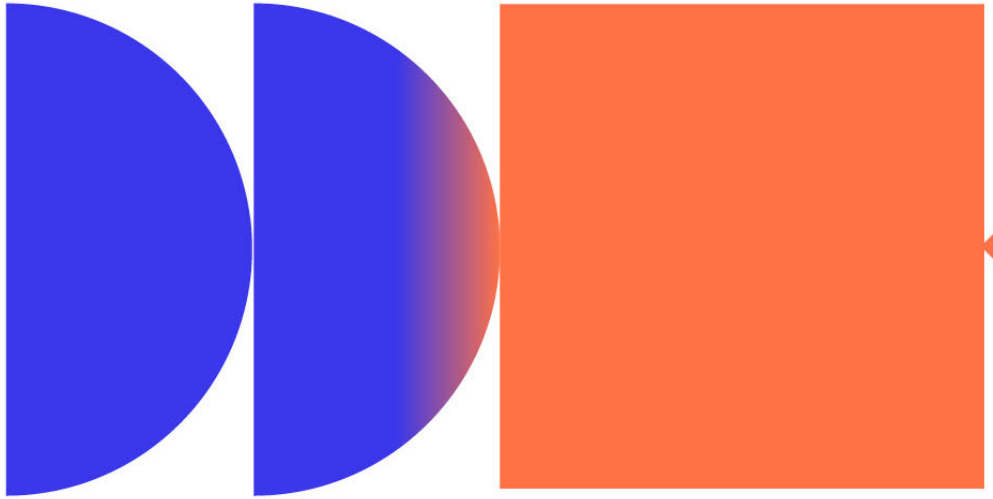
Diversity Data Collection: Exploratory Mapping & Reflection

UNA Europa Diversity Council
Action Group Data Collection Final Report
2022



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+ Diversity Council:

> 4 Action Groups:

- Data collection
- Education
- Research
- Good practices

> General report: *Engaging with Diversity in European Universities*
> Specific report on *Diversity Data Collection*

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Report on Diversity Data Collection?

Terminology?

Mapping exercise on data collection practices?

Issues related to data collection practices?

➔ Key findings & recommendations
➔ Template / questionnaire
➔ Reflective questions to guide data collection

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Terminology?

Diversity?*

- Not an objective term, but a contested conceptual framework that is both descriptive and programmatic
- Multidimensional differences structured by social categories
- Constructs that interlocks with complex, intersecting power relations and inequality
- Impact depends on society, time and context
- Inherently relates to equity, inclusion and antidiscrimination
- Fundamentally horizontal and intersectional approach
- Requires constant critical self-reflection

Diversity indicators and values?

Good practice?

**Some key elements of the definition agreed on by the Diversity Council 13.03.2021. Based on Rosenstreich, G. (2018) Diversity, www.rosenstreich.net/en/home/diversity*

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Mapping current practice?

Focus on quantitative data:

- administrative data + regular surveys (where possible)
- on the composition of staff and/or students
- in relation to diversity dimensions

For (‘only’) 7 universities

Mapping template

- Iterative approach
- In-depth discussion

Good practices

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Mapping current practice?

Name of University:							
Contact person in case of questions							
Q1: What quantitative data do you collect on the composition of your staff and/or students in relation to diversity dimensions in your university's administrative data/statistics? (enter into table)							
Diversity Dimension	**Data collected** *(drop-down menu)*	**How do you define this?**	**Variables/Indicators**	**Status group** *(drop-down menu)*	**Why is this data (not) collected?**	**Notes (e.g. issues)**	**Instruments & systems (and notes on associated issues)**
Sex (e.g. official or self-reported sex/gender status) [see also Q6 below]							
Gender Identity (as a specific dimension of sex/gender that may supplement the sex status e.g. trans*/transgender status, cis-gender, inter*/intersex status, endo,							
Sexual orientation (e.g. heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality)							
Age							
Ethnicity/racialized identity							
Migration							
Refugee status/experience							
Nationality (e.g. citizenship, residency status)							
Language							
Religion							
Class/social status (e.g. first generation to attend university, socioeconomic status)							
Working student (paid work alongside studies)							
Disability/health status (e.g. physical or learning disability, mental health, chronic illness)							
Family status (e.g. marital or relationship status, children, caring responsibilities/carer status)							
Other:							
Other:							
Other:							
Other:							

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Mapping current practice?

Q2: What surveys does your university carry out that may be relevant for diversity data collection? (enter into table)

Survey (including standardised course	Target group	Frequency *(drop-down menu)*	url (if applicable)	Diversity dimensions included (demographic data)	Why is this data collected?	Notes (e.g. primary interest, issues)	Instruments & systems (and notes on associated issues)	Ownership of survey	Survey items on experiences in relation to	Data use (how) is the data gathered accessible? (eg. Is there a system in place to share data?) How is it reported and used? Please note any observations/issues.

Q3: Does the university have a policy about using consistent definitions for items/indicators across surveys etc.?

	Details/Comments:	

Q4: (AG members to enter directly into online whiteboard) What issues have you identified in relation to the collection of diversity data?

Methodological Issues	Legal Issues	Practical Issues	Conceptual Issues	Ethical Issues	Other Issues

Q5: Other thoughts/comments/concerns?

Q6: Does the university have a policy about inofficial names within the data system in relation to gender identity that does not align with the offical gender marker?

	Details/Comments:	

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Mapping current practice?

Diversity categories? Data ‘related to’:

- Age
- Gender
  - Gender identity - as a specific aspect of gender (including preferred names)
- Nationality
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Ethnicity/racialised identity
- Migration
  - Refugee status/experience - as a specific aspect within the broader category of migration
- Language
- Class/social status
  - Working student (paid work alongside studies) – as a specific aspect as several universities gather this data and it appears to be a relevant indicator in relation to socioeconomic status
- Disability or health status.
  - While disability should not be confused with health, operationally they are often dealt with together so for the purposes of this exercise they were both considered within one category
- Family status

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Mapping current practice?

Differences?

- Collection?
  - Students? Staff? Why not?
- Availability?
  - Population / Sample / On request for benefit?
- Indicators?
  - Values? Purpose?
- How used?
- How collected?
  - Instruments?
- When collected?
  - Update/revision?
- Who is collecting?
- Policy?
  - Access? How? Conditions? Format?

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Mapping current practice?

Weak reasons for (not) collecting data

- GDPR does not forbid collection
- Limiting to external requirements is comfortable

Weaknesses related to (lack of) utilisation of the data collected

- Needs to be adressed by all staff in their own roles and responsibilities
- Sometimes unaware of each other's work

Weak diversity indicators

- Definitions, operationalisating, communication, interpretation

Lack of a coherent approach to data collection

- Location and ownership of data collection
- Instruments with which data is collected and stored
- Timing
- The relationship to external data

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Issues?

- Needs-Driven Data Collection
- Interests Underlying Data Collection
- Data protection
- Definitions of Diversity Indicators (or The Problem of the Categories)
- Intersectionality
- Methodological Issues
- Expertise and Responsibility

Recommendations & food for thought

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Key findings & recommendations?

The focus in most universities is on fulfilling external reporting requirements rather than monitoring and promoting equity, and it is often not clear how data collected is actually used to support policy development and practice within the university. There are gaps in data collection in some areas known to have significant impact in higher education, e.g. racism, impact of class, gender identity. Often the data that is gathered is at best collated, with little analysis in relation to the diversity goals of the organisation.	Use 'why' rather than 'what' as a starting point: ensure that purpose drives data collection and is clearly defined at the outset. When making decisions, critically reflect on the reasons behind (not) gathering data together with other stakeholders and ensure that the data gathered is fit for purpose.
	Determine the way in which data will be used and made accessible as part of the planning phase.
	Place the purpose of reducing discrimination and promoting equity at the forefront of data collection (for example, gaining information to identify needs and to inform the response to these needs).
	Where possible, collect data in a 'design for all'/mainstreaming logic, rather than focusing on categories of people as target groups.
	Supplement the data required by external regulatory frameworks with needs-driven data collection. In some cases, an interface can translate internal data into the form required to meet external rporting requirements.

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Key findings & recommendations?

Each university operates in a very specific context (e.g. legislation, public discourse, education system, data management, organisational culture) and conceptualizes diversity issues differently. This limits comparability of data and the opportunities to adopt good practices from other universities.	Treat any comparison of data with the utmost caution. When reporting on diversity data collection, provide extensive and explicit notes on definitions, contextual factors and methodological decisions. This enables assessment of comparability and robust consideration of potential transferability of practice (f.i. Eurostat).

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Key findings & recommendations?

There is a **lack of knowledge on what privacy and data protection entail** and how they can be operationalised. This often leads to data simply not being collected due to 'data protection' concerns.	**Use the guidance offered by the legal data protection framework** to develop clear, accessible internal guidelines and a strict policy that defines quality criteria and requirements to ensure that all personal data is collected, processed, stored and reported in a way that protects the privacy of individuals. Unless there is a justified need to link the data to individuals, gather data anonymously or, where that is not possible, anonymise it.
	Provide clear information from the outset about the privacy policy, the purpose of the data collection and how the data will be used.
	Limit access to personal data on a transparent needs-to know basis (with a signed confidentiality declaration).
	Consistently and proactively inform individuals about how to access all personal data collected on them, how long data will be stored (as per data protection regulations), and how they can make changes as required.

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Key findings & recommendations?

The **universities vary enormously in their approach** to collecting, analysing, and using diversity data. There is **seldom a specific policy** on diversity data, demographic data or dealing with sensitive data more generally (beyond general data protection policies).	**Develop a strategic policy on data for the university as a whole** that provides direction based on accepted good practices and the university's own strategic goals, including those related to diversity. **Include guidance** on what data should be prioritised and what it will be used for (e.g. which diversity categories and the areas of focus), principles and standards (e.g. definition of purpose, data protection/ privacy), the instruments/methods used to gather data (e.g. consistent definitions across the university), how often data should be gathered and who it should be accessible to and how.
	Acknowledge and proactively communicate the limitations and potential for error, and **take a pragmatic approach in combination with a continuous learning approach** (reflecting on and improving practice).

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Key findings & recommendations?

Both administrative and survey data almost always focus exclusively on singular identity indicators (measuring representation of members of defined social groups within the university), with little data gathered on experiences (e.g. of inclusion or discrimination) or on multidimensional/ intersectional identities.	Monitor the experiences of university members and relate them to their membership of minoritised groups. For example, conduct regular surveys on how respondents experience the organisational environment.
	Formulate survey items/questions on the basis of currently accepted good practices, including acceptance by the target group. Where possible, use them consistently across time to maximise comparability, unless they are misaligned with current best practice, in which case revision should be considered.
	Conduct multivariate analysis where possible to provide insights into intersectional identities and experiences.

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Key findings & recommendations?

Indicators are a mix of self-identification (i.e. the person determining their own identity) and other external criteria such as legal status or official assessments. The two do not always align. For example, a person's own understanding of whether they have a disability may differ from whether they meet defined legal thresholds.	Where possible, enable respondents to determine for themselves how they relate to diversity categories (selfidentify). Take a flexible approach that puts the purpose of the data collection at the forefront, recognises that there are sometimes discrepancies between documents and lived experience, and makes it transparent to respondents exactly how indicators are being defined.
The definitions used for indicators and values are not always clear, increasing both potential variance in respondents' interpretation and barriers to the robust interpretation (and utilisation) of findings.	Formulate items so that they are easily comprehensible to the target group (both questions and response options), including descriptions to explain key terms.
	Include comprehensive notes in all reporting, with clear definitions of the indicators and values used and any caveats relating to the findings.

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Key findings & recommendations?

There are significantly different practices in relation to the publication of data, and when it is made available, it is seldom communicated in an accessible way.	Make the results of data collection available to those from whom it has been collected and to those who can derive practice implications from it. If that is not possible, at least communicate transparently why the data is not available.
	Communicate data in a way that is accessible and that the subjects can understand.
Data collection is generally carried out by practitioners with either expertise on diversity issues or expertise in data analysis, seldom both.	Build dedicated and qualified staff capacity for diversity data collection, analysis and reporting, combining expertise in both data analysis and diversity policy. Address gaps in expertise, e.g. by staff development or buying in external expertise.
	If responsibility lies in separate units, foster systematic collaboration between them.

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Key findings & recommendations?

Similar data is often collected in different contexts and by using different instruments.	Adhere to the principle of data minimisation. For example, record personal data once and make it accessible where it is required so that people do not need to tell their stories repeatedly.
There is little linkage between administrative and survey data.	Triangulate different instruments and methods, in particular in relation to sensitive data (see Appendix 4).
There is often significant variance between data collected for the different populations within the university. Often different indicators are used for staff and student data.	Consider the needs of the university community as a whole (staff and students).
	While there might be different data needed for the different groups, if data is being gathered on the same category of diversity, use consistent indicators where possible, based on accepted best practice at the time (multiple indicators where necessary).

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Reflective questions to Guide Data Collection

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1. Why do we intend to collect this data? (purpose) What exactly are the policy needs we seek to address and how would data help us to do that? In whose interests is the data being collected? How will it contribute to the goals of the university in relation to diversity?

2. Do we have the right to collect this data? Legally? Ethically?

3. Do we have an ethical responsibility to collect this data?

4. How will members of minoritised groups/target groups participate in the definition of purpose, the development of instruments, the implementation and the analysis, interpretation and reporting of findings?

5. Is the data fit-for-purpose? (see question 1)

6. What will be done with the data? Who will have access to it and why? How exactly will it be used? How will findings be made available to stakeholders, including the respondents?

7. How is data privacy being addressed? How is this communicated to (potential) respondents?

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Reflective questions to Guide Data Collection

…

8. How does this data link to other data already being collected? (Within our own organisation, external/official reference data). Are the definitions and questions comparable? If not, why not?

9. How are the indicators being defined? Does this reflect current understandings of good practice? How does it relate to understandings within minoritised groups and to the conceptual framework of the university in relation to diversity?

10. Are the questions being asked/the forms formulated in a way that is clearly understandable for all respondents and unambiguous? Does the terminology reflect the language used by the respondents themselves? Is the language used in the instrument as a whole non-discriminatory?

11. Is the instrument being used accessible to all members of the target group? Which groups may face barriers (e.g. language, technology, distrust) and how will those barriers be addressed?

12. How will the data collection process be evaluated? What understanding of quality underlies that evaluation? How will the target groups be involved? How will learning derived be incorporated into future data collection planning processes?

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