Admission to Higher Education - disconnected from the current reality

During these critical times, the disruptive effect generated by the current crisis, has directly influenced the flexibility and adaptability of the education system. It is necessary to respond appropriately to the challenges posed by the crisis of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19), including the ones regarding the first stage of accessing higher education, which is the admission process.

The National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) has analysed the admission process within all public higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country and presented good practices examples implemented by universities around the world. The analysis concludes with a series of recommendations on the admission process to higher education, addressed both to decision-makers and HEIs.

The information gathered showed that, although the Governments’ Emergency Ordinance no. 41/2016 regarding the establishment of simplification measures at national level provided the elimination of the requirement to submit legalized copies to official papers, there are still 36% of public HEIs that require mandatory legalized copies of documents in some situation within the admission to bachelor’s studies.

Another finding shows that only 34% of civil public universities include in their admission regulations provisions that ensure equal opportunities for candidates with disabilities, but without concrete measures of special procedures adapted to them.

Regarding the existence of appeal procedures, all the analyzed universities present such regulations. However, regarding the possibility of submitting online appeals, only 2 universities (4%) have such provisions, while for all the other universities it is necessary to submit the appeals to the secretariat, physically. Moreover, only in some cases students have the possibility to participate in the process of analyzing their own appeal.

In order to offer equitable opportunities to the candidates within the online admission process, we request the conclusion of partnerships between HEIs and county school inspectorates. Thus, if a student does not have the necessary possibilities to take part in the online admission, it should be organized and supported in the nearest educational unit from the candidate’s home, using the devices provided by that specific unit, under the conditions and on the platforms established by universities.
Next, it is essential to take into account the impediments of the current online teaching process. Thus, we think that the average of final grades of high school students should weight a certain percent of the admission result, if there would be an online examination. We consider that the grades achieved within the online teaching and learning process should **weight less than the ones obtained before the pandemic outbreak** and, respectively, before the face-to-face activities were suspended. This approach aims to create a "safety net", thus reducing the possible discrimination caused by the limited opportunities of high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Basically, this would give high school students the certainty that their **final grades would not be negatively influenced by the education received in the online environment.**

At the same time, we consider it a **priority** to adapt the provision of Minister Order no. 6102/ 2016 regarding the *Methodology for organizing the admission process for bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies in order to reduce bureaucracy of the confirmation process*. Specifically, **we urge the Ministry of Education and Research to amend Minister Order no. 6102/ 2016 regarding the confirmation procedure** and to include a series of feasible proposals for the Romanian higher education institutions, which would ensure the accuracy of submitted documents and the online confirmation.

Also, in order to streamline the admission process, we mention the main requests provided in the analysis:

- **universities should urgently establish the online platforms** to be used for the admission process, with IT&C support from the Ministry of Education and Research;
- establishment of **special admission conditions for candidates with disabilities** and development of an institutional guidebook with the steps to be followed by these candidates, in order to benefit from an **admission process adapted to their needs**;
- possibility to **submit appeals and acceptance of places by students online**;
- **prolonged period of time for submitting the admission documents**, with respect to the previous years;
- **reduction of admission fees** (at the beginning of this academic year, ANOSR has conducted an analysis which provides all the unnecessary fees perceived by the public HEIs and their lack of substantiation);
- **various financial benefits for candidates that have been severely financially affected by the COVID-19 outbreak**, such as postponing the deadlines for payment of the first installment of the tuition fee and the possibility of not paying the admission fee;
- harmonization of the current admission regulations at HEI level with the national legal framework in force and **elimination of mandatory legalized copies of some documents** that need to be submitted by candidates in the admission process.
Although too few universities think about online admission, and decision-makers do not provide concrete solution to the needs of school- and university students, **education remains a priority during the pandemic.** Therefore, the ANOSR calls for greater attention to education and for the implementation of realistic measures for teaching, in order not to affect the interests of the primary beneficiaries of education.

"Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has disastrous effects, it also offers us an **unexpected opportunity to reflect on the Romanian higher education system**, including the admission methods. The future students need an admission system that is **equally fair and effected**, that focuses on the potential candidates and, respectively, their **interests and skills** and, last but not least, to fit in the curriculum they would like to follow as well as possible. All of these measures should be implemented **taking into account their socio-economic background.**" - Petrișor-Laurențiu ȚUCĂ, President of ANOSR.