

**REPORT:
SUMMARY FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOCIAL DIMENSION
OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS IN KOSOVO**

Pristina, July 2015

Draft by Xhavit Rexhaj

With contributions from

Arianit Krasniqi, Louise Sperl and Veronika Nitsche (WUS Austria)

Additionally, written feedback has been kindly provided by:

Muhamet Arifi (Balkan Sunflowers), Lulavere Behluli-Kadriu,

Enesa Kadic (MEST) and Mimoza Paçuku (KWN)

I.)	INTRODUCTION	4
	Importance of national policies	4
	Findings from the desk research	6
	A narrow view of the Social Dimension	6
	Participation of minority community members, girls, and persons from rural areas	7
II.)	FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS	9
	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	9
III.)	HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FG DISCUSSION WITH AUTHORITIES, SENIOR UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AND CSOS	10
	a.) Understanding of the concept of the Social Dimension in higher education.....	10
	b.) Underrepresented categories in the Kosovo higher education system.....	10
	c.) Current situation regarding social dimension in higher education in Kosovo.....	10
	d.) Concrete measures in place to implement aspects related to the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process	11
	Good practice from the University of Prizren.....	12
	e.) Does the student population reflect the Kosovo population structure?	12
	f.) Available data on students from vulnerable groups	13
	g.) Conclusions	13
IV.)	HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING STAFF	14
	a.) Infrastructure, working conditions and targeted financial support	15
	b.) Persons with special educational needs	15
	c.) Persons affected by the war.....	16
	d.) Availability of data and information.....	16
	e.) Members of ethnic communities.....	16
	f.) Other issues	17
	g.) Conclusions	17
V.)	HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS	19
	a.) Introduction	19
	b.) Claimed discrimination and abuses of minority quota and scholarships	20
	c.) Limited availability of study programmes in minority community languages	21
	d.) Role of student unions.....	21
	e.) Recognition of degrees and schooling	22
	f.) Scholarships and other forms of financial support	22

g.) Students with special educational needs	22
h.) Employment and further studies.....	23
i.) Conclusion	23
VI.) RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	24
Recommendations based on the results from the focus group discussions	24
a) Recommendations addressing legislators and higher education authorities:.....	24
b) Recommendations addressing higher education institutions and teaching staff	25
c) Recommendations addressing Civil Society Organizations	26
d) Recommendations addressing students/student unions	26
ANNEX I: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE CONDUCTION OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	27
ANNEX II: FACTSHEET ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS	33

I.) INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Social Dimension of higher education was first developed within the Bologna Process in the Prague Communiqué of 2001 and, broadly speaking, refers to the **goal of removing inequalities in access to higher education in the European Area of Higher Education (EHEA)**: The student body entering, participating and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of the populations. This comes with a need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. The social dimension includes measures to be taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services with a view to widening access. This is also in line with international human rights commitments on the right to education: According to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the right to education includes an obligation to develop equitable access to higher education for all.

In the last decade the number of tertiary students in Kosovo has tripled from 28,832 in 2004/2005 to over 107,000 in 2014. During the same period there has been a proliferation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) – while there was only one public University of Pristina in 2001, there are currently six public universities and twenty-five non-public HEIs with instruction in Albanian and one public university in Northern Mitrovica with instruction in Serbian. An increase of HEIs, however, does not automatically translate into effective and equal access to education for all, including for persons from vulnerable and marginalised groups. As a matter of fact, **structural barriers such as poverty, entrenched stereotypes or indirect discrimination** can potentially hamper effective access to education for all. So far, little attention in Kosovo has been drawn on whether persons from marginalised groups can effectively access higher education.

Importance of national policies

By 2009, countries to the Bologna Process were requested to elaborate **national strategies for the Social Dimension**, including action plans and measures to show their impact. Strategies should start with the identification of possible underrepresented groups. An analysis of strategies has shown considerable agreement among the reporting countries that several or all of the following groups are underrepresented in higher education:

- Groups with lower socio-economic background,
- (Less educated) immigrants and cultural minorities,
- Students with a disability,
- Non-traditional students (mature students, students with foreign qualifications),
- Female – male students (gender balance).

As part of their national reports to the Bologna Process, also the participating countries from SEE have provided such inputs (FYR Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania –

see <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=86>).¹ Since Kosovo is formally not part of the EHEA, a comparable strategy was so far not elaborated.

Given the importance of Bologna standards and the fact that the Social Dimension has so far received limited attention in Kosovo - despite its strong relevance to the country – efforts within HigherKOS are currently underway **to collect relevant data for Kosovo** in line with the information provided on the Social Dimension by member countries to the Bologna Process as part of their **National Strategies on the Social Dimension**.

Based on a collection of key resources, a brief desk research was conducted – pointing to main issues which were taken up in the formulation of **Guidelines for Focus Group Interviews**. Between **March 11 and 13, three Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) on the Social Dimension** of the Bologna Process were conducted in Pristina. The altogether 19 participants in the FGIs included higher education teaching staff, university management, education authorities, CSOs and students from Bosnian, Roma and Turkish communities.

The **FGIs** aimed at **stimulating a debate at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** on the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process and to **identify recommendations to strengthen the Social Dimension** of higher education in Kosovo.

Questions addressed in the FGIs included the following:

- **Which groups can be considered as marginalised in Kosovo (overall)?**
- **Which groups are underrepresented in higher education?**
- **What are some of the obstacles they face?**
- **What measures could be taken to enhance access to higher education for marginalised groups?**

The analysis of the overall results from the FGIs is consolidated in this report and will be presented in a **dissemination event** (tentatively June 2015) to which all participants in the FGIs will be invited. The analysis also seeks to **identify entry points/recommendations for future programming** in order to strengthen the Social Dimension of higher education in Kosovo. Depending on the buy-in of relevant key stakeholders, potential follow up action within future programmes could encompass interventions:

- Tailored to **address selected obstacles for persons from vulnerable groups in accessing and completing higher education** – as identified by participants in the FGIs (e.g. mentoring of students, access to information, provision of transportation etc.)
- Geared to support the **development of a National Action Plan on the Social Dimension** for Kosovo, informed by best practices from Bologna member states while tailored to the specific country context.
- Designed to disseminate information and increase awareness on the need for Social Dimension policies and actions at all levels of higher education.

¹ Still – this has been done to varying degrees, in particular when it comes to the identification of specific measures and activities responding to the needs of vulnerable groups. In addition, measures to stimulate participation are not regularly accompanied by monitoring mechanisms (e.g. FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia).

Findings from the desk research

The desk research, individual interviews and focus group discussions did not provide evidence of targeted, tailor-made measures² for underrepresented groups in the form of academic, social or financial services as proposed within the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process. A brief analysis of the legal framework showed a relative lack of a coherent and systematic approach to key aspects of the social dimension in higher education. Aspects such as equal access to higher education are duly addressed by the effective laws and administrative instructions. However, they show only a fragmented approach not providing for more and concrete support during and beyond the period of studies. Besides, discussions in focus groups indicated to serious issues with implementation of the current legal framework. The current law on higher education provides for equality of all persons and non-discrimination in higher education in general, but does not foresee any concrete measures regarding social dimension in higher education and support for underrepresented groups. A number of experts and participants to the focus group discussions pointed out the need to look into implications of the process of decentralization of responsibilities in education as one of the potential sources of challenges in the domain of social dimension. A clear division of roles and responsibilities is seen as one way of improving provision for the underrepresented groups.

Lack of relevant, accurate and comparable data specified by groups and categories proved an insurmountable obstacle to all aspects of the study and was brought in all phases and aspects of the research both at central and institutional level. Participation of student members of underrepresented groups in governance and organization of higher education was not existent in the literature reviewed and interviews carried out by the team. As outlined above, a holistic approach could be facilitated by the development of a comprehensive National Strategy on the Social Dimension, as developed by Bologna Member States.

