European Students' Union (ESU)
Fighting for students' rights since 1982

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Plan of Work 2021-2022

1. Social Dimension

1.1. BFUG Working Group

ESU will work to ensure that the Social Dimension remains a priority for the working period 2021-2024 of the Bologna Process and especially will focus on the monitoring of the implementation of the Principles & Guidelines (PAGs). For the sake of continuity, ESU will oversee the work of the new Working Group, which will aim to (a) develop a system of monitoring of the Principles and Guidelines and (b) define indicators and benchmarks for the principles for SD. ESU will also advocate towards introducing thematic country reviews on social dimension within the EHEA.

1.2. Closing of TMF(wrap-up) - World Refugee Day

After five years-duration and very successful results at the local level with student-led projects supporting young people with refugee backgrounds to access Higher Education, built friendship, and better awareness of their rights, the project as such will come to an end between June and December 2021. Final activities will be organised to celebrate the work done and the wide activist community built over the years. Alternative funding opportunities will be considered by ESU in partnerships with other organisations and youth-led organisations to keep working on social inclusion and access to HE for young refugees.

1.3. Access to Mental Health in a digital reality

Mental Health has reached a new peak of importance during the pandemic, and mental strain due to additional workload and the inability of social interaction makes us question how transferring support services of HEIs in a digital form will reflect on the general well being of the academic community. We will investigate good practices in assuring students` access to online mental health services in a safe, confidential, and beneficial way and give out recommendations on how to establish and/or access them wherever and whenever needed.

1.4. Mainstream and operationalise the Students' Rights Charter European wide and globally

ESU will continue working on the Students' Rights Charter; this entails working on options to operationalise it and mainstream it in a European setting, towards important other stakeholders in the EHEA as well as towards the EU. Further, ESU will - together with the Global Student Forum - work on a global implementation of a students rights charter based on the charter voted upon by ESU in order to mainstream a set of students rights globally - for example towards UNESCO - on equal footing with other students around the globe.

1.5. Working conditions in HE and the impact on student population

ESU will start getting involved in a discussion on working conditions in HE and their effect on the student population in particular regarding the quality of teaching and learning and the social dimension of HE. This requires further networking with teacher's and doctoral students' unions, such as ETUCE and EURODOC, in order to discuss and plan further activities in that field.

1.6. Enhancing ESU's commitment towards Gender Equality and Inclusion

The European Commission underlines the importance of gender equality and moves towards a union of equality in its EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and its LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

> 1.6.1. ESU will work either independently or together with different stakeholders to raise awareness and develop campaigns on gender equality, topics that could be addressed are gender-based violence, gender gap in STEM, leadership disparities within Higher Education and discrimination that other minority groups are facing, such as LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities etc.

1.6.2. Regarding gender equality and inclusion, ESU will start the process of reviewing and updating its internal policy documents such as the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) which was last amended in 2018.

1.6.3. ESU should look into different ways of making ESU's online and physical events and meetings more accessible for people with disabilities through best practice sharing of NUSes and other European Organisations.

1.7. ESU mapping Grant and Loan Systems

ESU will map and do desk research on loan and grant systems in Europe. The aim is to assess possible changes within, and preferences towards, certain systems over the last years and the impact the pandemic might have had on these systems. In addition, the research should include mapping of financial support measures provided to students during the pandemic. This, alongside the research, should enable ESU to gather theoretical and ideological elements that can support ESU's stance and advocacy and could outline the advantages of grant systems over loan systems.

1.8 Discrimination against neurodivergent students

In coordination with relevant partners, ESU will make a statement on the discrimination which neurodivergent students tend to face within the HE system, affecting their ability to fully benefit from HE or are even being denied the opportunities to access it.

The statement should address the importance of assuring the necessary support measures for this group of students as well as call for an essential and proper understanding of neurological disorders throughout the HE system as a whole.

2. European Education Area

2.1. Revise the "Introduction to ESU's policies in higher education" policy paper

In light of the proposal for a European Education Area and the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, ESU will revise the Introduction to ESU's policies in Higher Education policy paper. ESU will amplify students' voice during the Conference on the Future of Europe by lobbying the students' vision on the

future of higher education and supporting member NUSs engaging in national discourse.

2.2. Digital Education Action Plan

As part of the Transformative Agenda for Higher Education the Digital Education Action Plan will support the digital transformation plans at all levels of education and training. ESU will look for project opportunities concerning the developments in the area of digital education, its quality, and acquiring digital skills. Along with that ESU will monitor the developments of the Digital Education Action Plan and analyse the possibility of joining the Digital Education Hub.

