



## **COVID-19: ESU's reaction about the implications for students**

On the 11th March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). The European Students' Union (ESU) supports this call for international alert as the number of cases and deaths in Europe by transmission of COVID-19 is likely to increase. National containment measures are being implemented to slow the spread of the virus and as a result many governments have ordered schools and universities to close.

While respecting such measures, ESU recognizes the consequences that such measures have on higher education both for local and international students. In fact, ESU is currently working together with its Board of 46 member national student unions to address the educational, economic and social impact that such measures may have on students. The following [link](#) provides the contact details of national student unions who are ready to help and support any students having questions about studies, assessments, exams, credits, mobility travels, etc.

Primarily, ESU calls for immediate extensions in the payment of the student grant instalments, as the current public health crisis takes a significant hit on the economic system, affecting many students and their families.

We welcome the web conference of the EU Ministers of Education held last week who are putting in place coordinated measures to suspend face-to-face learning in higher education institutions and keep students safe while finding ways to continue to provide education through online solutions.

It is difficult to predict the trajectory of the pandemic and thus education institutions must adjust learning and teaching to a new reality that is being forced by external circumstances. We call upon governments and higher education institutions to take swift and thorough action to offer free, remote study conditions for students and to be creative and flexible in



the provision of education. Best efforts need to be put into ensuring that students have their online education at the best possible quality. It is crucial that universities have their support services available for students on a daily basis, particularly as not all students find it easy to transition to virtual learning. Constant discussions should be held between all stakeholders of higher education systems on solutions that address the needs of all students while causing minimal hindrance to the study cycle of students. Such extraordinary circumstances should not leave any student behind from progressing their education.

We also welcome the quick reaction from the European Commission addressed to the Erasmus+ International Contact Points which specifies the Measures for Management of International Credit Mobility projects during the outbreak of COVID-19. We are glad to see that the projects from 2018 are extended by 12 months with a new end date on 31 July 2021. This will make sure that students who are now applying for credit mobilities will have access to their studies guaranteed until a later point. We see that for those currently on mobility, the 'force majeure' clause of the learning agreement is being applied. Students should have the right to go back to their home countries since face-to-face learning is currently suspended, however, this should not be forced upon them if their host institution provides substitute online learning opportunities. We want to emphasize that governments and higher education institutions need to take the responsibility of ensuring that students are financially compensated for the study period spent abroad as well as for the extra travel arrangements. For this to happen it is also important that the European Commission and the Erasmus+ International Contact Points accordingly make all necessary financial arrangements on time.

At the same time, since in many cases all the courses (no matter if for local or mobile students) are supposed to be provided online in the current situation, ESU calls for making online education accessible to mobile students on the same bases. Full interruption of study mobility will result in major issues connected with potential lack of recognition of the partial study periods abroad, as well as issues with the transferral of ECTS credits. We stress that in no circumstance should mobile students be put in a situation to suffer any consequences



which will put them in a disadvantaged situation compared to those studying at their home or host institutions.

Finally, ESU would like to call upon its member and partner organisations and institutes to offer online contact and information points for students while refraining from organising large gatherings, preferring instead online solutions for meetings and events. As the evidence seems to show, young and healthy people are generally not severely affected by COVID-19. However, they can still be active transmitters of the virus, putting in grave risk those with weaker immune systems and contributing to the rapid spread of the virus. In a situation of such rapid outbreak, realization of social responsibility to prevent the spread of the virus is crucial and as an organisation that operates internationally, ESU will be doing its utmost to follow all safety precautions.

## Links

- [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/corona-virus-consequences-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-mobility-activities\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/news/corona-virus-consequences-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-mobility-activities_en)
- [https://mcusercontent.com/5d9fabf08f5c1c749fded08c1/files/f0b18b7a-e4d0-42a9-9210-2d18fe533f9f/Ares2020\\_1496697.pdf?utm\\_source=Mailing+list&utm\\_campaign=08baab87cd-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2020\\_03\\_12\\_09\\_08&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_9932b5b204-08baab87cd-70509495](https://mcusercontent.com/5d9fabf08f5c1c749fded08c1/files/f0b18b7a-e4d0-42a9-9210-2d18fe533f9f/Ares2020_1496697.pdf?utm_source=Mailing+list&utm_campaign=08baab87cd-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_12_09_08&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_9932b5b204-08baab87cd-70509495)

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The European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 46 National Unions of Students (NUS) from 40 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.