A narrow view of the social dimension in Kosovo higher education

The Social Dimension in higher education in Kosovo is narrowly viewed as a right to access to higher education, with other forms of support during and beyond the process of studies remaining slightly to completely unheeded. The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011 – 2016 foresaw increasing participation in higher education in Kosovo from 12 to 35 students in 1000 inhabitants until 2016. This goal was nevertheless met as early as 2014 and exceeded in the following years to reach over 55 students per 1000 inhabitants in 2014³. However, these measures were not coupled with other measures to support student performance, graduation rates and employability.

What is the impact of increased participation in higher education?

The scarce data made available by the MEST statistics office and the Kosovo Agency of Statistics for the period 2008 – 2013 on student enrolment and graduation at the University of Pristina indicate that increased participation has only served to increase the drop-out rate and to decrease the overall number of graduates entering the labour market.

Table 8: Student enrolments and graduation by years of study at the University of Prishtina

² The only exception was the Roma Education Fund that provided few scholarships for members of the Roma community, targeting this underrepresented category.

³ Kosovo Agency of Accreditation Self Evaluation Report

Academic year	Total Students	no.	First time Year 1	First time Year 2	First time Year 3	Graduated
2012/2013	45879		13146	7598	6283	4,809
Female	24761		6697	4290	3700	2,492
2011/12	47,070		15,612	10,249	7,322	4,496
Female	25,308		7,920	5,800	4,580	2,476
2010/11	44,130		17,190	9,178	6,016	-
Female	22,447		8,600	4,977	3,411	
2009/10	37,839		13,888	7,122	5,429	-
2008/09	29,051		10,007	5,192	4,413	5,161
2007/2008	25840		8,261			2,973*

*Data are available only for bachelor graduates according to the Bologna system. Data missing on graduates from Level 6 and pre-Bologna study programmes.

Source: SOK: Educational statistics, 2009; Educational Statistics 2014;

The table shows that there has been a decrease in real and nominal terms in graduation rates in Kosovo higher education. These figures indicate that increased participation has not resulted in improved opportunities for any category of population from Kosovo higher education. Due to the lack of any special measures targeting vulnerable and underrepresented groups one can only conclude that this situation has only further lowered opportunities for these groups during the given period.

For illustration, the Ministry provides enrolment quotas (around 170 places) for minority communities in Albanian language. However, they are not offered any additional support in the form of loans/scholarships, language courses in Albanian, mentoring support, or transport or accommodation during their studies. The situation does not improve when looking into support provided beyond their studies as there are no targeted services in higher education institutions for alumni coming from underrepresented groups.

Participation of minority community members, girls, and persons from rural areas

The desk research yielded a number of interesting findings regarding the participation of various groups typically categorized as underrepresented and vulnerable in Kosovo and elsewhere in Europe. Data about participation of minority community members range from 0.1 percent in the University of Gjakova, through 1 percent only at the University of Pristina, 4 percent in the University of Peja, 7 percent at the University of Prizren (data are only available for 2011/2012), up to 8 percent at the University of Gjilan according to the Kosovo Statistics Agency (KSA: Education Statistics 2013/2014: 2014). Even the high nominal percentage given for the University of Prizren is comparatively low given the relatively high (over 18 percent) share of participation of non-Albanian and non-Serb minority communities in this region

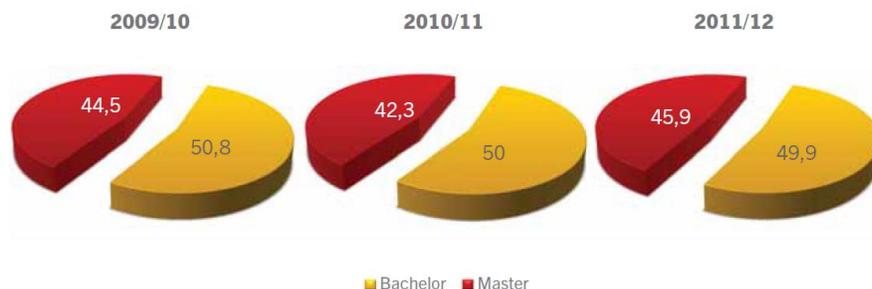
Even this level of representation of minority community members in Kosovo should be taken with reservation amid claims (expressed during the focus group discussions) about abuses of enrolment quota in study programmes in high demand at all public universities.

Participation of girls in higher education

The research of available education statistics in Kosovo yielded some interesting results also regarding participation of female students in higher education. Statistics show that there is lower participation of girls at the master cycle of studies compared to bachelor cycle (by around 5 %) at the national level. This

may mean that there is a stronger tendency for girls to leave their academic career to get employed or to marry and raise children.

Percentage of female students in public universities by educational levels (Kosovo Education Indicators)



The data shown in the pictures above are also supported by the education statistics 2011-12 and those for 2013-14 for the University of Prishtina (showing a ratio of 54% to 46 in favour of girls at the bachelor level). However, only 25 percent of the 3517 total students enrolled in Master's level studies in the academic year 2013/2014 are female. The situation is similar in other new universities, with a stark exception of the University of Prizren when referring to studies at the bachelor level.

Even though geographically not so distant from the University of Pristina, data from the University of Prizren offer a significantly different picture regarding participation of female students at the bachelor level. The number of students enrolled for the first time in the academic year 2011-2012 is 2,738 of which only 29% are female students. In this academic year a total of 2774 students attended studies in the University of Prizren of which 38% are female students. (*Education Statistics 2011-2012*).

This can be explained through a closer look at education statistics for girls from rural areas in the pre-university education in this region as shown in a study carried out by the NGO "Thesari". Their research states that from 171 girls who completed lower secondary education in the municipality of Dragash in the school year 2011-2012 only 81 continued upper secondary education in the school year 2012-2013, while in the same period in this municipality 167 boys completed lower secondary education and 144 of them continued upper secondary level. (*Project on awareness raising campaign for education of women in the municipality of Dragash financed by the Agency for Gender Equality in PMO implemented by NGO Thesari, 2012*).

The low level of participation of girls at the University of Prizren in general and for girls coming from rural areas in particular has to do with cultural and traditional considerations among non-majority ethnic communities in this region.

II.) FOCUS GROUPS DISCUSSIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

During March 2015 three focus group discussions were prepared and organized to generate a discussion on the level of implementation of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process in Kosovo's higher education system. As outlined in the introduction, the discussions involved (i) representatives of education authorities, higher education institutions and CSOs (ii) teaching staff and (iii) students of the Kosovo public universities. The discussions revealed the existence of significant difficulties in the course of implementation of the principles of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process in Kosovo. These difficulties traverse a wide range of issues and aspects related to the Social Dimension in higher education. Participants in the focus group discussions referred to policy, financial, institutional and personal issues and weaknesses negatively affecting and standing in the way of equal opportunities for all in higher education.

A common denominator of the views expressed by all focus group participants is the relative lack of information on, understanding of and clarity about the Bologna Social Dimension. Participants showed a piecemeal understanding of the Bologna Social Dimension as the right to access higher education, as financial support provided to students, or in some cases as an issue of inclusion in higher education. Initial phases of focus group discussions gave an impression of significant achievements in the field, but follow up questions and deeper analyses revealed serious flaws traversing all aspects and levels of higher education in the course of ensuring equal opportunities and benefits from higher education for all. Discussions about underrepresented groups showed similarities of the Kosovo context with those in other member countries to the Bologna Process, but also featuring an additional category in the Kosovo context: young people coming from families affected by the recent war in Kosovo. The focus groups once again underlined the difficult position Roma population finds itself in, and the shortages of provision for the special needs categories. Another key finding of the discussions – which also confirmed the findings from the desk research - was that Kosovo lacks a national strategy on the Bologna Social Dimension.

Representatives of education authorities and HE institutions referred to the lack of funds and capacity in the HE institutions to ensure better implementation of the Social Dimension principles in Kosovo, whereas teachers, students and CSOs complained about a lack of adequate policies, institutional support and funds for the same purpose. In addition, discussions also revealed a number of challenges for persons from vulnerable groups on their way to higher education such as the low level of awareness among rural population with regard to the benefits of higher education in general, early marriages (in particular of girls), lack of transport, lack of diversified provision in non-majority community languages, and lack of perspective and employment opportunities for graduates of higher education.

The key words most commonly brought up across all three focus groups included policies, finances, persons with special educational needs (SEN), ethnic communities, Roma students, minority community girls from rural areas, persons suffering from consequences of the war and scholarships.

III.) HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FG DISCUSSION WITH AUTHORITIES, SENIOR UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AND CSOs

a.) Understanding of the concept of the Social Dimension in higher education

A discussion of the understanding of the concept of the Social Dimension showed a broad and range of views and approaches and, at the same time, a relative lack of information on the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process. In their initial inputs, some participants referred to the Social Dimension in higher education as a social welfare concept and considered their engagement with the area of higher education as partially limited: “Since last year our organization (note: a CSO) has not been dealing with higher education. Regarding the Social Dimension, we have focused on ethnic, demographic and gender aspects.” Another participant said that they saw the Social Dimension closely linked with social norms: *“We are dealing with young girls and with their education. Therefore we consider social norms as very important since we think that discrimination starts there.”* Another participant added that *“our university should organize study programmes in English language, as other universities are doing in the world. This will broaden the views and opportunities of students.”*

As accurate as they may be in specific segments, such as gender, social norms, internationalization of education, or economic and social support to students, these perspective conveyed a fragmented approach of the Social Dimension in higher education. There were also more comprehensive views on this dimension of the Bologna Process, such as, “the Social Dimension is multi-dimensional, primarily involving ensuring equal opportunities for access to higher education for all categories, including ethnic, social or gender ones ...” Even though this perspective saw Social Dimension primarily as an issue of access to higher education, it still came closer to the widely accepted definition.

Sharing of the Social Dimension definition of the BFUG (see also Factsheet on the Social Dimension in the Annex) with the participants helped in steering the discussion in the direction towards a more general and holistic approach to the issue. At the same time the initial discussion on the Social Dimension clearly indicated the need for awareness raising efforts in this direction in Kosovo.

b.) Underrepresented categories in the Kosovo higher education system

Participants agreed readily on the list offered to them about underrepresented categories in higher education (see also Factsheet on the Social Dimension in the Annex), adding more specifically access to higher education and benefiting from it by rural population, girls in those areas and by members of the Roma community, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Later discussion proved two more categories in Kosovo, namely returning migrants and persons suffering from the consequences of the war of 1999 in Kosovo.

c.) Current situation regarding social dimension in higher education in Kosovo

This part of the focus group discussion in many ways reflected the discussion about the understanding of the concept of the Social Dimension in higher education. Participants from higher education authorities and institutions analysed the current situation from specific perspectives, at the same time indicating awareness for a more holistic approach to the topic. Asked about strategic planning on the issue, they stated that *“there was no national plan in place for the implementation of the Social Dimension of the*

Bologna Process, but that there was a National Education Strategy that covered also the higher education sector”, adding that “it provides for improving access to higher education for all categories of population.” Other participants said that they did not have specific plans for the implementation of the Social Dimension as described in the BFUG definition, but that they included aspects relating to the Social Dimension in their general plans, illustrating this with quotas for ethnic minorities. One participant mentioned the National Strategy for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities which included also the segment of higher education. He also continued discussing quota and claimed that there are cases of the quota system being abused by the majority community and that the strategy in general has not been successfully implemented. Or as one participant stated: *“Lack of adequate laws, policies and strategies or their inadequate implementation has had a negative impact in the Social Dimension and as a result, young people do not apply for studies or even when enrolled, cannot continue their university studies.”*

Participants concluded this part of the discussion agreeing that Kosovo needs to develop a National Strategy on the Social Dimension in higher education as a means to provide a more comprehensive approach and respond to numerous issues in this field through targeted measures.

d.) Concrete measures in place to implement aspects related to the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process

When asked about concrete measures undertaken by the Ministry of Education or by the public universities to implement the Social Dimension, participants spoke of a number of activities directed mainly at facilitating or increasing access to higher education, but only tangentially touching on measures that affected quality and effectiveness of studies. One of these were 500 scholarships for students – members of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities given by development partners and 33 by the Ministry of Education at the level of pre-university education in order to increase the pool of future students and to improve their prospects for inclusion in higher education (56 % of these scholarships were granted to female girls). Focus group participants reported a number of measures such as enrolment quota for members of ethnic minorities and social schemes that waived tuition fees for students coming from economically disadvantaged categories of population. However, apart from stipends for excellent students given by the University of Prishtina, these measures did not serve the purpose of improving graduation rates or for providing equity among different categories.

Based on accounts from participants, the **enrolment quota** reserved for 170 members of non-majority communities as provided by the MEST for non-majority communities in Kosovo, were often abused: *“This happens because there is often corruption and interferences within Kosovo institutions, whereby members of the majority community are enrolled as belonging to Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, and occupied their places especially in study programmes in high demand, such as medicine, education, architecture, etc. I can provide evidence of the cases when we intervened and procedures had to be started anew.”* This participant added that: *“Despite the annual quota of 170 places in public universities, our research and discussions with 12.000 persons from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, we learned that there are only 138 students at the bachelor and 4 students at the master level from these communities in the public universities.”* This evidence showed about gaps and serious failures in implementation of national policies and legal provisions for disadvantaged ethnic communities in Kosovo. However, one participant remarked that there is a positive trend underway since there are about 1.000 members of these three communities currently attending secondary education – a positive signal about the near future. This was seen also a motivation to work for better implementation of the laws in the future to allow for more equity for new entrants from these communities to the higher education system.

It also underlined the importance for targeted measures to address obstacles and enhance participation of vulnerable groups in education already at the high school level.

Good practice from the University of Prizren

A series of positive measures were reported by the University of Prizren during the focus group discussion. Apart from free enrolment for all members of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, the University of Prizren provided a number of stipends for them and contacted authorities of a number of municipalities to provide loans that would facilitate their studies. On the other hand, an agreement has been reached with the municipality of Prizren to waive transport costs for students from underrepresented groups. The representative of the University of Prizren added that “I am very happy that the first diploma certificate I signed was in fact the certificate for a girl - student with special needs. We are engaged in efforts to create a better environment for students with special needs in our university. We have to admit though that more has been done outside than inside the buildings in removing physical barriers to free movement.” At the same time, this university is the only one in Kosovo that organizes studies in three languages of instruction, including in Bosnian and in Turkish languages in several study programmes. This, according to representatives from the University of Prizren, helps to keep members of non-majority communities in Kosovo and facilitates their integration in the society. University of Prizren appears to be ready to serve as a multi-ethnic higher education institution with indicating openness for cooperation and readiness for change.

Apart from ethnic communities, gender issues came up prominently during the focus group discussions. One participant to the discussion stated that: “sexual harassment is taking place in our institutions, and in particular in universities. However, there is a lack of mechanisms and disciplinary measures for perpetrators. In other words, we all know that this phenomenon exists but it is not being directly addressed and we have somehow accepted it as a normal issue; this at least based on accounts from girls who have witnessed such cases.” This participant continued that their research has shown significant presence of stereotypes in university literature and that there are cases when professors try to explain to students what an honest and moral women is like, what a raped woman is like and so on. Apart from these, the need was emphasized to overcome stereotypes and gender divide in the choice of professions. This participant suggested awareness raising and information campaigns and scholarship schemes to increase participation of women in the so called ‘male’ professions and study programmes, such as technical faculties, agriculture and ICT. All these aspects should be addressed more adequately at the institutional and national level. These instances are a significant obstacle to achieving gender equality and ensuring equal opportunities in higher education.

e.) Does the student population reflect the Kosovo population structure?

According to the Bologna Process, the student body entering, participating and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of the populations. In Kosovo, the least represented in higher education have traditionally been persons with special educational needs (SEN). However, according to participants in the focus group discussion, the situation has improved which was also illustrated by the example of one professor with special needs. Participants also mentioned two cases of deaf persons who are currently studying for their master degree.

According to the census of 2011, there are 37.000 members of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities (even though – according to estimates - only 22.000 may be remaining after the recent migration to EU countries). In this context the questions arises of how many Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian

community members are studying in higher education institutions. According to the Kosovo average of 55 students per 1000 inhabitants, there should be around 1100 students from these communities in Kosovo universities (See: Rexhaj and Pupovci, "Access to Higher Education in Kosovo" 2015 and Agency of Accreditation, SER, 2014). According to data presented by a participant, there were around 170 students from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities at UP, reduced due to migration to fewer than a hundred perhaps, studying as a result of quota. Due to the stated cases of abuse of the quota system, participants stated that "some of them in faculties in high demand may even be Albanians"

From the remaining number a large part is not studying in their mother tongue. This gives a grim picture of the situation of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in Kosovo higher education⁴.

f.) Available data on students from vulnerable groups

A calculation of the numbers of students from vulnerable groups/communities in the system showed that a reliable system for data collection is missing in Kosovo higher education institutions. A system is only now being set up at the University of Prishtina that will give modularized and specific data for various categories of students. Both University of Prishtina and University of Prizren are in fact now working on their databases and feeding in data – possibly also on ethnic communities and social groups. MEST is also working on a new higher education EMIS.

g.) Conclusions

Participants concluded that good legislation is in place, but that there is a need for this legislation to be implemented in a more coherent and systematic way. One way to enhance implementation could be through a national strategy for the implementation of the Bologna Social Dimension. Such a strategy would set the needed goals, objectives and measures for their accomplishment. At the same time, activities could be costed to ensure better implementation of agreed measures.

Participants agreed that the issues of underrepresented groups in higher education are interrelated with those from pre-university education and with family culture and traditions, calling for more systematic measures in this field. Participants agreed that addressing these issues in higher education is already too late. Students, together with their families, should be provided with adequate support.

Most of the participants found that there is a need for better linkages between theory and practical work to make studies more relevant and more attractive and to increase student competencies, but also their employability. More linkages and cooperation between academia and industry is seen as a way forward in facilitating employment but also for improving opportunities for all students in the long term.

⁴ These figures were presented by a member of these communities. Data made available by AAB College alone, however, showed that there are around 40 members of these communities studying at AAB in Albanian language in 2015.

IV.) HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND TEACHING STAFF

The main themes discussed with the participants in the focus group discussions with university management and teaching staff covered the (i) understanding of the concept of the social dimension of higher education, (ii) underrepresented groups in Kosovo higher education, (iii) the status quo with regard to the implementation of the Social Dimension in Kosovo's higher education system, (iv) good practices and (v) suggestions and possible institutional plans for improving the current situation.

- (i) The discussion about the understanding of the concept of the Social Dimension among participants showed a relative lack of information about this aspect of the Bologna Process in Kosovo. A statement by one participant reflects the views expressed on the concept of social dimension, seeing it as a *"Broad issue incorporating a broad spectrum of issues facing the students and the universities involving various social groups and students coming from various social groups and backgrounds."* This general understanding of the concept left out key aspects such as *equal opportunities* and *underrepresented categories*. Other inputs saw the social dimension in higher education as an issue of access, participation or as state support for social welfare in education. Further exchange of views and follow up questions helped building a shared understanding of participants about this concept, which greatly facilitated the following discussion. The building of a shared understanding about the process was an indicator of the readiness of university staff to respond to challenges in providing better opportunities for underrepresented groups in Kosovo's higher education system.
- (ii) The participants, however, showed a shared understanding about who the underrepresented groups in Kosovo higher education are and about the underlying causes for this situation. They listed *"various groups coming from various social strata, including those with family problems, persons with impairments, minorities, persons from marginalized groups and more recently returnees as a result of the wave of persons emigrating now to EU countries;"* to this list other members added with agreement of the plenary persons (in particular girls) from rural areas, Gorani students, students graduating from the parallel education system in Serbian (due to difficulties with recognition of their degrees), and persons and families who suffered from the war of 1999, as categories of population underrepresented in higher education in Kosovo. This view to a large extent corresponded with the list of underrepresented groups provided by the moderator.
- (iii) A lively discussion evolved around the current situation in Kosovo's higher education system from the perspective of the Social Dimension. Various issues and themes were discussed in this regard also identifying the causes behind the current situation. The most frequent themes of discussion were: finances and working conditions, study programmes, institutional support, persons with special educational needs, enrolment quota, etc. Most of the participants agreed that due prioritization is needed on the Social Dimension in higher education and that there should be more institutional support for university staff to promote the Social Dimension and to support people and students who require support.

a.) Infrastructure, working conditions and targeted financial support

Working conditions and financial support are considered critical for universities to carry out their role in the field of the Social Dimension of HE, or put in words of a participant: *“It is a matter of the lack of finances, but not only. There was a dormitory, the funds have been allocated and dorms should be activated. Also more should be done in infrastructure for students with special educational needs – something has been done. More has been done outside of the premises than in the interior. There is also readiness and a level of awareness in the leadership.”* The other participants agreed, and added more systemic measures, such as *“review of the law and policies and the need for funds to be allocated that target specifically the implementation of the Social Dimension of higher education.”* One participant stated that it is very difficult for professors to provide more individual support to their students since they are sometimes teaching as many as 2000 students. One of the faculties of the University of Prishtina provides academic services to over ten thousand students in premises consisting of not more than a dozen rooms and theatres. *“Any thinking to provide additional support for students with special needs is at least problematic in the current working conditions with large classes and lack of decent learning premises.”*

Participants stated their commitment in implementing measures relevant to the Social Dimension if more targeted support and better working conditions are provided. When discussing the issue of students who have returned to studies as a second chance after having missed on higher education during the nineties, one of the participants said that: *“In our faculty it depends on individual professors who dedicate their time on a voluntary basis to provide more support to older students; other professors do the same – there are such cases. The problem is that there are no good working conditions and not enough rooms even for consultations, let alone flexible timetables.”* Another participant added that *“There are also community members among older students. They can help more junior students. We think that staff is ready to support students from vulnerable groups; it is an institutional issue; teachers are responding to these needs but they are not supported by institutions and authorities; staff capacity is limited without additional support.”*

b.) Persons with special educational needs

One of the topics that attracted considerable attention by the participants was the situation of persons with special educational needs. The discussion evolved around the topic of support provided to them both regarding access to higher education and support during their studies. There was general consent that not enough is done for persons / students with special educational needs. The main reasons identified and discussed were lack of awareness, lack of professional expertise, and inadequate infrastructure. Participants stated that: *“In Prishtina nothing is being offered for students with special educational needs, not only physical facilities but also regarding curricula and learning materials. In the University of Prizren they are doing a lot more about persons with special educational needs with physical impairments in the new buildings that are being constructed.”*

To respond to this situation, participants agreed that: *“A lot more should be done for students with special educational needs, not only about physical presence but also for full participation and better communication in all aspects and activities in both universities,”* adding that *“there is increased awareness among the teachers who have received a lot of training about this aspect ... and they are ready to provide support only during, but also before their enrolment to improve their access to higher education.”*

c.) Persons affected by the war

One group of persons which was considered as vulnerable by participants during the focus group discussion and which is not commonly found in similar classifications in other countries is the category of persons and families who suffered losses and traumas during the war of 1999. These issues came to the forefront last autumn when members of these families that could not be enrolled in the UP and associations of war veterans launched protests against the university leadership. Participants showed keen awareness on the issue and stated that: *“it is very important to address needs of these persons since war traumas and consequences must be addressed. Affected persons should be supported to have access to education as means of integration and improvement of their odds in life, including the 1200 students that could not enrol the UP recently. At University of Prizren we had no problems with war categories because we enrol them.”* *“A large number of families suffered during the war of 1999; the consequences are still being felt and there is clearly a need for HE institutions to face this phenomenon and provide support for members of these families.”*

d.) Availability of data and information

In Kosovo there a critical lack was observed regarding information about the various underrepresented and marginalized groups in higher education. Available data on underrepresented groups are fragmented, at times deficient and not comparable between institutions and with other countries. One participant said in this context: *“There is no evidence on marginalized and other underrepresented students – we only learn about them if they come and talk to us about their problems.”* Another participant added that *“What is visible is not a problem; the real problems starts with issues that are not visible and if they are reluctant to come and talk to us about their issues. In those cases it is difficult to register and maintain evidence of them and support them appropriately.”* As a result there is a lack of relevant data and information that would allow for informed decision-making and tailor made response to the needs of underrepresented and vulnerable groups in higher education.

e.) Members of ethnic communities

The issue of members of ethnic communities was referred to and discussed both specifically and as a cross-cutting issue. The issue of study programmes made available to Bosnian and Turkish communities, for instance, were brought up by several participants. They said that these communities can study in their own language only in a small number of (mainly teacher education) programmes, which makes it difficult for them to choose and pursue their personal development goals and careers. Those who do not want to become teachers, as a result, can either study business and economy programmes at the University of Peja, or apply for enrolment to study in Albanian language where there is a wider choice of study programmes. Apart from wider choice, a number of participants emphasised better quality of studies in this language which – according to their views - is primarily due to better qualifications of the teaching staff.

The discussion showed though that this broader choice had its setbacks, primarily linguistic and administrative in nature. Participants' accounts pointed to lack of any linguistic assistance and / or support. They also spoke about rumours that the enrolment quota in Albanian for these communities were abused by members of the majority Albanian community. This, some participants claimed, is done so that Albanians bribe representatives of minority community political parties to issue them certificates for their alleged minority ethnic affiliation. So apart from provision of a limited number of study

programmes in their language and enrolment quota in Albanian, these communities are left to themselves if interested in a more diversified educational provision – often found in other countries where they remain after studies (this issue is also discussed in more depth in the focus group with students).

The issue of marginalized groups is also related to the **parallel** education system – whereby students attend their pre-university education in Serbian language and in the parallel system. Despite opportunities offered and flexibility of the system, they tend to have continuity in their education away from the Kosovo system of education. Kosovo should prioritise supporting such students so that they complete their education in Kosovo. These can be done through more flexible policies including financial support.

f.) Other issues

The participants also discussed issues such as recognition of documents, education of minority community members, use of languages, employment, transport, study programmes, etc.

On the issue of recognition of documents for upper secondary students who completed education in Serbian language, participants insisted that this should be viewed as a legal issue and, as such, should be depoliticised.

Some participants were addressing this issue indeed as a legal one starting from the parallel system, but affecting all non-majority communities: *“It is a legal issue – this is how it is treated in Kosovo. Because they do not have a Matura exam – also they have eight years of primary school, students coming from the system without Matura are negatively affected by the fact that they do not have points from Matura. However, the University (of Prizren) decided to be flexible with those students and not to require the number of Matura points.”* Others saw this as an issue of quality of provision: *“Quality of previous education is not sufficient in any parallel system – this is true also in Kosovo, probably due to the lack of monitoring and supervision. This is also reflected in the performance of students at school and beyond and in admission exams.”* Due to this problems, students of Roma and Gorani communities attending education in Serbian language are suffering, too. However, it seems that this issue has become a political one – it is also among the items in the agenda of the EU mediated negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia. Most participants assumed that most probably, the problems will be solved on the negotiating table, too, rather than in and by academic institutions.

g.) Conclusions

In conclusion, the discussion showed that most of the measures in the field of the Social Dimension of higher education are fragmented and depend mainly on the individual good will of professors. There is significant lack of institutional support for professors and staff to provide any systematic and organized support for students from underrepresented and vulnerable groups.

What should be done to enhance participation and meeting the Bologna criteria with regard to the Social Dimension? Why is the situation as it is? Participants agreed that there are more reasons for the current situation, or as put by one of the participants: *“Most of these issues do not depend on professors, some depend on authorities, some depend on legal provisions. It is not our or teachers’ fault that some students are marginalized! On the other hand, as an institution, we have not done or offered enough.”*

This discussion proved that there is will among the teaching staff and institutional management in Kosovo higher education institutions, but any efforts should take place within a coherent and comprehensive policy and strategic framework with adequate financial support.

V.) HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS

Most frequently mentioned issues in this discussion were: Access to education, support and employability of members of the Roma community and other vulnerable groups.

a.) Introduction

At the outset it is worth noting that most of the issues raised in this focus groups discussions were echoed in the consultations held with authorities and key stakeholders. The focus group discussion started with a process of building a shared understanding about the concept of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process in higher education. In the beginning there were some difficulties with the understanding of the concept of the Social Dimension; later there was confusion between this concept and that of the Bologna Process in general. The Social Dimension was seen as support to students and finally - after follow up questions - the Social Dimension was understood as a set of efforts to bring about equality and equal opportunities for all students regardless of ethnic background, gender and other grounds.

The focus group discussion with students brought together students from Bosnian, Turkish, and Roma communities, studying at the University of Prizren. Naturally, most of the discussion focused around providing equal opportunities for members of these minority communities. The discussion revealed significant differences in the opportunities to benefit from higher education not only between the majority Albanian and minority communities, but also between minority communities/vulnerable groups.

Turkish and Bosnian minority students appear to enjoy significantly more support either by the local authorities or by the Turkish government. A number of study programmes are offered by the Universities of Prizren, Peja and the private AAB University in Bosnian and Turkish languages. Most typically teacher training programmes are offered in Bosnian and Turkish languages, with the exception made of the economy programmes offered in Bosnian in the University of Peja and Law by AAB University. Bosnian students also study in the universities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia (Novi Pazar), Montenegro and even Turkey. Turkish students have a number of scholarships and placements offered for studies in Turkish universities. However, these opportunities for studies abroad also bear the risk of these students getting employed and remaining to live in the host countries, or as it was put by one of the FG students: *“Our students who go to study abroad stay there and there are fewer Bosnians remaining in Kosovo.”*

The focus group discussion with students again confirmed the difficult position of Roma children in the Kosovo system of education in general, and in higher education in particular. Members of this group seem to be the most underrepresented ethnic community in higher education, encountering significant difficulties even at the stage of enrolment. As reasons, participants mentioned the lack of education and study programmes in their mother tongue, lack of support for youth and students (with the exception of the FER scholarship), abuses with their quota and others.

One participant in the discussion said that she would not have been able to become a student, had it not been for one of her teachers, who knew her as a good student and who supported her to get enrolled in the University of Prizren. She added that *“it is very important when teachers are committed and want to help students.”*

Challenges faced by young people from this community include the lack of awareness on the need for education among Roma families and early marriages, in particular of girls. One participant in the discussion said that her peers from the Roma community say “Lucky you ... that you can go to school, whereas I cannot attend school since my mother will not let me – she wants me to marry”, adding that “Roma youth are made to marry early in their life.” This is related to the ethnic background and culture; “among Roma, young people are supposed to marry, raise children, they age early and this is it; this is due to culture and traditions”. To make the case even more difficult, this lack of awareness is coupled with the fact that there is no education provided at any level in Roma language and with few exceptions no books are printed in this language either. Expressed in words by one participant: “We are used to that now. From birth we were not used to enjoy education in our mother tongue. So, I got educated in Turkish, other Roma children in Albanian, and others yet, in Serbian, depending on where they live.”

Problems for students from the Roma community start as early as pre-university education. Even if they attend education in Albanian or other languages, Roma students are segregated even physically, sometimes sitting separately in the same class or by being grouped in one class together, as was accounted by a participant to the focus group. All these factors in pre-university education negatively affect their inclusion in and benefits from higher education in Kosovo.

A similar situation is present also among the rural populations of the Bosnian and Gorani communities in the vicinity of Prizren and Dragash/Sharr municipality. One participant reported: “There are people among the rural population who live in the village, mainly girls, who are not allowed to go to school. It is a matter of tradition. These are girls from rural areas in Dragash/Sharr, too, including in Recan and Zupa; more recently, Bosnian girls are being allowed to go to school in Recan. However, other girls in the villages of Lubizhda and Skorobisht are made to marry early and drop out from school.”