2.3. Mapping of student rights and conditions within European Universities

ESU will start working with the students` councils established under the European Universities to map out student rights and conditions within the alliances, analysing the possibilities and the obstacles towards bottom up improvement of student rights and conditions within the alliances.

2.4. Democratic student participation within European Universities

ESU will continue its advocacy work in ensuring meaningful, democratic student participation in the governance of the European Universities, as outlined in ESU's resolution "European Universities: it is about the students"

3. Quality Assurance

3.1. Sustainability of ESU's QA Pool- transparency and recognition

ESU will continue the work on sustainability of the QA Pool of Experts by developing and implementing procedures for the recognition of QA Pool members' achievements in the scope of their work within the Pool. Additionally, ESU will assess how to assure higher transparency of the work of the Steering Committee and put the ideas into practice.

3.2. QA of the European University Networks and revision of the Quality Assurance system.

European University Alliances have started to develop more since the beginning of the pandemic, with the implementation of digital external evaluations of programmes and institutions. As traditional QA procedures do not include digital assessments, ESU will look into how they are organized and are they indicative of programme/ institution quality. Besides that ESU will participate in the discourse on the revision of European Council and Parliament Recommendations on Quality Assurance, as mentioned in the EEA Communication.

3.3. Analysis of QA approaches to students in Europe

QA procedures necessarily involve students, both on national and international levels; however, those students do not have equal roles, responsibilities and are most often not paid equally to other panel members across different QA levels. ESU will address these issues by collecting national perspectives of ESU`s QA Pool members, in order to define key problems and propose potential solutions for assuring a stable and equal students' role in the assessment procedures.

3.4. Developing the Policy Paper on Quality of Higher Education

ESU will amend and improve the 2017 Policy paper on quality of Higher Education, to assure that the document is relevant, not only for the current work of ESU, but also taking into consideration the challenges of the future. Special attention shall be put on digital learning in higher education, automatic recognition of competencies and the implementation of microcredentials, which were previously not addressed from a practical perspective.

3.5. Automatic recognition implementation

Based on the outcomes of the I-AR project and the current practices for automatic recognition within European ENIC-NARIC centres, ESU will continue to closely monitor how the automatic recognition is being implemented and if the process is effective enough. ESU shall continue to support automatic recognition for all bilateral and multilateral institutional agreements. Special attention shall be given to the implementation of automatic recognition of competencies on a national level (for entering the labour market or the continuation of education), of all EUNs.

3.6. EUROPASS and Digital Credentials Infrastructure

ESU will monitor the developments of the digital credentialing system developed under the Europass, ensuring that the supportive tools and initiatives are designed in a student-centered way. Additionally, ESU will further cooperate with EQAR to further develop the DEQAR database in order to build trust within the EHEA QA system, institutions and stakeholders.

3.7. Micro-credentials

ESU will continue to be actively involved in the developments of the micro-credentials and will use ESU's adopted policies to support further development of more flexible and inclusive learning opportunities for life-long learners and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

3.8. Learning and Teaching

ESU will ensure that during the 2020-2023 cycle of the BFUG the Advisory Group on Learning and Teaching prioritizes peer learning and capacity building actions that focus on the implementation of the Recommendations on L&T, as adopted at the Rome Ministerial Conference (online) 2020. ESU will advocate for developing criteria on L&T implementation to be later integrated into the Implementation Report.

4. Internationalisation and Mobility

4.1. Erasmus+ and Mobility

4.1.1. ESU will consult with its NUSs and work with other organisations to monitor what post-Covid mobility will look like, assessing access, safety and student protection.

4.1.2. ESU will support Switzerland and the UK to lobby in the reassociation of the Erasmus+ programme; and continue to advocate towards making the

Erasmus+ programme more environmentally and socially sustainable, and accessible to all groups of learners in Europe.

4.1.3. ESU will work closely with Erasmus Student Network and other partners that will carry our research on environmental sustainability and develop a toolkit that can be used across institutions and individuals.

4.2. Brain Drain in Higher Education

ESU will work toward creating an annex document to the Internationalisation and Mobility Policy Paper, including mapping best practices, and recommending the way toward academic Brain Circulation within EHEA. ESU will take into account the issue of Brain drain in its future work and advocate for measures to mitigate the negative impact.

