

Resolution on free access to Higher Education

As stated in the ESU social dimension policy paper (page 2): **“Higher education must be open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. Access must be free, meaning not only economically free but also free in terms of without barriers.”**

The Austrian system of higher education has been characterized by mainly free access since the 1970s. Universities of applied science on the other hand have always had restricted access and are financed with a certain amount per student which changes every few years.

The principle of free access has changed over the years and more and more regulations have been put in place limiting the amount of students in certain areas of higher education. This year the government passed a law which makes it easier for both the ministry of education and universities themselves to conduct entry exams. With the passing of this law, open access to higher education has partly been abolished and many prospective students face uncertainty whether they will be able to attend university.

In Belgium, selection processes exist only in some courses. However, it is alarming to notice that a general tendency to limit the access to higher education. Accessibility is not only characterized by the absence of admission exams but also social and economical barriers. Therefore, measures, such as increasing the budget for public grants or making housing more accessible, have to be taken to allow students from any background to study if they have the will to do so.

In Italy free access to Higher Education is hindered by numerus clausus, established for some degrees by the National government and applicable to all degrees by the Universities; by the third highest tuition fees in the European Union (an average of 1400€); and by the underfunding of students grants, which this year has left deprived about 7.000 students entitled to receive them.

At several universities in Switzerland discussions about increasing tuition fees are ongoing. At some universities the tuition fees have even already been increased, either for all students or only for foreigners. In addition to that, the social grant system in Switzerland is currently not appropriate to ensure equal accessibility for all students from all socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally in some parts of Switzerland grants are superseded by loans. Furthermore, access to Higher Education is restricted by numerus clausus for some degrees.

In Germany, the Numerus Clausus (NC) was put in place in around 50 years ago because HEIs claimed to be underfunded and did not have the capacities to accept all students who

finish school with an according degree, that gave them the right to study and wished to do so. The constitutional court only allowed it in 1972 to be a "temporary" measure. This temporary measure since then restricts access to HEIs in Germany. HEIs can since then in growing numbers of courses of study only accept the students who have the best school diplomas -until a fixed capacity border is reached. All other applicants have to wait - these waiting times now encompass up to 15 semesters. In December the German high constitutional court deemed this practice partly unconstitutional. As they did not make clear recommendations on how to change it, unfortunately, changes for the worse have to be feared. Therefore ESU demands in the debate following the court order to implement broader access to HEIs and the end of underfunding of universities. The NC must be abolished and the right to study must be put in place again.

Therefore ESU reaffirms its fight for a free access to higher education regardless of the socio-economic background, place of living, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, disability etc.

But this obviously requires:

- to guarantee free access to higher education,
- accompaniment of all students for better pedagogies methods
- and of course the financial means required to ensure quality assurance in higher education, as well as providing up to the needs students scholarships for those who need them

We call for the entire political sphere and especially for our governments to run public policies ensuring that HE is accessible and inclusive for all those who wish to enrol in it.

Proposed by: UNEF, FEF, fzs, ÖH, UDU , VSS-UNES-USU

Seconded by: LSA