A Comparative Analysis of Mental Health among Higher Education Students

through the perspective of National Unions of Students across Europe

European Students' Union

EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION

Co-funded by the European Union

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Participation by national unions of students in the surveys

In this section, the countries and their national unions of students who participated in the surveys are listed.

Spring 2020, survey participants:

Iceland (LIS), Slovakia (SRVS), Italy (UDU), Denmark (DSF), Sweden (SFS), the Netherlands (ISO, LSVb), Germany (FZS), Ireland (USI), Georgia (GSOA), Switzerland (VSS-UNES-USU), Lithuania (LSS), Croatia (CSC), Finland (SAMOK, SYL), Belarus (BSA, BOSS), Belgium (VVS), Austria (ÖH), Ukraine (UAS), Slovakia (SRVS), Estonia (EÜL), Romania (ANOSR), Norway (NSO), Cyprus (POFEN), Latvia (LSA), Hungary (HÖOK), Malta (KSU), France (FAGE), Spain (CREUP), Slovenia (SSU), Scotland (NUS Scotland), Northern Ireland (NUS-USI)

Spring 2021, Follow-up survey participants:

Belgium (VVS), Croatia (CSC), Lithuania (LSS), Finland (SAMOK, SYL), Germany (FZS), Czech Republic (SKRVS), Slovenia (SSU), Iceland (LIS), Denmark (DSF), France (FAGE), Poland (PSRP), Switzerland (VVS-UNES-USU), Slovakia (SRVS), Estonia (EÜL), the Netherlands (ISO, LSVb), Ireland (USI)

Acknowledgements

The co-chairs from LSVb and VVS thank all the people who made *A Comparative Analysis of Mental Health among Higher Education Students* possible. Over the period of approximately two years, a small team of 13 people wrapped their heads around this report and the two surveys that were conducted: Jasper Kars (LSVb), Ivy Dirksen (LSVb), Roos van Leeuwen (LSVb), Julien de Wit (VVS), Leandro Strome (VVS), Ruben Janssens (VVS, ESU), Kristel Jakobson (EÜL, ESU), Joonatan Nõgisto (EÜL), Kristin Pintson (EÜL), Ciara Kealy (USI), Marie Lyons (USI), Matej Bílik (SRVS), Urša Leban (ESU).

The data provided by the 33 National Unions of Students was crucial in the creation of the report. Therefore we would like to thank the unions for their cooperation during this rather difficult time amid a historic pandemic.

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students in higher education experienced mental health issues whereby National Unions Students & local unions, Higher Education Institutions, and governments played a role in addressing them.

Mental health and wellbeing among students have been analysed by external actors as the topic has been talked about already prior to the start of the pandemic. However, previous research indicates that students' mental wellbeing is not a concern on the local or national level. Neither has it been documented on a European level looking into its priority among actors in higher education. [1]

The authors of this survey used the survey from 2020 to have quantitative data, and a follow-up survey in 2021 for qualitative data in order to carry out a comparative analysis of the mental health of higher education students during COVID-19 through the perspective of the National Unions of Students on the local, national and institutional levels.

As expected, during the pandemic, the analysis has shown that students' mental wellbeing has increased in priority (or remained as a priority) on a local, national and institutional level in most countries. However, the subject is now on the agenda or a bigger priority of higher education institutions with mainly Northern and Western European countries taking initiatives to break the stigma on mental health.

This research report provides National Unions of Students and other stakeholders a broad look into the state of actions taken by the governments and other institutions concerning mental health. Stakeholders are able to see what is being done by national and local unions through a list of great initiatives, and a list with all national research on students' mental health that has been available during the conduction of the survey.

[1] The Eurostudent 2020 looked into the topic, but the participating countries in this survey and the Eurostudent one are different.

Disclaimer

The information gathered throughout the two surveys is dependent on NUSes looking critically at the practices in their local level institutions, unions and countries. This level of self-assessment can result in differing opinions and NUSes using different measures to rate performance. Although we trust the data collected and the content of this report generally reflects the lived circumstances, it is important to note that some of the results could differ depending on the individual completing the survey. It is also important to note that the subjective nature of self-assessment plays a slight role in the obtained results.

Introduction

Mental health has been gaining more and more attention in society as well among the members of the European Students' Union (ESU). Throughout all layers of society, but especially among students, people are becoming more aware of how important it is to take care of our mental health along with our physical health.

ESU strongly believes that the well-being of students should be prioritized in the context of higher education, and all stakeholders should give more resources and attention to this topic. As stated in ESU's Social Dimension Policy Paper,[2] the physical and mental health of students are essential predictors for the successful completion of their studies.

In 2020, ESU published its first-ever policy paper on mental health. In the Mental Health Charter,[3] the complexity of the integration of mental health in higher education is explained. Therefore we call for systematic changes, in order to secure a safe, inclusive and supportive higher education environment for all students.

As this survey was being issued during one of the most challenging times of our society, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital to address this situation in relation to students' mental health during these times. Students nowadays experience many significant changes in the study process, living situations and social interactions.

ESU has been involved in the European research, called *Student life during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: Europe-wide insight,*[4] where among other aspects, the mental health and general well-being of students during the COVID-19 crisis are being examined. Students have reported higher levels of frustration, anxiety and boredom, all related to changes in the academic environment. Researchers have highlighted that lower levels of well-being have been experienced by female students who had financial problems, students with mental health problems, and students lacking appropriate study places. Special focus in that research was brought to students who were lacking a supportive social network as they were also reporting lower levels of general well-being.

[2] https://www.esu-online.org/?policy=2019-social-dimension-policy-paper
[3] https://www.esu-online.org/?policy=2020-mental-health-charter
[4] http://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG_DE_UK_73_11_6_students_Covid_19_survey_results.pdf

Set-up of the Survey

This comparative analysis was created in order to get a better insight into how different higher education institutions, national governments and national student unions of students (NUSes) tackle the question of mental health in higher education. The main survey conducted in the Spring of 2020, and a follow-up survey carried out in Spring 2021, were conducted to evaluate if there was an evolution in the way institutions, governments and NUSes acted on the matter.

The main survey was shaped at the start of 2020 as one of the main outcomes of the ESU working group on mental health (mandated from Board Meeting 72 to Board Meeting 81). The survey was distributed in February 2020 with the final collection of answers in March 2020. This indicates that the answers to the questionnaire were handed in just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 11th of March[5]. The call to answer the survey was returned by 33 respondents from 29 countries representing their national student unions.

From April to June in 2021, the follow-up survey was conducted.. The call to answer the survey was returned by 18 respondents from 16 countries representing their national student unions.

Due to the difference in the number of answers between the main and follow-up survey, the analysis of both surveys is done differently. The main survey is used for the quantitative analysis, with the follow-up survey being used qualitatively to see if there is a certain evolution.

[5] https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020

National Union of Students

In this chapter, the authors analyzed the situation of mental health and actions taken by the national unions of students (NUSes) in their field of work. It became apparent that most of the NUSes address the mental health situation in one way or another. They consider mental health as an important part of their work.

Mental health on the agenda of the NUS

The NUS representatives were asked two questions. First, they were asked to what extent the issue of mental health is currently on the agenda of their NUS. On a scale of 1 to 5, the respondents rated it to be "3,5" on average. 11 respondents answered with a "5" meaning that a third of the respondents find the issue of mental health to be an important part of the agenda of their NUS.

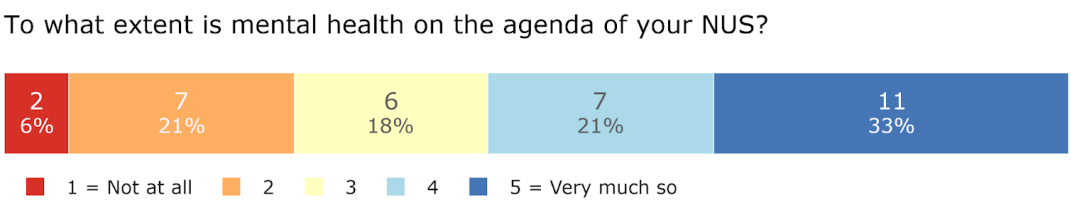

Figure 1. National Union of Students responding to the question: "Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your NUS?

The follow-up survey suggests that mental health has been placed higher on the agenda of NUSes, in which the overwhelming majority says it is "very much so" on the agenda". All NUSes also indicate that their priority for the subject is higher or the same because of COVID-19.

It also became apparent that 11 respondents stated that their NUS does not do any work on mental health currently. However, 12 respondents stated that their NUS had experience with doing research and/or applying for grants in the area of mental health.

Those who stated not to currently have the topic on the agenda added that it is either in their work plan for upcoming years or is dependent on the process of societal and potential political changes which are needed in order to bring the topic up.

Most responding NUSes have been working towards bringing awareness using happenings and thematic weeks in close cooperation with the universities. NUSes find the topic of utmost importance to the students currently enrolled in higher education.

Mental health on the agenda of the local member unions

Next, they were asked to what extent the issue of mental health is currently on the agenda of their local member unions. The local member unions are defined as the members of the national unions of students on the local level in each country.

On a scale of 1 to 5, the respondents rated the extent of the issue to be at an average "3.1". 12 respondents answered with a "4". This suggests that the matter is addressed on the national and on the local level from the students' perspective and indicates well the importance of the topic.

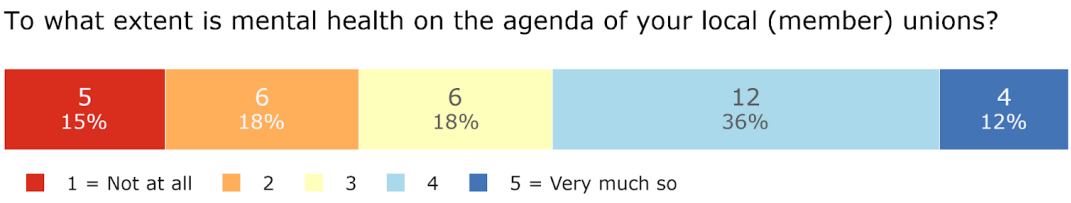

Figure 2. National Union of Students responding to the question: "Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your local (member) union?"

Furthermore, a slight improvement can be deduced from the follow-up survey. It becomes apparent that a bigger fraction of local (member) unions are putting mental health on their agenda; with little to no members not addressing it. The reason could be that as the pandemic (and lockdowns) continue(s), more students start to talk about their mental health and the issue becomes more visible.

Higher Education Institutions i.e. the Local Level

This chapter explores the involvement of higher education institutions in mental health, regarding policy, as well as cooperation with students' unions, services they provide to students and initiatives they take up themselves.

Mental health on the agenda of the higher education institution

Firstly, the NUSes were asked to indicate to which extent mental health is on the agenda of the higher education institutions in their country. The answers to this question indicate that mental health is on the agenda of HEIs in the majority of the countries. However, it is regarded as a top-level priority only in Scotland.

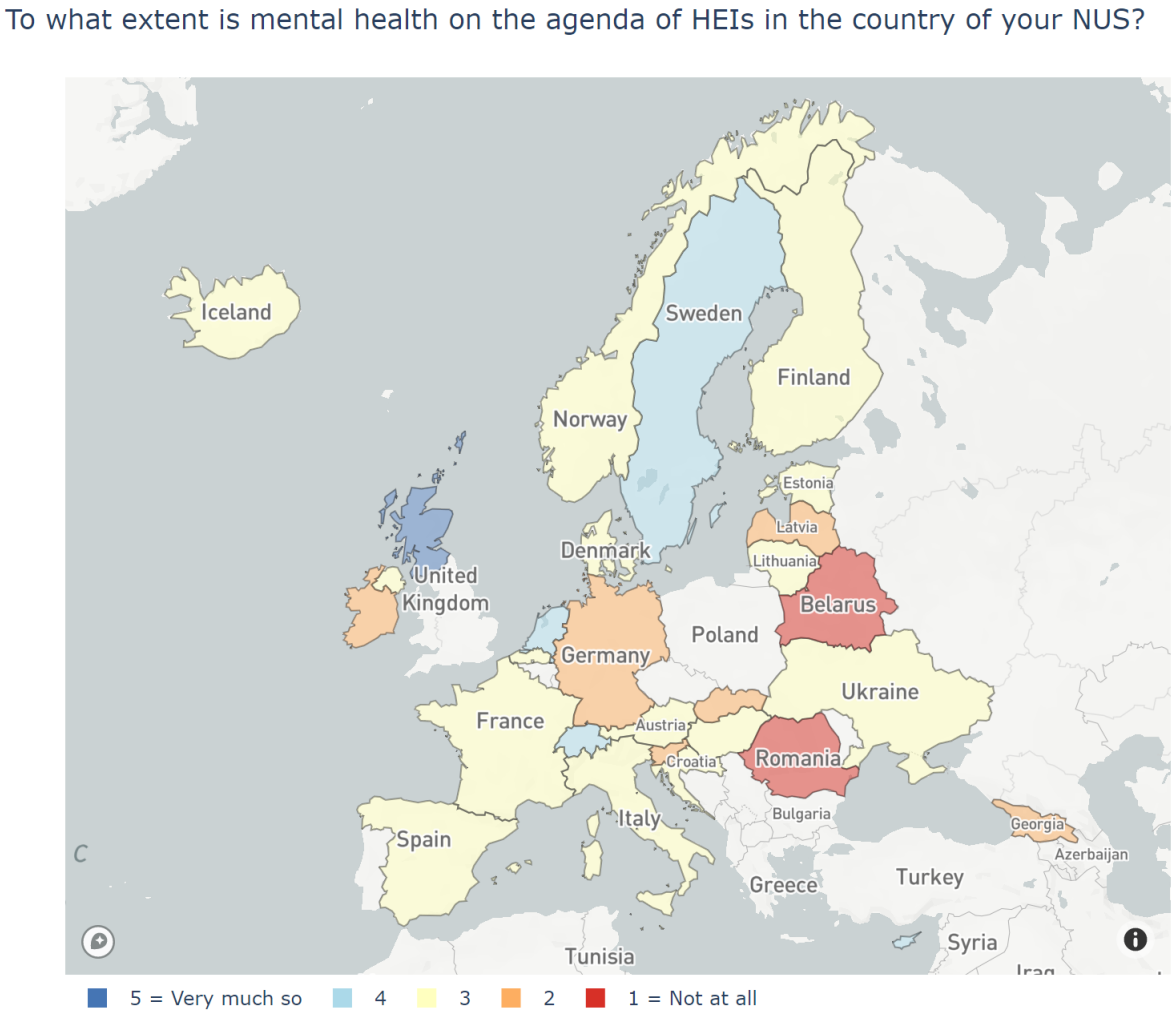

Figure 3. Map presentation of participating national unions of students responding to the question: "To what extent is mental health on the agenda of the higher education institutions in the country of your NUS?"

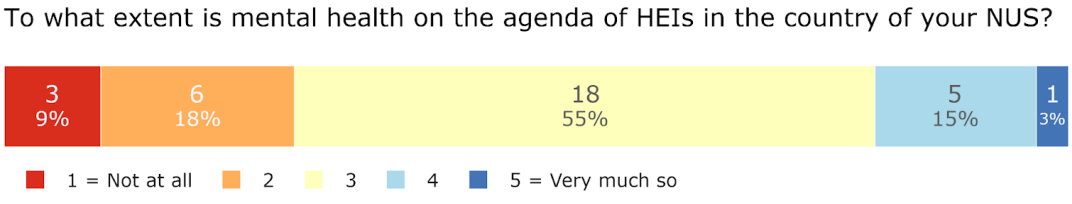

Figure 4. National Union of Students responding to the question, "To what extent is mental health on the agenda of the higher education institutions in the country of your NUS?"

The follow-up survey also shows a trend that mental health is a higher priority in most higher education institutions, with just a few having it as the same priority when compared to the period before COVID-19. Thus it can be stated that the priority of the topic has remained similarly high or increased in importance also to the higher education institutions. It should be mentioned here that local differences may be possible between higher education institutions in the countries.

