Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy for the European Students' Union (ESU) 2024-2026

Table of Content

ESU
EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION

Introduction

ESU is an organisation representing an incredibly diverse student body, which should be reflected in the way ESU is working. This is especially important since ESU's core values are based on equal access and opportunities for all in education. This strategy sets out how we aim to include and work on this within our whole organisation.

This plan is for the period 2024-2026 and will be adjusted and renewed at BM91 in the autumn of 2026. The goals and the measures of the plan are written to apply broadly to ensure that throughout this period specific measures can be implemented based on analysis and research of the organisation. The implementation of this strategy will be reported on at every Board Meeting, with a point by point evaluation at BM91.

This strategy combines Gender Mainstreaming with an intersectional equitable aspect, where multiple inclusionary parameters are evoked without prioritising one above another, to fight discrimination and strengthen inclusion in ESU.

The Executive Committee (EC) and the coordinators have the main responsibility for ensuring that this work is realised, but every person within ESU, e.g., members of staff, and board members have a responsibility to reach the goals within and to raise new aspects as they develop. The EC should endeavour to obtain funding for EDI.

The Equality Coordinator has the main responsibility of monitoring and reporting on the status of the strategy. They also are responsible for taking further action to implement and update measures. Each mandate they will create a plan for their work which must be adopted by the Executive Committee.

The EDI strategy firstly defines the different types of discrimination we should acknowledge and the marginalised groups that are disproportionately affected by inequality and require adequate support and empowerment. Subsequently, the strategy elaborates the different dimensions in which actions are to be taken, in order to make ESU an open and inclusive space for everyone, along with description of listed actions. In the layout and description of said actions, a special emphasis is placed on intersectionality, which is a crucial factor in realising ESU's goals.

In general, ESU should ensure the organisation is aware of the Code of Conduct, and that its contents are revisited, evaluated and, if need be, changed by the Board.

To do this, everyone should be aware of reporting procedures so they can report discrimination, harassment and offensive behaviour.

Recognising and confronting discrimination

ESU is a diverse space that must accommodate people from all backgrounds and identities. Any form of discrimination and harassment are prohibited within ESU and its events. All members, officials, staff and participants at ESU events should experience a safe and respectful environment at all times. ESU must work to develop a culture that combats all forms of harassment, discrimination and exclusion.

Special support, visibility and empowerment should be provided for particularly marginalised groups and groups that face discrimination. This special focus includes, but is not limited to:

- **Women, intersex, non-binary, transgender and agender people (WINTA)**

Since gender diversity refers to all gender identities, not only the traditional binary system of female/male, ESU should actively and equally include people that fall under the WINTA term. Gender marginalised groups refer to groups that experience discrimination, exclusion, or disadvantage due to their gender identity.

Achieving equity and diversity is crucial, and one significant approach to accomplish this is by improving gender balance. However, it is not solely about numerical representation; it is also essential to dismantle gender stereotypes and reduce gender segregation and guarantee an equal accessibility to all. Gender diversity enriches ESU's work by bringing a range of experiences and perspectives that contribute to a more inclusive environment.

- **The LGBTQIA+ Community**

LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other similar groups are meant to be encompassed by the +. Stigma around

members of this community is still prevalent in most parts of the world up to this day, and progress towards combating that stigma faces regular threats of backlash. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community must be and feel safe and accepted in ESU, where officials, staff and other participants can be themselves without fear or discrimination.

- **Racialised People**

Racialised people still face discrimination in their everyday life based on their heritage and are often confronted with structural barriers within education, limiting their access to higher education. The academic success of racialised people is limited due to a lack of representation among educators, harassment and discrimination, as well as linguistic identity, therefore it is more challenging for racialised people to reach higher education. This leads to an underrepresentation within the student movement.

Skin colour and heritage should not affect anyone's possibility to be a part of ESU. It is therefore important that ESU as an organisation is at the forefront of removing any structural barriers and discrimination against these students and staff in general as well as within its structures.

- **Ethnic Minorities**

The term Ethnic minorities refers to groups of people who have a distinct cultural, linguistic or historical identity that sets them apart from the majority population in a particular country or region. Ethnic Minorities are often subject to discrimination and social exclusion which can impact their access to education, healthcare, employment and other opportunities.

- **Disabled people[1]**

As outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, participation in all aspects of life and both enjoyment of human rights and equal opportunities should be ensured for people with disabilities.

---

[1] In this document we use the phrase "Disabled people" in line with the Social Model of Disability. Some disabled people prefer the term "people with disabilities". For the purpose of this document, "Disabled people" refers to anyone who considers themselves to have a disability or to be part of the Disabled community.

