

Do not isolate us from education!

ANOSR's requests during COVID-19 pandemic

Considering the difficult context determined by the risk of spread of Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) infection and the measures taken at national level, **including suspension of face-to-face teaching activities within higher education institutions during the State of Emergency period**, it is essential that the right to education will still be respected.

Thus, the **National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)** considers it decisive that governors, HEIs' and students' representatives should collaborate in this exceptional situation, in order to propose and implement relevant solutions for the benefit of the entire university community. **The right to quality education is a fundamental right even in special situations.**

1. Teaching and learning process

Even if it is difficult to trace the evolution of the current state, we consider it imperative that universities should ensure the adaption of the teaching process to the current realities and needs of the students. Thus, first of all, **we encourage the continuation of a rigorous teaching and learning process, with the support of online tools.**

Of course, the suspension of face-to-face didactic activities also has effects on the structure of the academic year, especially on the practical activities, exam sessions and completion. In this sense, we propose a series of measures that would facilitate the normal following of the academic path within this year:

- **combining practical activities** (seminars, laboratories and mandatory internships) that cannot be achieved using online tools and recover them in a short period of time after the State of Emergency ends; this decision is mandatory to be fulfilled only after a wide consultation with students' representatives at university level, depending on its specificity.
- **lowering the minimum of necessary ECTS points in order to pass the academic year**, in accordance with the specific of each study program; we mention that **we do not want to diminish the quality of higher education**, but to minimize the risks created by the situation of this semester, especially in those universities that had a scheduled reexamination session that could not be carried out due to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- **establishing a commonly approved period of time for final exams at national level**, in order to ensure students the possibility to enroll in a new cycle of studies at another university in Romania or abroad. Also, the admission process in higher education must be operated in accordance to a possible delay of the Romanian Baccalaureate.
- **maintaining reexamination and/ or additional examination sessions** is essential in order to respect student' right to at least two free of fee exam sessions per semester.

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- **provision of online resources for individual study**, in addition to moving the teaching activities in the online environment. During this crisis we are going through, we encourage the existing university libraries, as well as Central University Libraries, to provide students the digitalized books and papers available so far and to offer students unlimited access to scientific articles from international databases and online teaching materials. It is necessary that the information is accessible quickly and efficiently (by using catalogues, keywords and order numbers). Moreover, we point out that there are digital libraries that are not available to everyone that might be interested. Therefore, we recommend the making of short tutorials that would explain the functionality of these online platforms, how to create an account and so on.

There are plenty of alternative methods at the moment, such as those mentioned above, that would allow the following of the curricula, together with ensuring the successful completion of this academic year. Therefore, we are confident that they could be well implemented through exact and feasible solutions.

2. Administrative services

Regarding administrative services conducted by HEIs, among which there are **issuing of certificates, transcripts of records, submission of documents for scholarship applications**, we strictly recommend their complete transfer in the online environment, together with transparency from universities regarding the offered solutions, by publishing them on the website, so that they would be accessible to students as soon as possible.

At the same time, taking into account the impact generated by this multidimensional crisis, we support the **postponement of fees payment**, and the **withdraw of possible penalties resulted from delayed payments**.

3. Accessibility

According to the figures provided by Eurostat¹, in 2017 approximately **50,000 Romanian students did not have constant access to Internet or devices that allow online learning**. Therefore, we ask the Ministry of Education and Research and higher education institutions to make joint efforts in order to grant students' access to devices connected to the Internet. Some examples of solutions are:

- **allocation of proper funds from universities' own budget** that would allow students to procure electronic devices and therefore have access to distance learning. We mention again that *Euro 200* governmental program is necessary and helpful, **but due to the lack of correlation with the economical realities, it failed to reach its goal**. ANOSR's detailed position on this topic can be found [here](#).
- **free borrow of devices (laptop and PCs)** from universities' infrastructure for students in need.

¹ Eurostat: [here](#).

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- **short-term agreements with Internet service operators** that would be provided by HEIs for their students. A good practice example can be found at University of Georgia², USA, and many other American HEIs that offer **short-term, cost-free Internet packages to students in need.**

4. International mobilities

The situation of international mobilities beneficiaries is very sensitive during these times. In order to address their issues, the European Commission has allowed beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs to use the force majeure clause in their contracts. Thus, we urge both **universities, as well as the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide the necessary support and to act in the benefit of students** - helping to their repatriation, if they have to or wish to return home, and to continue their mobility virtually, and to ensure the recognition of ECTS points obtained until their return.

5. Social Dimension of Education

The current crisis has not bypassed the social dimension of higher education either. Inevitably, the epidemiological crisis will have strong effects on the general and individual economic well-being. Thus, we expect that **the number of applications for scholarships offered on social criteria to increase** in the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021. In order **to avoid the increasing of the drop-out rate, it is essential the universities and Government will be prepared to provide supplementary financial support for eligible students.** Therefore, we urge the Government to consistently supplement the scholarships fund meant for social scholarships.

At the same time, we call on all higher education institutions to take the necessary measures and disinfect accommodation facilities in order to protect those students who have chosen not to leave, in the absence of other alternatives. However, we would like to point out that this process must be conducted while respecting the right to privacy and avoiding exposing students to any potential risk.

Nonetheless, we ask the Ministry of Education and Research to **maintain the accommodation and canteens subsidies at the current amount**, in order to support students who needed to remain in university dormitories, as well as to support actions taken for the disinfection of these spaces.

6. Safety and optimization measures

Last but not least, after recovering from the current state, in order to enhance the educational process, **we call on Romanian higher education institutions to maintain those solutions offered during this period.** Thus, we ask universities to provide sufficient resources, both material and human, to ensure the disinfection and hygiene of all teaching, studying,

² <https://www.uga.edu/>

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dining and living spaces **before resuming the face-to-face activities**. It is also essential to ensure that **regular hygiene products for students use would become normal** (liquid soap, hot water, hands dryer/ dry wipes, toilet paper and disinfectant).

Moreover, since **online secretariat services are being operationalized**, they should be maintained in the future **in order to contribute to the flexibility** of the program and communication with the administrative staff.

Therefore, even if the prioritization of other fields by decision-makers is understandable, we should not forget that **education continues to play a vital role in the society** and it should not be neglected. Thus, the necessary measures have to be taken rapidly.

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