4.3. Internationalisation at home

ESU will actively be involved in the development of internationalisation at home and ensure that it is developed in a way that makes internationalisation more inclusive, and increases the accessibility of international competencies. ESU will develop a plan to lobby policymakers actively on the subject of internationalisation at home.

4.4. Global engagement and solidarity

4.4.1. ESU will make an effort to strengthen global partnerships and look to expand its network further. It will foster the current cooperation and collaboration with international student organizations and work towards engagement within the UN and its agencies. ESU will also support the recognition of education qualifications across the globe.

4.4.2. ESU will continue to defend the right to access to education, especially access for migrants and refugees lobbying for funded pathways into HEI's, with the help of the human rights coordinator. ESU will work to highlight the link climate displacement has to the barriers to right for education as refugees. ESU

should lobby on the recognition of Climate Refugees and the impacts on climate migration.

4.4.3. ESU will continue its cooperation with GSF to promote ESU's policies within the framework of the G20 engagement group Civil 20 with the goal to influence the G20 2021 Ministerial Communique.

5. Public Responsibility, Governance and Financing of Higher Education

5.1. Sustainability and Climate Education

5.1.1. ESU will advocate for and campaign around climate education through Environmental campaigns by supporting and working with organisations such as SOS international, Generation Clime Europe and UNESCO. ESU will ensure that in its work, the response to the climate crisis is rooted in changing educational frameworks, and will advocate for the inclusion of climate education in HEIs curricula.

5.1.2. Additionally, ESU will explore the possibility of finding funding to add the position of the sustainability coordinator, who will take charge of mainstreaming the climate and sustainability discourse within ESU's work.

5.2. Belarus

ESU has used different avenues to support academic freedom and the right to demonstrate and freely express for students and Belarusian citizens. This has led to a declaration, endorsed by 24 Ministers of the European Higher Education Area, calling for the respect of academic freedom in Belarus. ESU will continue its support and advocacy work to the students and student organisations in Belarus demonstrating academic freedom and democracy.

5.3. Work in implementation of EHEA definition of Academic Freedom and definition of the other fundamental values

ESU will work alongside the BFUG towards the monitoring and implementation of the EHEA definition on academic freedom, as well as in the definition on other fundamental values of the EHEA.

5.4. Enhancing ESU's capacity on students' rights to academic freedom

ESU, through the support of the HRSC, PR cluster and a Task Force on Academic Freedom will work with its member unions and on the general European level to gather information on the level of understanding and engagement on the topic of academic freedom and academic integrity. Additionally, ESU will look into different support mechanisms (such as capacity-building activities and advocacy training) that students can access in order to promote students' rights at the level of their HEIs, with a special focus on the role of students' ombudspersons.

5.5. Strengthening academic integrity in Higher Education

ESU will continue being a part of international bodies addressing academic integrity and an effort will be put in to address the relevance of the topic, and the importance of students' participation in preservation of academic integrity values.

5.6. Next Generation EU and National Recovery and Resilience Plans

Next Generation EU is the single biggest investment initiative in the history of the European Union. ESU has campaigned for a minimum investment of 10% of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans to be devoted to education, as well as a meaningful student involvement in the design and implementation of the Plans. ESU will continue lobbying for a significant part of the education budget to go to higher education and research. ESU will continue the work by globally assessing the level of student involvement in drafting and whenever possible revising the Plans (in light of the European Commission's assessment of the Plans) and empowering the NUSes in being involved in the implementation phase of the projects.

6. Organisational Development and Capacity Building

6.1. The needs of ESU's membership

ESU will review the results from the survey and focus discussions on the needs of the membership (including associates) and will reflect those accordingly in the next Strategic Priorities. Furthermore, ESU will seek opportunities to improve the situation of the NUSes and Associates through Capacity Building and through the newly established buddy system.

6.2. Enhance the engagement of Full and Associate Members

ESU's Membership Coordinator will look into creating opportunities to increase the cooperation between NUSes and Associate Members, such as organising a European Students' Summit that will bring together ESU's membership organisations.

6.3. Review of ESU's Membership Strategy

The Membership Coordinator will work closely with the Executive Committee and the board to review the Membership Strategy adopted in BM72. This review will take into account the work of previous Membership Coordinators and the result of the different membership procedures that exist in ESU in order to improve them through the Strategy.

6.4. ESU's 40 Year Anniversary

To celebrate this milestone in 2022, ESU will begin preparations for it's 40 year anniversary, seeking the involvement and participation of its members, alumni, partners and stakeholders.