



European Students' Union (ESU)

Fighting for students' rights since 1982

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Statement for the International Women's Day

When the first marches and demonstrations were held on the International Women's Day at the beginning of the last Century, they were held with a focus on something crucial, yet today often forgotten - power structures. The first marches held by women in the socialist and workers' movements aimed at challenging the economic power relations that were seen as not only abhorrent and cruel, but also having especially dire consequences for women. Radical feminists of the 1960s and 70s defined the specific power structures disadvantaging women as the patriarchy. In the 90s, third-wave feminists brought to mainstream the idea that any fight for equality needs to be based on an intersectional approach, taking into account the different ways discrimination, marginalization, exclusion and violence affect people due to their varying identities and circumstances.

In ESU, our fight for equality, for example in the form of equal access to education, is not for a numerically equal amount of men and women from privileged backgrounds benefiting from an elitist and exclusive higher education system. Rather, it is a fight for the most marginalized and disadvantaged people in society to have the same opportunities to participate in higher education as those with the most advantages. Our cause, like that of the women marching 110 years ago, is reforming discriminatory systems and breaking down barriers on a structural level. Gender-based and sexual harassment and violence in higher education institutions structurally disadvantage women in particular, as do societal prejudices against women in specific fields like STEM, gender-based pay and employment discrimination, and countless other such factors in our societies. Some need to be broken apart, some reformed, some adjusted – all need attention and change.

ESU's belief is that there can be no lasting change without structural change and that everyone needs to do their part in the fight for gender equality and women's rights on all levels, from the individual to the structural. This fight needs to be mainstreamed through all other aspects of societal change, just as the commitment shown from all on the 8th of March should remain the same every day. We stand in solidarity with all women in this struggle, today as much as the other 364 days of the year!

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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.