

Statement on Southeast European Student Social Support Systems

We, representatives of national unions of students from the SouthEast Initiative network and colleagues from Poland, Finland, Armenia and European Students' Union met in Bucharest during the 21st to 24th of February to analyse the social dimension of higher education in Southeast Europe with a particular focus on student social support services. We looked into different models from this region and from other European countries.

It is our strong belief that education must be treated as a public good and public responsibility and societies should provide state funded education and tools that address and remove the effect of any disadvantage one might have due to socio-economic background or special individual needs in accessing, progressing through and graduating higher education.

We concluded with great concern that the student support services are underdeveloped and are far from adequately reaching their goals. Too little is done to ensure that underrepresentation of different groups in higher education is undone. While ambitious statements regarding the pursuit of equity have been signed by our Governments in international policy documents such as the Bologna Ministerial Communiqués, students with disabilities, from rural areas, low socio-economic background, immigrants and some ethnic minorities access, progress through and graduate higher education in much lower percentages than society in general.

We call on our governments and higher education institutions to provide the following services for all students regardless of their socio-economic background, disability, religion, political belief, ethnic or cultural origin, gender or sexual orientation:

- sufficient affordable housing places and canteens for all students who need them, with decent living conditions and accessible by students with disabilities
- social scholarships that cover at least minimum living expenses; students with social scholarships should be able to also receive merit based ones.
- financial support for mobility programs and exchange programs, language courses at the beginning or prior the mobility period and full recognition of courses taken at a different higher education institution.
- health insurance, basic medical health care in student campuses and psychological services
- quality career guidance, tutoring and counselling services for students and also for school students, to assist when choosing a study and career path
- conditions and facilities for the full participation of students with disabilities in the educational, social and cultural activities related to university studies
- free study materials, access to libraries, scientific and specialty journals and university technical resources for projects related to studies
- free access to internet in student campuses
- free access to sport facilities for a healthy lifestyle



- other student support services, according to the needs of the students and the specific national background

In order for these support services to fulfil the aims they are designed for we urge governments and higher education institutions to take the following measures:

- design and implement national strategies and policies to ensure the inclusion of underrepresented groups within higher education and evaluate their impact periodically
- ensure flexible learning paths to cater for the needs of a diversifying student body
- adapt quality assurance systems to look more into social support services which have a very important influence on the quality of education
- provide quality practical training and internships in order to facilitate the link between education and labour market
- organise teacher and staff training for better adapting and responding to students with different needs: with disabilities, mature, different cultural background, with families and other
- provide teacher training for adapting to new technologies and different learning styles
- ensure fair treatment of international students and similar financial conditions with national students for the same studies

As representatives of students, we commit to monitor the reforms taken to ensure equity in our education systems and continue to push for effective measures that address the existing problems. We call on our governments to consult us, as independent national unions of students, in developing policy and strategies related to higher education and on the European decision makers and stakeholders to consult the European Students' Union in this regard.

Signatories:

ANOSR – The National Alliance of Students in Romania (Romania)

SUS – Studentska Unija Srbije (Serbia)

SKONUS – Student Conference of Serbian Universities (Serbia)

NSUM – National Student Union of Macedonia (Macedonia)

NASC – Nacionalno Predstaviteľstvo na Studetskite Saveti v Republika Bulgaria (Bulgaria)

UBS – Barski Studentski (Bulgaria)

SSU – Studentska Organizacija Slovenije (Slovenia)

Supporters:

SAMOK – Suomen ammattikorkeakouluopiskelijakuntien liitto (Finland)

PSRP – The Students' Parliament of the Republic of Poland (Poland)

ANSA – Armenian National Students' Association (Armenia)

CNE – National School Students' Council (Romania)

ESU – European Students' Union



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