The NUSes were also asked to what extent they feel supported by the Higher Education Institutions in their work on mental health. In the majority of the countries, the higher education institutions support the work of NUSes on mental health, with active partnerships being reported in 6 out of the 33 responses. Furthermore, none of the respondents perceived opposition from higher education institutions regarding the topic. This can also be considered as a very good opportunity for future partnerships

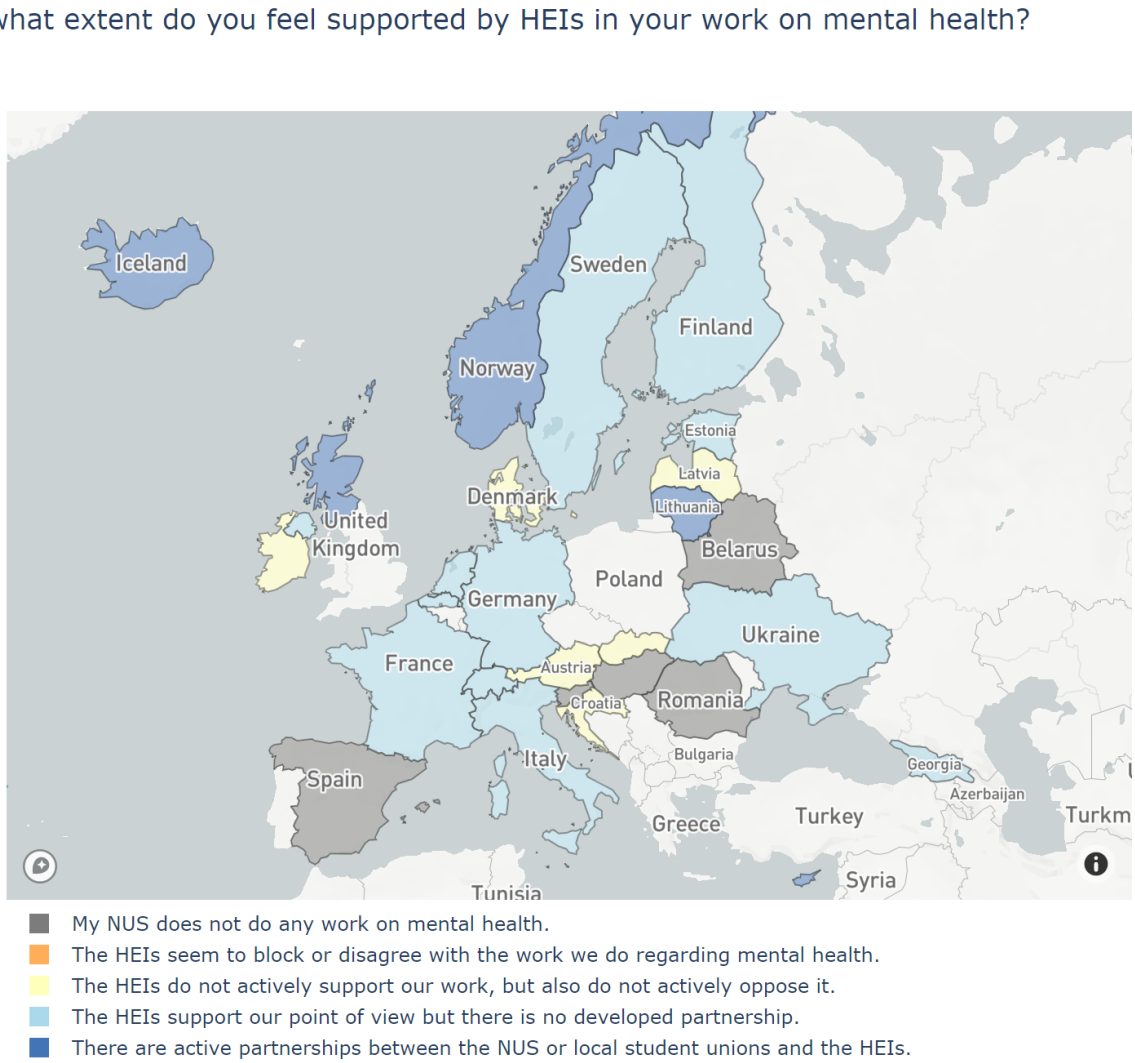

Figure 5. It was asked, "To what extent do you feel supported by the higher education institutions in your work on mental health?"

Support Services provided by the Institutions

The NUSes were asked to describe the mental health care related services that higher education institutions in their country provide. 14 NUSes indicated that HEIs in their country provide counselling services. However, 7 of them added that not all HEIs provide this service, 2 stated that there are differences between the HEIs in the counselling services that they provide, and another 6 stated that the counselling services that are provided are limited. One of the NUSes explicitly mentioned long waiting lists. One NUS also explicitly mentioned that the provided services are free.

Multiple obstacles to counselling services were mentioned: a lack of sufficient resources, information about the services that does not reach the students, and a stigma regarding mental health that prevents students from even seeking help, with one NUS even mentioning academic staff discouraging students from getting help.

The subject area for which students can seek counselling is more limited in some countries and broader in others. 2 NUSes only mentioned career advice to be present and one NUS said that counselling is purely seen in an academic context. In contrast, 3 NUSes say that also physical health services are provided, as preventative measures. In one of those cases, HEIs provide gym membership fee waivers and medical service discounts.

Three of the NUSes mentioned that higher education institutions are required by law to provide mental health services. However, in all of the countries, the way this is implemented varies between institutions, and in one of them - financial problems and stigma limit the implementation.

Staff training to Support Students

NUSes were asked whether HEIs in their country provide training for staff to support students in distress/with mental health issues. Only 8 of the 33 respondent NUSes report that HEIs provide training for staff to support students in distress and with mental health issues.

The NUSes had a chance to elaborate their answer to this question. 6 NUSes mentioned that there are significant differences between higher education institutions in their countries regarding this issue. 5 NUSes refer to counsellors or psychologists' services that are provided by the HEIs in their country, although one of them mentions that students mostly get help outside of the higher education institution.
Three NUSes clarify that HEIs provide training for staff to recognize worrying signs and support students in distress or with mental health issues, one of whom says that these trainings are provided by the HEI's counselling service. Lastly, one NUS says that their priority is structural solutions to prevent mental health issues, rather than individual, curative solutions.

Do HEIs provide training for staff to support students in distress/with mental health issues?

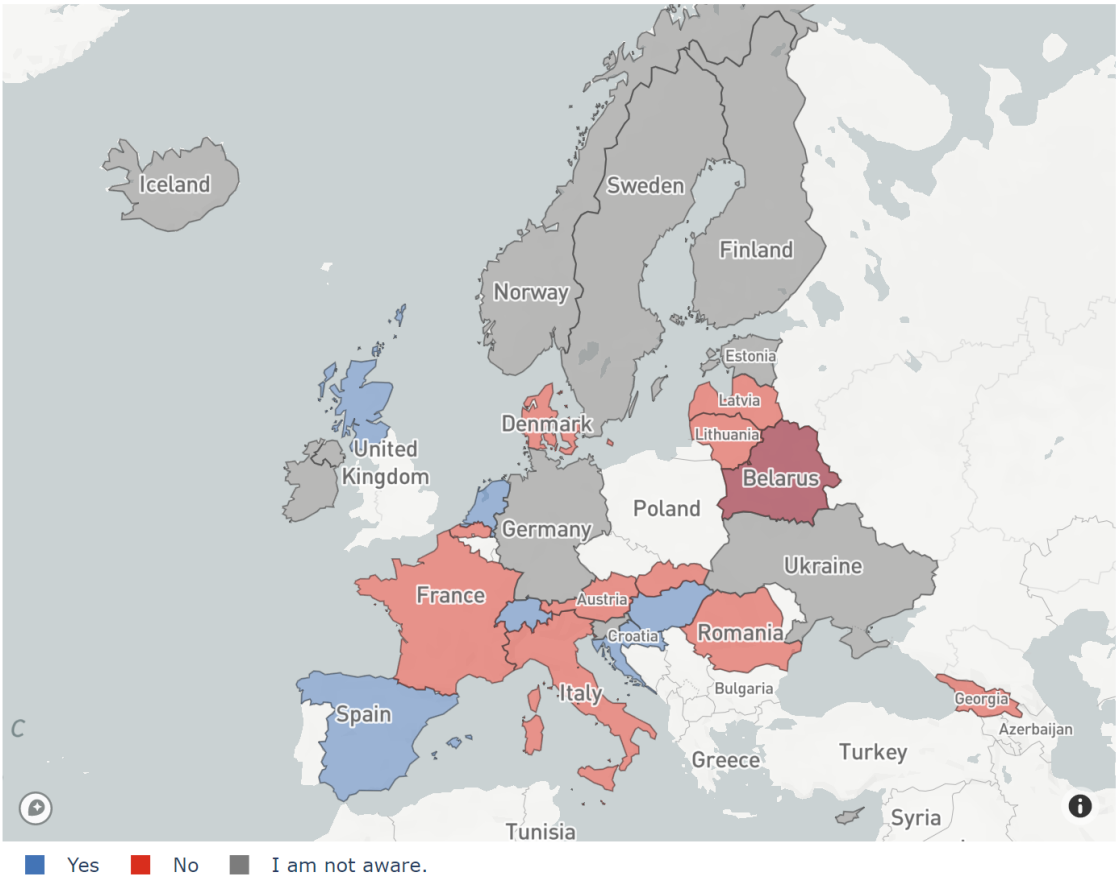

Figure 6. It was asked "Do HEIs provide training for staff to support students in distress / with mental health issues?"

Curriculum Design

Lastly, NUSes were asked whether mental health is being taken into account in curriculum design by the HEIs in their country.

17 NUSes answered "No" to this question and 8 answered that they are not aware. Furthermore, 5 NUSes answered that mental health is taken into account in curriculum design in some individual HEIs, faculties or programs, but that it is not a systemic practice. One mentioned that the topic of mental health is included in the curriculum of the tutoring program, both regarding prevention and recognizing distress signals. One referred to the possibility to choose the pace at which they complete their program. Finally, one NUS answered that this is an active discussion in the space of quality assurance.

Is mental health being taken into account in curriculum design by the HEIs?

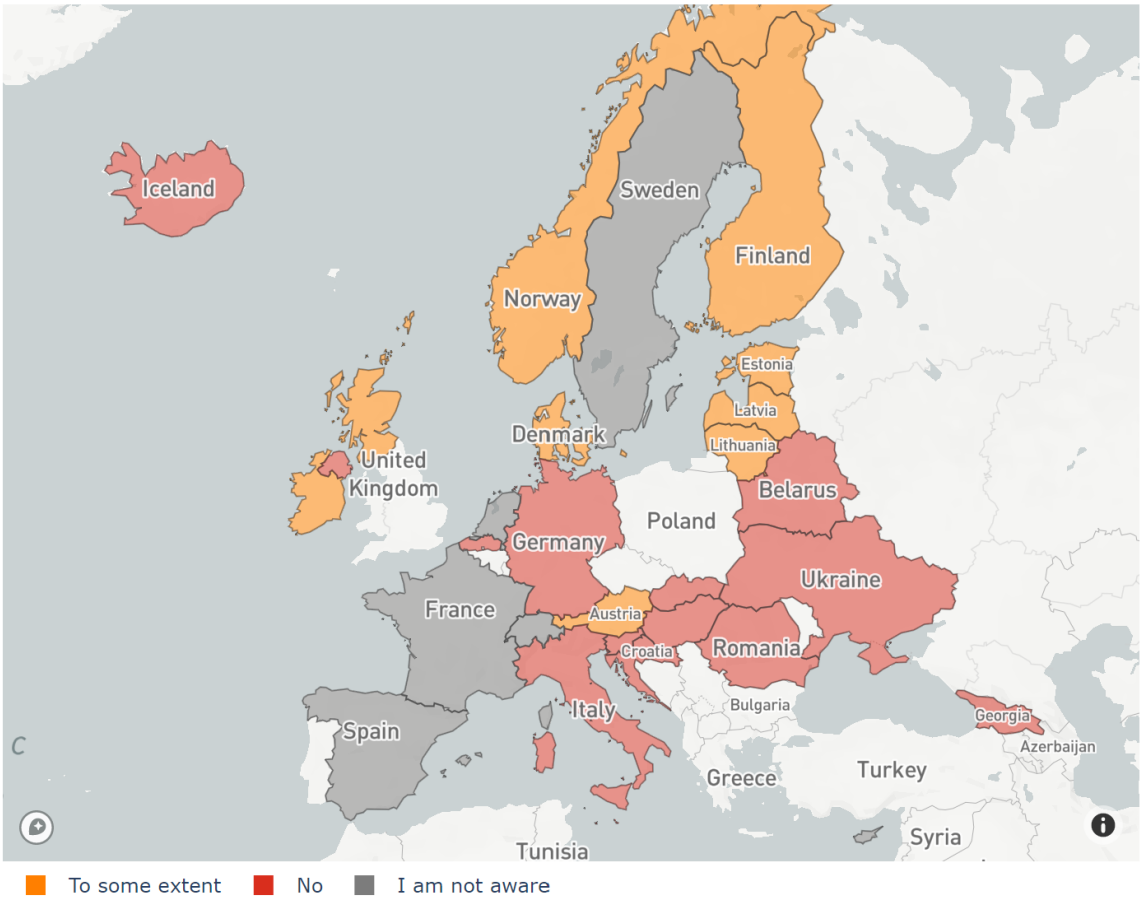

Figure 7. It was asked "Is mental health being taken into account in curriculum design by the HEIs?"

Governmental Initiative

This chapter explores the involvement of governments in mental health, regarding policy, as well as cooperation with students' unions and the accessibility of mental health care in their country.

First, the NUSes were asked to what extent they feel supported by their government in their work on mental health. The majority (10 respondents) outlined that their government supports their point of view, but there is no developed partnership. 8 NUSes responded that their government "does not actively support our work, but also does not actively oppose it". 7 NUSes responded that "there are active partnerships between the NUS or local student unions and the government", and 8 stated that their "NUS does not do any work on mental health".

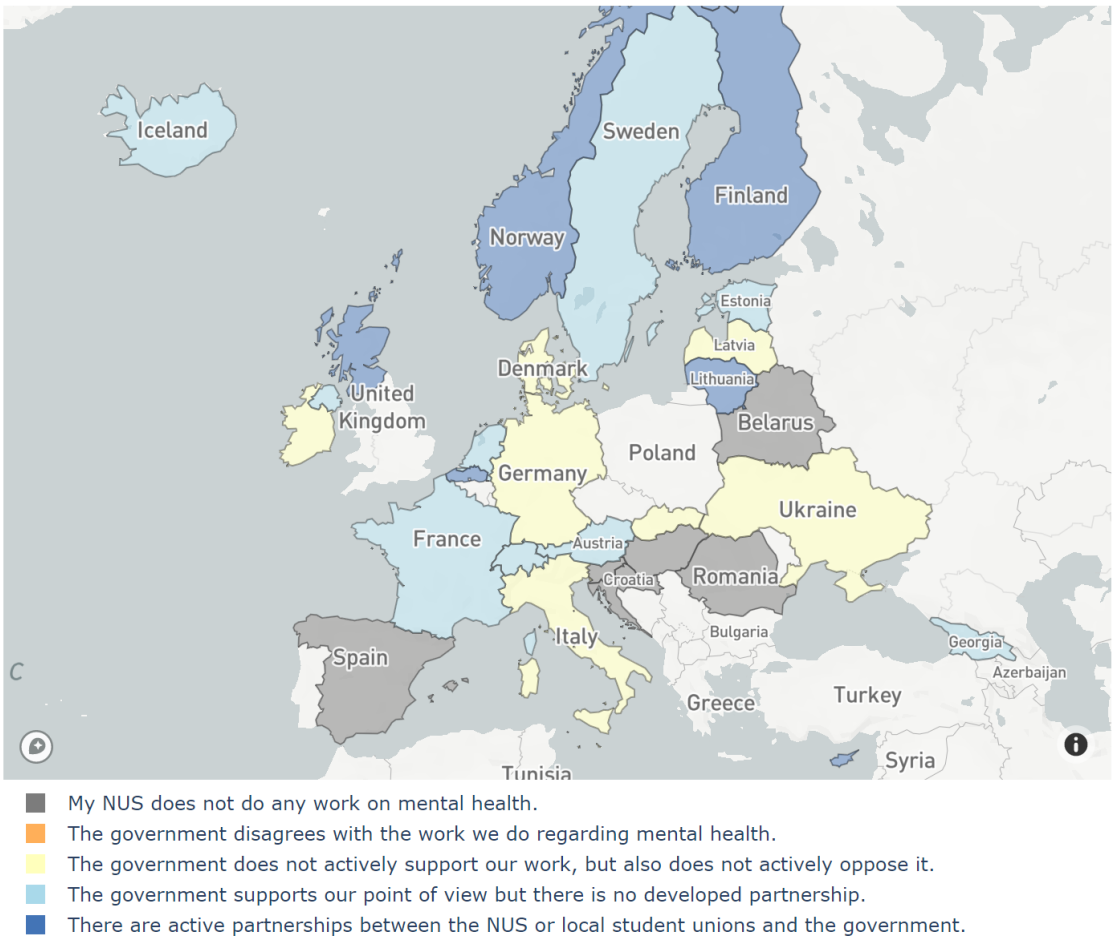

Figure 8. It was asked "To what extent do you feel supported by the government in your work on mental health?"

The NUSes were also asked to what extent mental health is on the agenda of their government. On the scale, one states that mental health is not on the agenda of the NUSes government and 5 that mental health is very much on the agenda of the NUSes government. The majority of respondents outlined that mental health was not extensively on the agenda of their government with the largest portion of respondents selecting between 1-3 on this question.

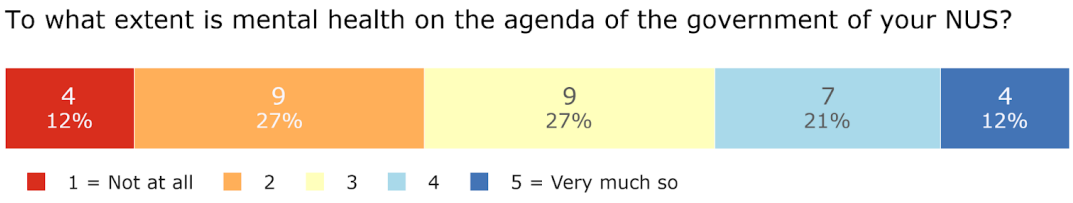

Figure 9. It was asked "To what extent is mental health on the agenda of the government?"

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the follow-up survey in which it can be seen that answers are split. Approximately half of the respondents say that their government has the issue of mental wellbeing on the agenda, with the other half of the respondents saying that their governments do not have it on their agenda and it's not quite a priority. Thus it is clear that the countries' perspectives on this matter are still changing and have not secured ground for long-lasting change.

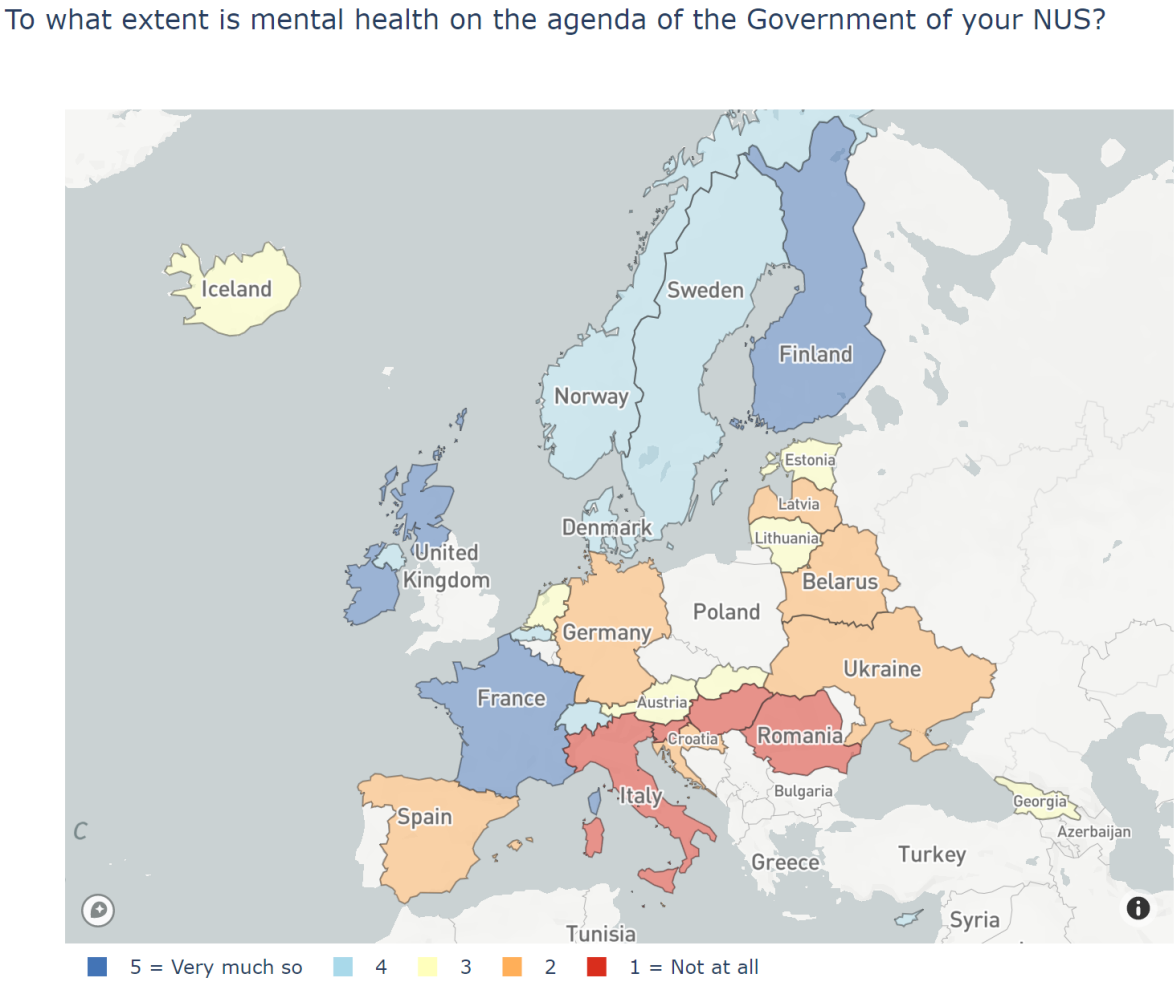

Figure 10. It was asked "To what extent is mental health on the agenda of the government?"

The NUSes were also asked to indicate which level of government takes the most initiative regarding mental health care. The majority of respondents of this question highlighted that the majority of initiatives regarding mental health care are coordinated at the national level. While a minority outlined that mental health initiatives are coordinated at both a local and national level combined.

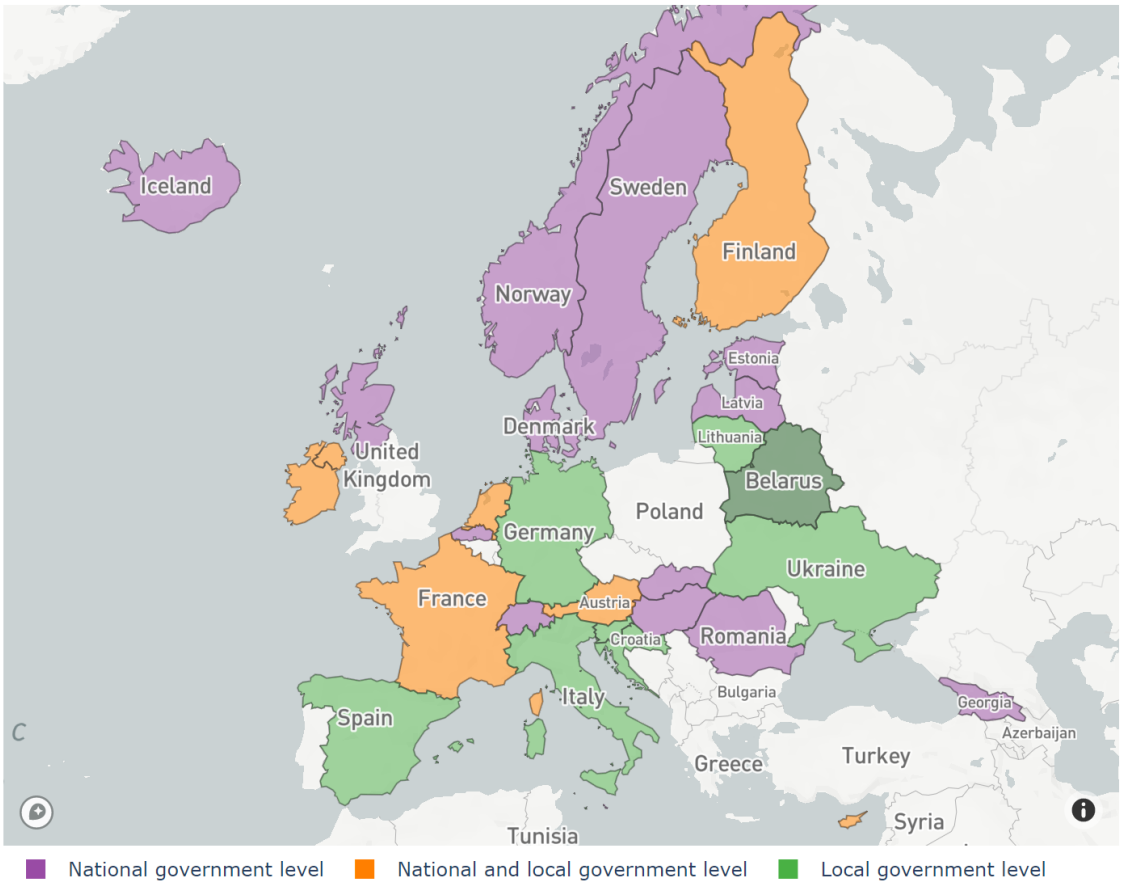

Figure 11. It was asked "What level of government takes the most initiative regarding mental health care?"

Next, the NUSes were asked to what extent mental health care is accessible for students in their country. The majority of respondents of this question outlined that there are "a limited number of mental health care services are included in the national health care/insurance system" (11 respondents) or that "mental health care services are included in the national health care/insurance system, but waiting lists are too long" (18 respondents) compared with a minority of the respondents outlining that mental health services are included in the health care/insurance system and are well-accessible or free of charge.

