



ESU against austerity measures on higher education in Estonia

09.09.19 The European Students' Union (ESU) supports the Federation of Estonian Student Unions (EÜL) in their struggle against unapt austerity measures being proposed following news that the government of Estonia will not be raising the percentage of science funding or public funding for higher education.

ESU expresses serious concerns over the deprioritization of science and higher education in Estonia. It has come to ESU's attention that public sector [expenditure](#) on higher education has decreased or stayed the same in Estonia over the last couple of years. [Statistics](#) indicate that the government has decreased the budget for higher education from 1.20% in 2007 to 0.97% in 2017. This is undoubtedly a worrying statistic for current and prospective students.

The financing of higher education should never come at the students' expense. The right to education has been recognized as a human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which recognizes the obligation to develop equitable access to higher education. The introduction of financial barriers to students irrefutably serves to limit accessibility of higher education particularly to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and adds weight to the affordability of higher education that is already exacerbated by both direct costs (study material and resources) and indirect costs (housing and transportation). Making students pay for their education in order to fill the national funding gap in higher education is unacceptable and undermines the right to education for all.

As one of the core institutions to society, education significantly contributes to imparting cultural and intellectual heritage, to enhancing sustainable, scientific and economic development and to empowering democratic and active citizenship, among many other public benefits. In view of this, ESU asserts that governments should steer away from presenting higher education as an expense, but rather as a public good and responsibility in the interest of the wellbeing of society, that should therefore be publically supported through the national budget. Neglecting this support not only undermines the values of education but also risks changing the perception of higher education to a private, undemocratic and limited commodity.

It is of most importance to keep higher education free and accessible for all students from all backgrounds. Therefore, the European Students' Union unites with the Federation of Estonian Student Unions in demanding a raise in higher education financing in Estonia and in standing against increasing students' expenses to afford higher education. We call upon all relevant stakeholders to thoroughly reflect on the serious implications of decreasing the affordability of higher education echoed in this statement. Finally, ESU would like to stress the importance of including students in these discussions as they are the main benefactors of the higher education system. Students must be allowed to bring up their opinion and defend their views against changes that will impact their studies directly.

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the European Students' Union.

The European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 45 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 39 countries. The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO.