

ANOSR's proposals for the upcoming academic year

On the 30th of June, the **National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)** was present at the working group's meeting formed by the Government and Romanian Presidency in order to prepare schools and universities to start the teaching activities in the next school and university year.

Among the main issues brought up by **ANOSR**, we highlight low accommodation capacity of dormitories in Romanian universities and the phenomenon of over-accommodation. **Sufficient accommodation which complies with the hygienic-sanitary norms is essential for students' safety.** Drawing on this matter, ANOSR has requested Government officials to raise the grant which is offered to students that do not obtain accommodation and to establish a transparent funds allocation methodology. Moreover, we sustain the financial support of universities in order to extend accommodation capacity through public-private partnerships. Thus, COVID-19 testing of all members of university community is absolutely necessary from the beginning of the academic year.

Another important aspect is students' mental health, given these tough times. It is necessary that all students who encounter problems to benefit from psychological counselling services offered by universities, through Counselling and Career Orientation Centres, but also by a GreenLine based at institutional level for students and teachers, in order to support them psychologically. Hence, we requested supplementing the number of employees in these centres, together with the raise of necessary funds for this matter and modifying the legal framework accordingly.

Financial difficulties encountered by students' families cannot be neglected in the context of reducing economical activities in Romania. To support them, **ANOSR** submitted a proposal to the Romanian Government to take into account the period of emergency situation when it comes to social scholarships and to ensure sufficient funds from the state budget in order to cover up all submitted requests for scholarships based on socio-economic criteria. The failure in responding to financial difficulties of students in this particular period of time can lead to a negative impact over the higher education system, with the risk of rising dropout.

It is to be noticed that the pandemic generated by SARS-CoV-2 led to an acceleration in systems digitalizing all over the world. Thus, we suggested taking into consideration blended education, which is based on a mix between face-to-face meetings and online environment. In order to accomplish this, a series of changes of the current legal framework is necessary, together with a thorough process of digitalization of higher education. However, this decision must be taken **after consulting all stakeholders.**

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Nonetheless, we reminded the problematic circumstances of domain and specialty practice development in this period, more precisely the reduction in numbers of workplaces of private entities because of imposed restrictions and, in some cases, the universities' incapacity to cover these deficiencies. Should the students cannot fulfill their obligations regarding mandatory practice in this period, we reiterated the necessity of introducing the possibility of performing mandatory internships within the following academic year (for students who are not in the final year of studies), **without the number of ECTS corresponding to this activity being taken into account when calculating the general average, nor to discriminate students in any way from education or social points of view** (the loss of priority for accommodation in students dormitory and so on).

The right to education is provided within the **Romanian Constitution**, therefore **ANOSR will continue to militate** for ensuring a **fair access to quality higher education**, even in these hard times.

UPDATE:

The current challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced lifestyles, they have changed the way we work and they put pressure on the medical system. At the same time, the higher education system was subjected to transformations, transferring the educational process in the online environment, a transfer that generated various problems or could not be fully implemented for some subjects and/ or study fields.

By the beginning of the new academic year, **all the stakeholders should work together to find the most effective solutions to the current challenges**. The **National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)** proposes to the dialogue partners the **students' solutions for a resilient higher education system for COVID-19**.

The solutions proposed by ANOSR are the following:

1. The **adaption of accommodation and dining conditions on university campuses**:
 - a. Increasing the accommodation subsidy granted to students who do not obtain a place to stay in dormitories;
 - b. Increasing the dormitory-canteens subsidy per student in order to cover the maintenance expenses of the dormitories;
 - c. Financial support of universities for expanding accommodation capacity in the short and medium term;
 - d. Offering "to go" meals in university canteens.

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2. Implementing **hygienic-sanitary measures** in all university spaces:
 - a. Allocation of financial, material and human resources for the regular disinfection and sanitation of all spaces and ensuring students' access to essential hygiene products (including protective masks) in all university spaces;
 - b. Informing and encouraging the members of the university community to respect the rules of hygiene and social distancing;
 - c. Digitization of the book fund of university libraries;
 - d. Hygienic-sanitary norms regarding the development of Physical Education and Sports classes;
 - e. Clear rules regarding the number of people who can participate in physical teaching activities, depending on the size of the spaces or other criteria, by the Ministry of Education and Research together with the Ministry of Health.

3. The **digitalization** of the higher education through:
 - a. Implementing blended learning and adaption of the legal framework currently in force in order to allow this implementation;
 - b. Providing support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties;
 - c. Trainings for the teachers for online teaching;
 - d. Ensuring the electronic devices necessary for the teaching and learning process for students and teachers;
 - e. Optimal conditions for international students to be able to participate in the educational process;
 - f. Implementing virtual mobilities or blended mobilities.

4. Providing **financial support** to the students affected by the pandemic:
 - a. Supplementing funds for social scholarships to cover all eligible applications;
 - b. Postponement of university fees;
 - c. Dedicated scholarships for students whose families had a decrease of incomes, strictly related to the pandemic.

5. **Psychological support** for those in need through:
 - a. Supplementing the number of staff within the *Counciling and Career Orientation Centers*;
 - b. Special focus on students' mental health;
 - c. Operationalization of a GreenLine for students.

6. Improving **health care services** provided by the universities.

7. About the **study field practice and the mandatory** internships for the students:
 - a. Recognition of volunteering activities related to the pandemic through ECTS included in the mandatory internships;

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- b. Possibility of conducting mandatory internships in the following academic year, without considering ECTS in calculating the average grade per semester and without any other discrimination for students.
8. Universities should conclude public-private partnerships with companies that rent alternative transport equipment (such as bicycles or electric scooters).
9. Preparation of short-term action strategies in case of an outbreak of local infection, at home, campus or university center.
10. Organizing remedial activities for students who did not have the opportunity to participate in online teaching activities.

Although the impact of the pandemic has economic and financial consequences, it is essential to underline **the role of education in relation to the society's ability to react to future situations of this kind.**

We call on all institutional partners to support the increase in funding for higher education and training. Just as the research component strengthens the ability to respond to major challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, so do **secondary and tertiary education have importance for the well-being, financial security, personal and professional development of citizens and, consequently, support resilience of the society and the economy, especially in the recovery process.** Now, more than ever, it is necessary to implement effective and sustainable strategies by universities and decision-makers.

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