

Call for Belarus to implement national Stay-at-Home measures

The European Students' Union (ESU), in solidarity with the Belarusian Students' Association (BSA) and the Brotherhood of organizers of student self-government (BOSS), expresses its concern and criticism over Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko's dismissal of the threat of the coronavirus pandemic. As of 30th March, Belarus had not initiated a nation-wide quarantine effort. Furthermore, ambiguous government reports on the epidemiological situation of the country restrict both press and civil society from having up-to-date information about the territories affected by the virus. Most recent figures from the Ministry of Health within Belarus report 502 patients in hospital with confirmed coronavirus infection and 8 deaths of patients related with both age and the presence of other chronic diseases¹.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every country must consider physical distancing to contain the COVID-19 outbreak². COVID-19 can spread unknowingly in a significant proportion of healthy asymptomatic carriers, while causing severe disease and increasing the likelihood of death in individuals with at least one underlying comorbidity, particularly if such individuals are above the age of 60. Coupled with this, a lack of sufficient testing makes it extremely hard to accurately assess the number of infected people.

Delays in taking action to slow the spread of the coronavirus by European decision-makers such as President Lukashenko, risks an exponential rise in COVID-19 transmission and infection of citizens. This can cause severe distress to national healthcare systems, as seen most recently in Italy and Spain, and can consequently increase the need for damaging shutdowns that cause so much misery for people.

Addressing COVID-19 is an all-of-government and all-of-society responsibility. National stay-at-home policies are widely seen as best practice in reducing the rate of transmission and flattening the epidemic curve. As seen in the South East Asian experience and in accordance with WHO's guidelines, containing the COVID-19 outbreak is possible if people are guided on the right ways to protect themselves, if suspected cases are immediately tested, if patients are isolated and if contacts are traced.

Unfortunately, in the case of Belarus, such policies have not been introduced yet, although local transmission of COVID-19 has been confirmed. Making matters worse, public gatherings continue to be encouraged by President Lukashenko. ESU, BSA and BOSS condemn leaders at the highest levels of government who refuse to join a global, coordinated response to beat this global pandemic crisis. The behaviour of the virus cannot be predicted, but we can be sure of how good we are in stopping it. Timely action is fundamental for early containment. While recognizing that shutdowns are extremely stressful on people, a severe public health crisis will rapidly transform into an even greater economic and social crisis.

¹ [Link](#) to Ministry of Health updates

² [Link](#) to WHO statement



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Therefore, and in the spirit of solidarity with those in society most vulnerable to succumbing to the effects of the coronavirus disease, ESU, BOSS and BSA call for the immediate closure of schools and higher education institutions within Belarus. Students must be encouraged to continue and complete their studies without physical attendance until the COVID-19 is safely contained. In-person educational activities must be creatively and flexibly transformed onto digital and online platforms. Various different platforms are being implemented by the international higher education community. ESU further calls for support from all its partners within this community including teachers, academics and administrative staff to share good practices, and to continuously and directly engage student representatives in decisions made on educational matters in order to ensure that any changes are student-centered and accessible and leave no student behind.

Considering all this, ESU, BSA and BOSS ask President Lukashenko and the Ministry of Education to recognise their social responsibility to contain the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in Belarus. We ask that through transparent and bold action, they fulfil their duty in making both the region and the world safer.