Apart from tradition and cultural reasons, lack of motivation on the part of parents of both Roma and other communities stems also from the poor economic situation to support their studies and lack of perspective and employability of members of these community after graduation from university. Asked about their plans after their graduation, most of the participants in the focus group discussion stated that their chances for employment are bleak since most jobs are available for those who speak Albanian, who know people in decision making positions, or belong to one of the majority communities. They said that: *“There is no work for us and we are not optimistic about our future, everything is going through connections and links. We can only hope that we may get employment. In the meantime I hope to find some interim employment – until a teacher is retired in the school in my neighbourhood.”*

b.) Claimed discrimination and abuses of minority quota and scholarships

Participants paid significant attention to enrolment policies and their implementation. In particular, they referred to the enrolment quota in higher education for members of minority communities set by the Ministry of Education. Research and focus group discussion revealed that despite the good intention behind these quota, they seem to limit the number of students from these communities who can enrol in higher education. This is due to the fact that they cannot compete with Albanian students in admission tests that are designed and conducted in Albanian language. Students claimed that they had filed complaints to be allowed to compete on equal footing with their Albanian colleagues for admission beyond the quota but to no avail. On top of this, they said that there are frequent cases that minority quota are abused by majority candidates for enrolment. One participant stated and others agreed that:

“The quota are often taken by other non-Turkish and non-Bosnian students since they go to minority political parties and they enrol as Turks and Bosnians even though they do not speak a single word in that language.”

It was claimed that this is being done by bribing officials of minority community political parties who issue them false certificates on ethnic affiliation. It was said that they use these to get enrolled in profiles and study programmes in high demand, such as English language, education, medicine, etc. As a result, the few places for minority communities are made even fewer.

Similar abuses and malpractices seem to have happened, according to the FG participants, also in cases of awarding scholarships and municipal loans for higher education students. As expressed by one student: *“Often municipality or university administration officers hide their good scores in competitions until the results of application are published, when it is already too late.”* One of the participants, student of the UPz, added that she had applied for a transport stipend for Bosnian students for travel between Peja and Prizren. *“Even though this is a stipend for Bosnian students, Albanians received this support.”* Another way these students are denied their rights according to the participants, is that information about the scholarships, stipends or quota are concealed from minority community members until it is too late for application. As one participant stated: *“Sometimes there is not enough information for all potential candidates for a stipend or for other opportunities. For instance, there was a stipend for community students. But information was disseminated only to a limited group of people and I could not apply since I was not aware of this.”*

Participants suggested that these abuses could be interrupted if ethnic affiliation certificates were issued by municipalities instead of political parties. More transparency of procedures and improved information about various opportunities for minority communities could enhance proper implementation of the quota system and prevent cases of abuse. They also suggested that all applications should be addressed on a case by case basis and with the presence of community members and NGOs from these communities.

c.) Limited availability of study programmes in minority community languages

The University of Prizren provides teacher education programmes in Bosnian and Turkish languages; the University of Peja organizes studies of economy in Bosnian and AAB University (private entity) offers legal studies in Bosnian. Nevertheless, this provision seems insufficient to cover the wide range of interests of members from these communities. As a result they are made to apply to study either in Albanian language (where they are provided with quota for these communities) or to leave the country and study mainly in the region or in Turkey. The latter, as mentioned by a participant, often find employment in host countries and do not return to their homes in Kosovo. Even in cases when they opt to study in Albanian language, they are faced with the issue of language competence in admission exams. Having studied in their mother tongues (Bosnian, Turkish, etc.), they find themselves competing with Albanian speaking applicants in admission tests administered in Albanian language.

This situation could be solved through bilateral and multilateral agreements of cooperation with other universities in the region and through further internationalization of study programmes of Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo.

d.) Role of student unions

According to FG participants, here seems to be ample room for more active engagement by students unions and representatives of minority community members in these unions in improving provision,

benefits and opportunities for these communities. Participants were unanimous in their statements that student unions are not active in facilitating their position or in providing any support for them during their studies. Asked if they were members of the students union (SU) and if they participated in SU activities, the participants said that: *“We are members but we are not active. There are no initiatives from the student union to improve quality of studies for the members of communities. There is a lot of improvisation but no meaningful work and activities.”* Regarding active involvement of their representatives they added that: *“There is one Turkish representative who is not active either. He does not actively participate in the student union activities or work with us in promoting our interests in the SU. I have heard of them but we are not included.”*

It was mentioned by participants that student unions could significantly increase their role in supporting community member students and in improving quality of academic provision for them. Besides they also agreed that their active role is also very important: *“We should work for our rights and enjoy equal rights with the others. Minorities should have the same opportunities like the majority.”* Active engagement in the student union may be an important way in this direction. *“Even without engagement in the student union,”* a participant added, *“senior students can do a lot in providing mentoring to younger students. For instance, I help junior students from my community and provide advice based on my own learning experience and support them with learning materials from the money I earn cleaning homes of people in Prizren!”*

e.) Recognition of degrees and schooling

Participants of the discussion brought up the issue of recognition of education degrees and certificates for members of communities attending their pre-university education in the parallel system in Serbian language. A number of Roma and Gorani students attended this system and they then face difficulties if they want to enrol in studies in the higher education system in Kosovo. They claim that Bosnians and Turks do not have such difficulties but they have heard of other cases when certificates were not recognised by the Ministry of Education. At the same time, they were also worried about the recognition of their degrees for work in Kosovo and for further studies and work in other countries in the region and in Europe.

f.) Scholarships and other forms of financial support

Asked about sources of support they receive for their studies, most of the participants declared family funds as the main source of support, one is supported by the partner, and one received a scholarship. Several participants declared part time jobs as a source of income to support their studies: one as a cleaner, others as teacher-assistants, and another offering computer maintenance services. However, they were strongly against long hours of additional work since, in their words, this negatively affected their performance in their studies. In addition, students stated that part-time work is not always compatible with teaching schedules requiring in class attendance. Turkey provides a number of scholarships for Kosovo students mainly from the Turkish community. However, other communities can also benefit from these opportunities provided they first spend a year learning the Turkish language.

g.) Students with special educational needs

Participants pointed out a total lack of support for students with special needs illustrating this with the case of a student with physical impairments at the University of Prizren: *“There are cases where students are carried up the stairs to the first floor, instead of administration planning and allowing that class to have lessons on the ground floor.”* They added that on top of the lack of physical facilities for students

with special educational needs, “there are no efforts whatsoever to support them in their everyday learning activities. There is a feeling that equality is there on paper but lacking in everyday practices and routines.”

h.) Employment and further studies

When asked about their future studies or work participants stated that they foresee a bleak future as far as employment is concerned and that they would need to wait until an opportunity opens. They stated that they would like to work with Albanian children or in places when Albanian is used for communication and they welcomed support and opportunities to learn languages. Alternatively, they would need to study further for a master degree in Kosovo, in Bosnia or in Turkey, with the latter being very popular due to the conditions offered.

i.) Conclusion

To conclude - the words of a Roma participant sounded to stand for much of what was discussed in the focus group: *“We need more support from teachers, our faculty, and family during our studies but also from the society to get employment. I would like to get employed but I really do not expect much because they will not want me working there.”* Participants identified a need for Kosovo authorities to address the issue of the Social Dimension in higher education and employment very seriously.

The FG discussion showed that on the surface all communities are fully integrated, but that in practice there are challenges that require support for individual students at all levels and aspects.

VI.) RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Recommendations based on the results from the focus group discussions

Participants from the focus group discussions concluded that Kosovo needs a **national strategy and action plan with concrete measures to implement the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process**. This is also seen as a further step towards a full integration in the Bologna Process. A coherent and clear strategy and action plan would provide clearer guidance and division of responsibilities between key agents in the system. Good practices available from other Bologna Member States could serve as a source to inform such a process (see for example <http://www.pl4sd.eu/>). Such a strategy/action plan could be an important contribution to improve opportunities for underrepresented groups, improve social cohesion and serve to prevent potential social discontent. Higher education appears to be the most efficient vehicle for change in society and increased opportunities for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, economically and socially disadvantaged categories and persons (in particular girls and women) from rural population belonging to minority communities.