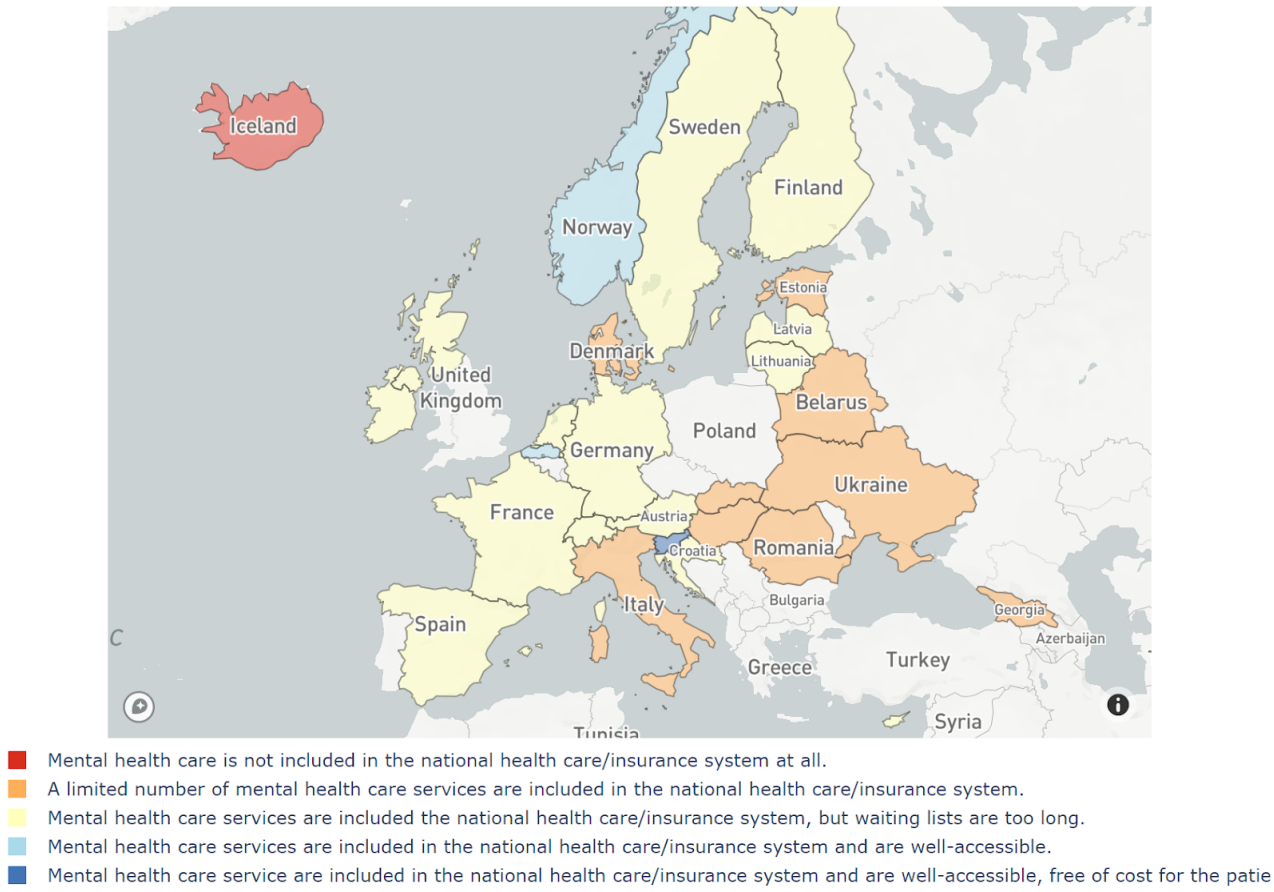

Figure 12. It was asked "To what extent is mental health care accessible for students in your country?"

Breaking the Stigma

The NUSes were asked whether their government takes any initiatives to break the stigma regarding mental health. 15 NUSes stated that their government takes initiatives to break the stigma regarding mental health. However, 18 responded "no". This can be considered alarming as it connects directly to the NUSes feeling supported in their endeavours regarding mental health.

An example can be brought from Germany. In 2018 there have been troubling law changes in the federal state of Bavaria which grants the federal government in certain circumstances access to the records of people who used mental health services. The law has been widely criticized for adopting a view of people with mental health issues as potential criminals.

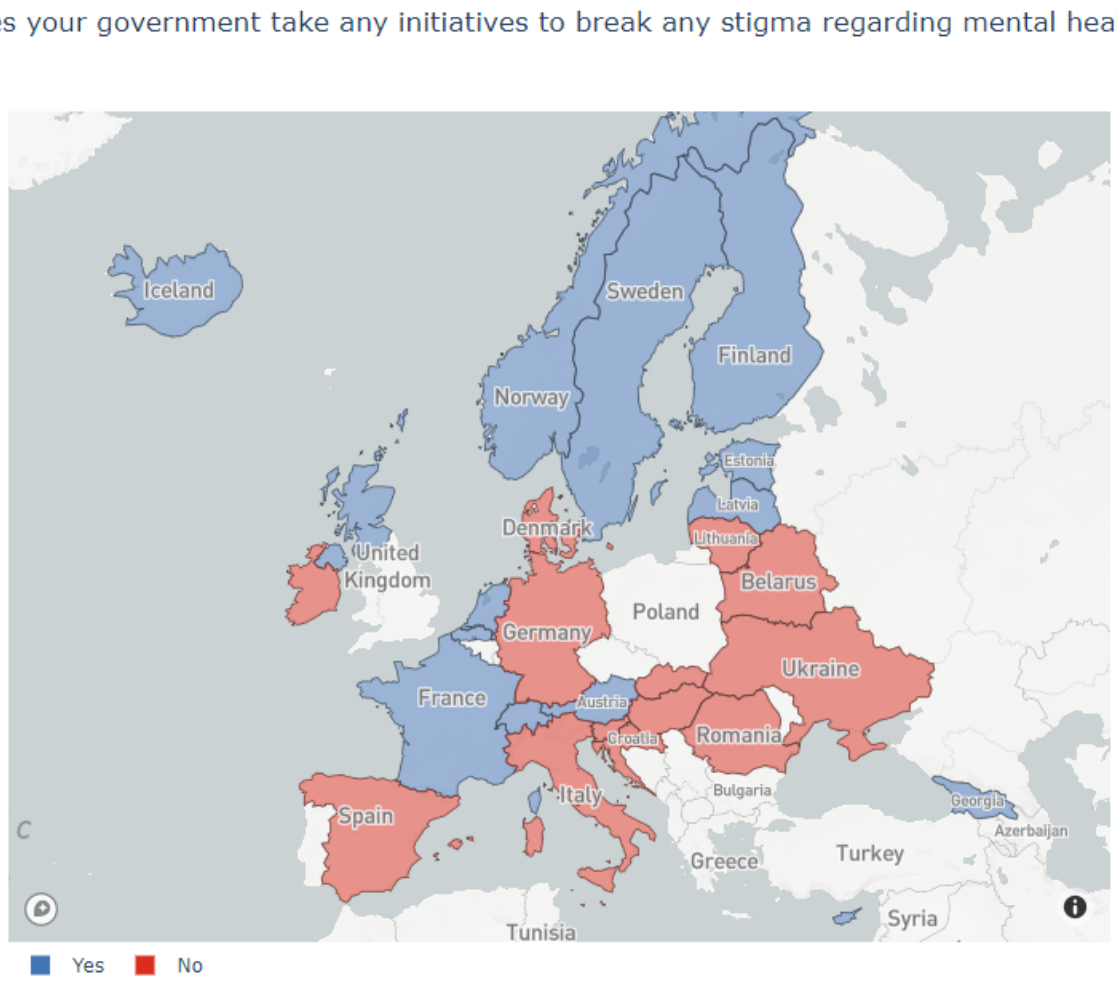

Figure 13. It was asked "Does your government take any initiatives to break any stigma regarding mental health?"

Good Practices

In this section of the Report, an overview will be provided by the participating unions on good and the very best practices they are aware of that take place in their countries and in their unions. The following section will highlight real-life practices that can be of help to anyone looking into the field of mental health advocacy and making a change.

Great Initiatives from outside of the NUSes

This paragraph highlights great initiatives being put to action outside of the national unions' of students' works regarding mental health, for example by non-governmental, non-higher education institutions and non-Students' Union groups (i.e. other student/youth associations).

The NUS from Italy (**UDU**) is reporting that there exist some associations that promote free counselling services.

An NUS from Finland (**SYL**) stated that there is an umbrella organisation in Finland called Mielenterveyspooli which has done great work towards influencing parliamentary work and including mental health issues in the parliamentary programme.

The NUS from Ireland (**USI**) has several initiatives and campaigns through which they successfully promote the topic of mental health in higher education. Jigsaw peer education programme and workshops, Spun Out articles, Pieta House and Samaritans 24-hour helpline, Childline helpline, SHINE, GROW, aware, bodywhys, LGBT Ireland.

The NUS from Belgium (**VVS**) has named WAT WAT and MindMates as successful campaigns.