Despite over ten years of implementation of the Bologna Process in Kosovo, there seems to be severe lack of information on the Bologna Social Dimension among all key agents in the Kosovo higher education system. Therefore, **awareness building measures** appear to be necessary across all levels, agencies institutions, teaching staff and students alike, to synergise and follow up – also in light of a potential national strategic plan in the field of the Social Dimension. Another common recommendation coming from the focus group discussions was the need to move beyond seeing **improved access** as the only channel for addressing the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process in Kosovo. Measures to **improve overall quality of provision and academic support** appear just as important to provide equal opportunities for underrepresented groups. Besides, focus group discussions pointed to the need to **address the root causes for the lack of access and participation of persons from vulnerable groups in higher education** which in many cases – but not exclusively – are **linked to previous levels of education and cultural rules and traditions**.

a) Recommendations addressing legislators and higher education authorities:

- Consider key issues related to the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process in the current process of rewriting the legal framework. A more systematic approach to the social dimension and support for underrepresented groups should be provided for more clearly in the law; these provisions would then serve as a clear roadmap for the higher education institutions for implementation of the principles of social dimension in higher education;

Develop a national strategy and action plan for the implementation of the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process in line with the recommendations of the BFUG working group on the Social Dimension. This strategy may be designed either as a standalone document or as one of the components of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP 2011-2016) currently being rewritten;

- Establish a sustainable system providing reliable and accurate data and information on education of underrepresented groups;

- Raise awareness on the Social Dimension in higher education and its practical implications among students, HEIs and HE authorities; address also cultural barriers and stereotypes, in particular among the Roma community and in rural areas of Kosovo; also strengthen career guidance services at pre-university level of education.
- Implement measures that improve the quality of higher education provision for all, including targeted measures that increase opportunities for underrepresented and vulnerable groups, such as:
 - Review the implementation of the quota mechanism for enrolment in higher education, with a focus to combat claimed abuses by members of the majority community. The Agency for Civil Registration with offices in every municipality should serve as the sole authority to issue confirmation for ethnic affiliation.
 - Increase awareness and avoid gender divide and stereotypes in the choice of professions;
 - Revise existing and design new policies and concrete measures against sexual harassment in all higher education institutions; besides, stereotypes related to professions for male and female need to be tackled and affirmatives measures taken in this regard;
 - Provide an e-platform as a consolidated source of information about the education of underrepresented groups;
 - Develop a bridging programme for members of the families who suffered from the last war in Kosovo. This could include training in the area of so called transferable skills to build their self-help capacity in the mid- to long-term and stipends for the best students;
 - Take measures to enhance access to education for vulnerable groups in Kosovo already at earlier levels of education, including through awareness raising campaigns (e.g. high-school).
- Design and implement policies and measures to alleviate administrative and legal obstacles (such as recognition of documents) for members of non-majority communities and for students attending the parallel system of education.

b) Recommendations addressing higher education institutions and teaching staff

- Implement awareness building measures to improve the understanding and requirements in the implementation of the Social Dimension.
- Design and implement an institutional plan of action for better implementation of measures in the field of Social Dimension. This document could be part of the contract for annual funding between MEST and institutions.
- Provide more study programmes in languages of minority communities and in English language to diversify provision in Kosovo higher education as a means of preventing members of minority communities from leaving Kosovo as a result of lack of study programmes in their languages.
- For Higher education institutions to improve internationalization of studies and study programmes to enhance opportunities for student mobilities. Agreement of cooperation with higher education institutions in the region for student exchanges can also help in reducing migration of students to other countries in the region.
- For Higher education institutions to develop a scheme of incentives for teaching staff providing individual and group support to underrepresented and vulnerable groups (e.g. through mentoring).

- Implement measures that address the needs of underrepresented and vulnerable groups, such as:
 - Stipends for best performing students;
 - Stipends or loans for students coming from economically disadvantaged categories;
 - Peer / mentoring / apprenticeship academic support for students;
 - Pilot day care centres for students for mothers with children to improve the participation of girls including in so called male professions (engineering, sciences, information technology, agriculture, etc.);
 - Career counselling services targeting vulnerable groups;
 - Provision of transport and / or accommodation services in cooperation with municipalities;
 - Language courses for official and local languages in Kosovo to facilitate interaction and academic communication in higher education.

c) Recommendations addressing Civil Society Organizations

Community based organisations and NGOs are encouraged to play a more pro-active role in promoting the interests of persons from vulnerable and underrepresented groups when it comes to higher education. Civil Society organizations can play a unique role in:

- Building awareness and disseminating information among all stakeholders including authorities, community political organizations and NGOs, rural population, community and higher education institutions;
- Addressing cultural issues and causes behind underrepresentation and marginalization;
- Serving as a bridge between authorities and underrepresented categories and at the same time
- Acting as a currently missing voice for vulnerable groups;
- Monitoring if adequate implementation of government policies is taking place, including for enrolment quota, scholarships and stipends, etc.

d) Recommendations addressing students/student unions

Participants identified a great potential for increased engagement of students and student organizations which could greatly contribute to the implementation of the Social Dimension in higher education:

They could play a role by:

- Providing peer support for students members of the Roma community and members from other vulnerable groups to increase their academic performance, participation in and benefits from higher education;
- Increasing inclusion and voice of underrepresented groups in their student organizations;
- Including the implementation of the Social Dimension in higher education among the top priorities on the agenda of student organizations;
- Engaging in dissemination of information on the Social Dimension.

ANNEX I: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE CONDUCTION OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

FGI 1 – TARGET GROUP: STAFF OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs)

1: To gain insights into participants' own understanding of social dimension of education and categories of under-represented groups in Kosovo...

a.) What is in your opinion the social dimension of education?

After collecting feedback from participants, the interviewers will present a definition – to the extent possible relating it to the participants' feedback.

Further, the interviewer will moderate a brief discussion around the following questions:

How is the social dimension addressed in Kosovo HEIs in general?

e) How is the social dimension addressed at your institution?

f) In your view, does your institution contribute to social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society ...

2: Under-represented groups: The purpose is to gain insight into participants' understanding of categories of under-represented groups and causes behind under-representation of given categories (discrimination, lack of funds, lack of interest, lack of absorption capacity of the system, lack of policies, legal instruments, ...)

a.) Could you list under-represented groups in Kosovo in terms of their (lack of) benefits from and access to education?

b.) What are in your opinion the causes behind their under-representation (finances, societal support, poverty, policies, discrimination, ...)

c.) From the categories listed in front of you, which of them are supported in your institution? Could you illustrate with a concrete example?

For list of categories – see Annex II of the report.

3: To collect information about the situation with the social dimension in institutions represented by the participants in the focus group: The question:

a.) Does the student population in your institution reflect the ethnic and social diversity of the Kosovo society?

b.) Give reasons why, both for Yes and No answers.

c.) Do students in your HE institution participate in the governance of your institution – how is that accomplished?

4: To collect information about the ways needs of particular under-represented groups are dealt with in institutions represented by FG participants:

a.) How are the needs of non-traditional students met in your institution (for example, more mature students returning to higher education after a break)?

b.) How are the needs of students with special needs met in your institution?

c.) What inclusion practices do you exercise in your institution?

5: *To follow up on information about particular practices identified during the desk research, which might stand as examples of the best practice. Additional questions could be asked for this purpose, such as:*

- a.) Which programmes and other practices were particularly helpful for the development of competencies for inclusion and why?
- b.) How could the in-service practices of teacher development be improved to better help teachers develop those competencies?

FGI 2 – TARGET GROUP: EDUCATION AUTHORITIES, UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT, CSOs⁵

1: To gain insights into participants' own understanding of the social dimension and measures undertaken to promote the social dimension ...

a.) What is in your opinion the social dimension of education?

b.) In your view, does your institution contribute to social cohesion, reducing inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competences in society - ...

c.) If yes, then how is it contributing to these aspects?