The NUS from Scotland (**NUS Scotland**) states that The National Leadership Group to Prevent Suicide has just launched a new national campaign, United to Prevent Suicide where they are actively seeking to break the stigma surrounding suicide and encourage everyone in Scotland to talk about it. ScotGov also funds See Me, a national campaign to tackle stigma and discrimination, who host national campaign days such as "Time to Talk". ScotGov has a 10year Mental Health Strategy of which Think Positive is Action 9, suggesting that they have committed to supporting student mental health until at least 2027 (when this current strategy ends).

The NUS from Austria (**ÖH**) highlighted AMSA (Austrian medical students association), as it focuses a lot on mental health[6] and Mental Health Awareness Week, which is a student-run project on mental health.

The NUS from Romania (**ANOSR**) has stated in the survey that "Save the" is an NGO that focuses on access to education from the early stages - it also includes Mental Health of children up to 14 years old in their area of interest.[7] Besides, The Romanian Association for Social Psychiatry has annual conferences that approach the topic of Mental Health and offers help for those in need.[8] Additionally, they have also named the Cognosis (The national union for psychology students) and their member unions, as they are usually approaching this subject through conferences and awareness campaigns. However, they are reporting that there are still no results as policies on a national level.

T**he NUS from Estonia** (**EÜL**) is reporting that several NGOs in Estonia contribute to the mental health area. Some of the brightest examples are VATEK (Estonian Mental Health and Well-Being Coalition), Mure Pooleks (in translation "Half a concern") and an organization named Peaasi.ee (in translation "main/head thing"). All of these organisations also directly address the mental health situation and work in close contact with the students on the matter.

The NUS from Cyprus (**POFEN**) is reporting that the Church of Cyprus has a big role in bringing mental health awareness across the country.

The NUS from Hungary (**HÖOK**) has highlighted the problem of the data collection, as they see the lack of representative data as problematic since it doesn't give a realistic status of the mental health of students.

The NUS from the Netherlands (**ISO**) is reporting on a theatre called Time Out, a show that tries to reduce stigma and gathers information on mental health amongst students and ECIO (Expertise Centrum Inclusief Onderwijs, in translation "centre of experimental, inclusive education").

The NUS from Malta (**KSU**) has highlighted an association named ADHD Malta, as they do campaigns in educational institutions, besides the Malta Autism Parents association brings awareness by working with other NGOs to promote mental health. As they state, there are several NGOs in Malta that are dedicating their work to mental health.

The NUS from Latvia (**LSA**) states that Different social media actions and campaigns. "The Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDPC) of Latvia have carried out a couple of small studies and launched awareness-raising campaigns, their social network profiles promote a healthy lifestyle, including tips for maintaining good mental health."

[6] http://www.amsa.at/wp-content/uploads/Position_Papers/Mental%20Health.pdf
[7] https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/cine-suntem/unde-suntem-activi
[8] http://apsro.ro/conferinta-2019/programul-conferintei/

Great Initiatives from outside of the NUSes

This paragraph highlights the campaigns and focus points of the national union of students' initiatives on mental health and mental well-being.

The NUS from Scotland (**NUS Scotland**) states that Think Positive is a student mental health project funded by the Scottish Government, hosted by NUS Scotland, as it has been since 2009. We work directly with institutions and student associations in Scotland to work together to create a holistic, one-community approach, action plans (Student Mental Health Agreements) to support their students' mental health. NUS Scotland were key players in the push for the Scottish Government's initiative to add a further 80 counsellors in all colleges and universities. They also state that during COVID-19, they offered a weekly meeting and Slack workspace with their participants and the wider sector. Through their One Community Conversation Series, they've brought in a variety of external organisations to share the resources they have developed and allow key connections to be forged so that staff can access training, new ideas and feel confident in signposting to a variety of services.

The NUS from Hungary (**HÖOK**) stated that a mentoring program is provided where older students are offered a short training to guide younger students on every aspect of adjusting to student life.

The NUS from Denmark (**DSF**) stated that they have regular meetings with several ministries of the country (including wellbeing and higher education & science). They are also working on establishing a youth well-being council, with some other national actors.

The NUS from France (**FAGE**) stated that they have a national campaign on mental health. They organise Mental Health Day in universities where students can respond to a questionnaire and evaluate the level of depression. If they want they can also meet a psychologist who is especially there for Mental Health Day. Should the student wish to, they are also given a number or address of a psychologist to be sure that they have all the help they need in case they want to take a rendez-vous.

The NUS from Belgium (**VVS**) is working on a government-sponsored project in which they will do a student wide survey to have an overview of the well-being of students within all higher education institutions in Flanders and Brussels.

The NUS from Malta (**KSU**) stated that they have a week-long campaign on Autism, a week-long campaign on ADHD. They have also advocated for counselling and well-being centres to be installed to provide students with free mental health courses. These are done among other social policy commission discussions.

The NUS from Austria (**ÖH**) has approached the mental health situation in a practical way by establishing the ÖH-Helpline, run by psychologists, to help students over the phone with advice and consultations in case of mental issues.

The NUS from Sweden (**SFS**) states that every HEI is required by law to have a student health service "The higher education institutions shall be responsible for providing students with access to health care, in particular preventive health care intended to promote the physical and mental health of the students." However, there is a big difference in how various HEIs handle this. In some places it is the local student union that provides this kind of service, in other places, there is the HEI who does it, or they buy it from an occupational health care service.

The NUS from Norway (**NSO**) states that the institutions in Norway have a collaboration with the student welfare organisations. They are required by law to facilitate services for students. These services often include psychiatrists, doctors, mental and physical training, advice and courses on stress mastery etc.

Outstanding NUS Campaigns on Mental Health

The following section highlights the campaigns that the national unions of students carry out in their work to advocate for mental health.

The NUS from Iceland (**LIS**) has run several campaigns advocating for more psychologists within their HEIs. Recently, following the demand of students, the University of Iceland hired psychologists. Mental health services within both the University of Reykjavík and the University of Iceland have increased dramatically because of students. In LÍS's equal rights policy within the HE system, LIS also has a clear stand on mental health issues.

The NUS from Denmark (**DSF**) works on student well-being using a holistic approach as they consider it a high priority area of work for the NUS. Their field of work ranges from campaigns ("Less pressure - more learning") to political well-being lobby with ministers and politicians.

The NUS from Lithuania (**LSS**) has created a project funded by The Ministry of Health of The Republic of Lithuania called "A Systematic Program for Strengthening Student Mental Health in Lithuanian HEIs". They are working on a project that expands the existing range of psychological counselling and emotional support to provide 15,000 students with free psychological support. LSS is also working with the Rector's Conference to create guidelines for handling and preventing sexual harassment in Lithuanian HEIs.

The NUS from Ireland (**USI**) launches a national mental health campaign every year. On top of that, they have a USI mental health policy, they sit on the national suicide prevention framework working group, and have a published research paper on student mental health. The USI Mental Health report[9] was launched in September 2019. It was the first report of its kind to look directly at student mental health across Ireland. It provides a much-needed insight into the lived reality of student mental health.

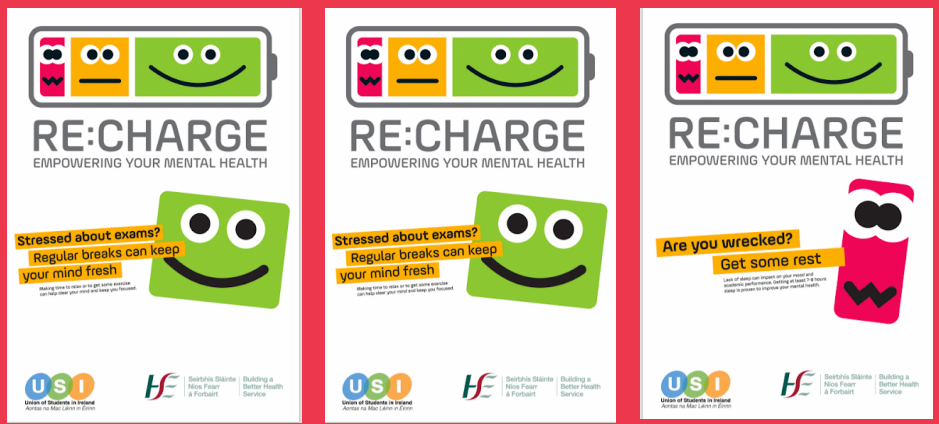

Figure 14. Examples of the posters from USI in their campaign.

[9] https://usi.ie/mentalhealthreport/

Surveys by the National Unions of Students on Mental Health

In the following section, an overview of the surveys is given.

The NUS from Belgium (**VVS**) conducted a survey of all students in higher education in Flanders and Brussels. The survey[10] serves as a zero measurement of the mental well-being of students. The survey was filled in by over 16.000 students from November 2020 till January 2021. Main outcomes of the survey: 2 in 5 students didn't feel good in their own skin in the past year; 1 in 5 students had suicidal thoughts in the past year.

The NUS from Lithuania (**LSS**) conducted a survey in which 2112 students were interviewed over the period of 10 to 18 February 2021 regarding mental health and other related issues.[11] Some of the main outcomes of the survey: 6 out of 18 higher education institutions do not have an established position of a psychologist (answers were received from half of the higher education institutions); Compared to the institutional survey conducted in 2018, the average number of psychological consultations provided per year increased by 100; Compared to the institutional survey conducted in 2018, the average waiting time for psychological counselling decreased from 21 days to 12 days, and the maximum time decreased from 3 months to 1.5 months.

The NUS from Finland (**SAMOK**) co-conducted a survey for undergraduate students in the spring of 2021.[12] The focus of the survey was on the experiences of a year-long pandemic period. 7341 students from 19 higher education institutions filled out the questionnaire. The main outcomes of the survey were: 61,8% of the respondents felt their motivation dropped during the pandemic. 60,1% of the respondent's mental health deteriorated in the past year. This result is higher than the 47,3% of the respondents that felt their mental health worsening in the previous year's survey. A survey of the University of Helsinki had similar outcomes. [13]

The NUS from Germany (**fzs**) communicated that a survey about "studying in Germany during the corona pandemic". [14] The survey was conducted by The German Center for Higher Education and Science Research (DZHW) and the University Research Group of the University of Konstanz, and filled in by 28.623 students over the German summer semester of 2020.

The NUS from Denmark (**DSF**) communicated that a wide-scale survey was conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education about the impact of online learning on students during the pandemic.[15] Some of the main outcomes of the survey were: Six out of 10 students assessed that their professional development is worse with online teaching than usual. The teachers also experienced a decline in the quality of their ability to transfer knowledge. In a survey by the Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut (EVA) the well-being among newly started students in the autumn of 2020 is compared with the well-being in 2017.[16] The report shows, among other things, that there were more new students who were lonely and more who considered dropping out of education in 2020.

The NUS from Finland (**SYL**) helped with the spreading of a survey conducted by Tampere University.[17] The data collection took place in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in May 2020. Answers were collected on the impact of the pandemic on the well-being of 1064 Finnish University students. The material is part of an international project that is managed by the University of Antwerp. Of those students, about a quarter reported a deterioration in their economic situation and a reduction in the workload of more than half. Just over 10% of students reported moving back to their parents during the epidemic. Students' substance use decreased during the epidemic, while there was variation in physical activity.

The NUS from France (**FAGE**) conducted a survey through IPSOS on the impact in June 2020 on 1000 young people and students aged 18 to 25.[18] The survey focused on the impact on their financial resources, their health, academic career and orientation, and their access to employment. During the (first) lockdown, 64% of young people aged 18-24 declare having felt the need to confide in someone, to be listened to (a proportion which reaches 69% among students), a need, significant psychological distress which for almost a quarter of them went so far as to have had suicidal thoughts (23%).

The NUS from the Netherlands (**ISO**) conducted a survey through ResearchNed on the experience of students with online learning. More than 11.500 students participated in the survey which was conducted in December 2020. [19] The results show that the corona measures and everything related to them caused social isolation: 30% of students often felt lonely. More online education meant less concentration, lower motivation and more loneliness. According to the survey, having financial problems appeared to be a reinforcing factor here.

In a survey of the Caring Universities in June 2020, similar results were found.[20] As a result of COVID-19, 56.3% say they are less able to concentrate, 52.5% are lonelier, and 44.6% are more gloomy. For example, 27.1% of the respondents expected to experience a study delay and 43.3% indicate that taking online lessons had a negative effect on the study.

The NUS from Ireland (**USI**) conducted a survey in 2018 in which 3340 students participated.[21] The survey is focused on the mental well-being of students in the third level of education. Main findings: students are experiencing extremely severe levels of anxiety (38.4%), depression (29.9%) and stress (17.3%), close to a third (32.2%) of students had a formal diagnosis of mental health difficulties at some point in their lives, a fifth (20.9%) of students did not have someone to talk to about personal and emotional difficulties, most students (35.3%) were made aware of support services through their Students' Union, a free on-campus counselling service was important for students, those who were involved in activities outside of their coursework had better mental health.

[10] Dutch version: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nVoduRUDCrWQKLiu2t_MimQ4JV1xIMPt/view

[11] Lithuanian version: http://www.lss.lt/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Tyrimas-„Psichologine-studentu-busena-ir-pagalba-.pdf

[12] Finnish version: https://samok.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/amk-opiskelijoiden-etaopiskelukyselyn-tulokset-2021.pdf

[13] English version: https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/news/teaching-studying-at-the-university/university-students-wellbeing-continues-to-decline

[14] English version: https://www.dzhw.eu/en/forschung/projekt?pr_id=665
[15] In Danish: https://ufm.dk/aktuelt/pressemeddelelser/2021/online-undervisning-gar-ud-over-studerendes-laering
[16] In Danish: https://www.eva.dk/trivsel-blandt-nye-studerende-2020
[17] In Finnish: https://zenodo.org/record/4620752#.YGGLoK8zaM8%20
[18] In French: https://www.fage.org/news/actualites-fage-federations/2020-07-13,DP-Enquete-FAGE-IPSOS-Jeunes-Crise.htm
[19] In Dutch: https://www.iso.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ResearchNed---Ervaringen-van-studenten-met-onderwijs-en-toetsen-op-afstand-tijdens-corona.pdf
[20] In Dutch: https://caring-universities.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/De-geestelijke-gezondheid-van-studenten-tijdens-de-COVID-19-pandemie-rapportage-van-Caring-Universities-19082020-versie-2-9112020.pdf
[21] In English: https://mentalhealth.usi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WEB-USI-MH-report-1-edited.pdf

Appendix

In the appendix, the survey questions can be viewed as presented to the respondents. These were asked via Form in Google Documents.

2020 survey questions:

1. What is the country of origin of the NUS you represent?
2. What is the full name of the NUS you represent?
3. What position do you hold in the NUS?
4. How long have you participated in the work of your home NUS?
5. Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your NUS?
6. Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your local (member) unions?
7. Please elaborate on the mental health care services that your NUS provides for individual students? Please check the box that is correct for your NUS
8. Please elaborate on the previous question:
9. To what extent is mental health on the agenda of the higher education institutions in the country of your NUS?
10. To what extent do you feel supported by the Higher Education Institutions in your work on mental health?
11. Please elaborate on mental healthcare-related services that the HEIs in the country of your NUS provide?
12. Do HEIs provide training for staff to support students in distress/with mental health issues?
13. Is mental health being taken into account in curriculum design by the HEIs?
14. To what extent do you feel supported by the government in your work on mental health?
15. To what extent is mental health on the agenda of the Government of your NUS?
16. To what extent is mental health care accessible for students in your country?
17. Does your government take any initiatives to break any stigma regarding mental health?
18. If you answered "yes" to the previous answer, please elaborate on how your government takes initiative to break the stigma regarding mental health?
19. If you can you name any initiatives being taken regarding mental health by non-governmental, non-HEI and non-Students' Union groups (i.e. other student/youth associations), please do so here:
20. Is there anything else you want to mention?

2021 survey questions:

1. What is the country of origin of the NUS you represent?
2. What is the full name of the NUS you represent?
3. What position do you hold in the NUS?
4. Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your NUS?
5. Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your local (member) union?
6. Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your higher education institution?
7. Currently, to what extent is the issue of mental health on the agenda of your national/local government?
8. To what extent did the issue of mental health change in priority because COVID-19 of your NUS?
9. To what extent did the issue of mental health change in priority because COVID-19 of your local (member) union?
10. To what extent did the issue of mental health change in priority because COVID-19 of your higher education institution?
11. To what extent did the issue of mental health change in priority because COVID-19 of your national/local government?
12. Select what activities your NUS participated regarding mental health during COVID-19. Please check the box that is correct for your NUS.
13. How did mental health care accessibility for students in your country change during COVID-19?
14. Did you feel supported in your work by HEIs and government(s) in your country? Were there any barriers or obstacles to work on mental health for your NUS?
15. If your NUS, your local (member) union or any HEIs, government(s) in your country have organised or initiated anything regarding students' mental health during COVID-19 that you weren't able to mention, please do so here.
16. If you can name any initiatives being taken regarding mental health during COVID-19 by non-governmental, non-HEI and non-Students' Union groups (i.e. other student/youth associations), please do so here.
17. If you know about any research/study/survey done in your country regarding mental health during COVID-19, please mention it here (add links where possible).
18. Is there anything else you want to mention?

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