2: Under-represented groups: The purpose is to gain insight into participants' understanding of categories of under-represented groups and causes behind under-representation of given categories (discrimination, lack of funds, lack of interest, lack of absorption capacity of the system, lack of policies, legal instruments, ...)

a.) Could you list under-represented groups in Kosovo in terms of benefits from and access to education?

b.) What are in your opinion the causes behind their under-representation (finances, societal support, poverty, policies, discrimination, ...)

c.) From the categories listed in front of you, which of them are supported by your institution / organization? Could you illustrate with a concrete example?

For categories of under-represented groups see Annex II to the report.

3: To collect information about the situation with the social dimension relative to the missions of institutions represented by the participants in the focus group:

a.) Does the student population in Kosovo reflect the ethnic and social diversity of the Kosovo society?

b.) Give reasons why, both for Yes and No answers.

c.) What education management information systems are there to help informed planning and decision making related to under-represented groups?

⁵ Representatives from CSOs were originally invited to FGI 3 with students from vulnerable groups but due to logistical reasons had to be moved to FGI 2.

4: To collect information about any policies or regulations used to address social dimension in education by improving the situation of under-represented groups as defined at the beginning of the discussion. Possible questions:

a.) What policies / regulations / agencies, mechanisms are there in the field of social dimension in HE serving to support the underrepresented groups

b.) Are there any / the needed funds allocated to address needs of the under-represented groups

c.) Is there a national strategy in place to address issues of social dimension in HEd?

5. To collect additional information on any measures / action taken to improve the situation with under-represented groups in the Kosovo HE and their impact – if any.

a.) What practices are there in place reflecting and implementing equity policies in the field of HEd?

b.) What if any positive action have the participating organizations undertaken to improve the situation of under-represented groups in the Kosovo HEd?

c.) How effective were the interventions to improve situation of under-represented groups?

6. To follow up on information about particular practices identified during the desk research, which might stand as examples of the best practice. Additional questions could be asked for this purpose, such as:

a.) What is the situation with the category of war veterans and children of the victims of the war, in particular with their registration in the University of Prishtina?

b.) Which programmes and other practices were particularly helpful for the development of new and effective approaches?

c.) Are there any plans in place to improve this situation? And or what should be done to provide equal opportunities in higher education for all categories of the society?

FGI 3 – TARGET GROUPS: STUDENTS FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS

1: To gain insights into participants' own understanding of the social dimension of higher education and categories of under-represented groups in Kosovo...

a.) What is in your opinion the social dimension of education?

After collecting feedback from participants, the interviewers will present her definition – to the extent possible relating it to the participants' feedback.

2: Under-represented groups: The purpose is to gain insight into participants' understanding of categories of under-represented groups and causes behind under-representation of given categories (discrimination, lack of funds, lack of interest, lack of absorption capacity of the system, lack of policies, legal instruments, ...)

a.) Could you list under-represented groups in Kosovo in terms of their (lack of) benefits from and access to education?

b.) What are in your opinion the causes behind their under-representation (finances, societal support, poverty, policies, discrimination, ...)

3: To collect information about participants' experiences relative to social dimension in higher education, namely their journey into the system – institutions of higher education.

Because of the sensitivity of issues discussed, the moderator could at some point impersonalize the discussion, asking generalized questions and participants opinion about issues: Possible questions:

a.) Does the student population in your institution reflect the ethnic and social diversity of the Kosovo society? Give reasons why, both for Yes and No answers.

**b.) How did you get enrolled into your institution of higher education?
*The same question rephrased: What are the ways to get enrolled in higher education institutions?***

**c.) Who supports your studies financially?
The same question rephrased: what financial support is there available for students in higher education in Kosovo? The question could again be personalized during the discussion.**

4: To collect information and insight into personal experiences regarding the system, institutional and individual support provided to vulnerable groups both prior and during the study period. Possible questions:

a.) What are your learning experiences and challenges in acquiring education? (possible issues: language, finances, quality of previous education, socializing, participating in group and team work, obtaining and using literature, ...). Alternatively, and depending on the group compositions, the question could be rephrased into: *what would be the best ways to overcome challenges faced by members of vulnerable groups / students during their studies?*

b.) How are students engaged in the governance of the faculties / colleges

c.) Sub-question: Are you involved in the student union? If yes, what activities are you engaged in?

5: Follow up on information provided

Possible follow up questions:

a.) How are the needs of non-traditional students met in your institution (for example, more mature students returning to higher education after a break)?

b.) How are the needs of students with special needs met in your institution?

c.) What inclusive practices do you benefit from / witness in your institution?

6. To gain an insight into participants ideas on ways to improve services for vulnerable groups. Possible questions:

a.) When do you expect to graduate and what will you do upon graduation?

Possible Sub-question:

- Will you continue with your studies – or will get employment?

- What support would you need to make the best use of your skills and competencies in the future?

ANNEX II: FACTSHEET ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS – SOME FACTS

1.) What is the Social Dimension and why does it matter?

The concept of the social dimension of higher education was **first developed within the Bologna Process in the Prague Communiqué of 2001** and, broadly speaking, refers to the goal of **removing inequalities in access to higher education in the European Area of Higher Education**.

The **goal** of the social dimension was most clearly defined in the **London Communiqué of 2007**:

*"We share the societal aspiration that the **student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations**. We reaffirm the **importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background**. We therefore continue our efforts to provide **adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity**."*

Addressing the social dimension should take into account that **three key 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.

The **social dimension** therefore entails **looking at various stages of the education system and adopting measures that can help individuals to overcome such or disincentives to access, participate and complete higher education**.

Source: <http://www.pl4sd.eu/index.php/the-social-dimension/what-is-the-social-dimension>

2.) Which groups are under-represented in higher education at the European level and what is being done to address this issue?

By 2009, countries to the Bologna Process were requested to **elaborate national strategies for the social dimension**, including action plans and measures to show their impact. Strategies should start with the identification of possible underrepresented groups. An analysis of strategies has shown considerable agreement among the reporting countries that **several or all of the following groups are underrepresented in higher education:**

- **Groups with lower socio-economic background,**
- **(Less educated) immigrants and cultural minorities,**
- **Students with a disability,**
- **Non-traditional students (mature students, students with foreign qualifications),**
- **Female – male students (gender balance).**

In addition, there may be also **other underrepresented or vulnerable groups** – given a specific country context. In Kosovo, for example this would also include **persons affected by the war (war victims, children of war victims etc.).**

3.) What measures can be potential measures to foster the implementation of the Social Dimension?

In order to foster equal access and equal opportunities in higher education, the BFUG WORKING GROUP ON THE SOCIAL DIMENSION has developed a (non-exhaustive) list of potential measures.

These include:

A.) Measures to promote equal opportunities for access, participation and completion

- Anti-discrimination legislation covering higher education
- Admission rules that are simple, fair and transparent

B.) Measures to widen access to and participation in higher education

- Outreach programs for underrepresented groups as defined nationally
- Flexible delivery of higher education
- Flexible learning paths into and within higher education
- Transparency of qualifications and recognition of prior learning
- Incentives for higher education institutions to take action to widen access and participation

C.) Study environment that enhances the quality of the student experience

a.) Provision of academic services

- Guidance (academic and careers) and tutoring
- Retention measures (modification of curricula, flexibility of delivery, tracking academic success etc.)
- Working tools and environment (well-functioning libraries, lecture hall and Seminar rooms, internet access, access to scientific data bases etc.)

b.) Provision of social services

- Counselling
- Targeted support for students with special needs and students with children
- Appropriate housing conditions for all students
- Provision of healthcare
- Provision of transportation, student canteens etc.

D.) Student participation in the governance and organisation of higher education

- Legislation or other measures to ensure student participation in higher education governance
- Provisions for the existence of and exercise of influence by student organisations
- Student evaluations of courses, programmes and institutions, including action plans and follow-up of actions taken

E.) Finances in order to start and complete studies

- Financial and legal advice for students
- Appropriate and coordinated national financial support systems that are transparent
- Targeted support for disadvantaged groups as defined nationally
- Support measures for students with children

For more information see <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=12>

For best practices see <http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=244>