ESU
EUROPEAN
STUDENTS'
UNION

It should be noted that this can be a disability that is not medically diagnosed but is experienced by the individuals in question and challenges people to participate successfully.

There is an underrepresentation of Disabled people in both higher education and within democratic structures. In the social model of disability, barriers in society - including discrimination and attitudes - create the disability. These barriers include but are not limited to the physical environment, communication, people's attitudes and how organisations are run. This can cause systemic exclusion and discrimination.

- **Neurodivergent people**

There is great variation in brain developments and structures. Neurodiversity reflects differences in people's experiences and behaviour. In the current system a lack of knowledge and accessibility has meant that these differences are not accepted, but stigmatised, so neurodiverse people still face systemic discrimination and exclusion, also inside HEIs where they cannot always rely on specific support measures.

ESU, in ensuring substantial inclusivity within its organisation, must promote respect for everyone's needs, in order to achieve actual equity.

- **People from lower socioeconomic background**

Individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face economic challenges, limited access to resources, and reduced opportunities due to a combination of their social and financial circumstances. It's important that ESU acknowledges these marginalised groups in their policy and advocating work. While this factor is core responsible for access to and in the completion of the Higher Education path, it's also important for ESU to acknowledge that these problems do not start affecting the education system with the access to Higher Education. People from lower socio-economic groups are also affected earlier in the education system.

As stated above, marginalised groups that require special inclusion and support that lead to empowerment, are not limited to the ones mentioned above. Rather, the list above should serve as an example and be expanded as needed. We also

acknowledge that people who are multiply marginalised as part of more than one marginalised group will face additional barriers, and we therefore take an intersectional approach to equity, diversity and inclusion.

Achieving our vision

With the actions laid out through the following points, ESU will ensure an accessible and inclusive space for everyone. The main goal is creating a safer space for everyone in ESU, with a zero discrimination and harassment organisational culture.

1. Accessible environment

An accessible environment should be welcoming and accommodating to all individuals, allowing them to fully participate in activities and access all areas of the environment with ease. While creating an accessible environment, we should pay attention to physical, sensory, cognitive accessibility and inclusive, universal design. This point is not limited to the physical environment, but also encompasses the structure and organisation of remote settings, meetings and informal events.

Actions:

- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members, regardless of their background, identity, or disability, with a focus on dismantling barriers.

- develop and implement accessibility guidelines for the use of digital platforms and tools which are universally designed.
- Ensure that all facilities, events, and activities are inclusive and accessible to all.
- All ESU events must be held in universally designed venues to ensure inclusive participation. Where universal design is not sufficient, participants must be able to request accommodation measures to ensure accessibility.
- Ensuring that the organisation's culture allows for a work life balance to promote an inclusive working environment.
- Create a safe and supportive environment for all marginalized groups.

- Identify structural barriers for Disabled and Neurodivergent people within ESU.
- Use clear and specific language in all communication and documents.
- Ensure the rules of participation and discussion are clear for all participants. The aim of each discussion must be defined and debates must be moderated in an orderly fashion and summarised before the conclusion.
- Provide a clear and defined schedule of activities, with regular planned breaks. Ensure that information on duration, possibilities to retreat and special information, such as sensory impact during the schedule, is transparently communicated for social activities.
- Make sure to avoid spaces with loud or repetitive noise and always provide a quiet alternative space with low sensory impact that if possible still gives participants the opportunity to actively participate in the event.

2. Visibility

Visibility refers to the degree to which someone is seen, noticed, or recognised. It refers to the representation or recognition of a particular group or identity in society and it can be a powerful tool for raising awareness, creating change, and empowering marginalised communities.

Actions :

- Every statutory event must include at least one diversity, equity, and inclusion session/meeting (such as gender session, liberation session)
- The language used in formal and informal communication must be inclusive.
- Develop awareness campaigns to promote a culture of inclusiveness and respect within ESU.
- Integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion topics into the regular activities and programs of ESU.

3. Education and Training

Learning and acquiring new skills play an essential role in fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment within ESU. It is unreasonable to expect everyone to know everything upon entering the organisation; hence, capacity building and continuous learning should be integral to our functioning. This knowledge becomes even more impactful when it spreads from national unions to local unions, higher education institutions, and beyond. Moreover, knowledge sharing should flow seamlessly between local contexts and the international sphere.

Actions :

- Address all stereotypes and unconscious biases of any kind within ESU, doing so in a sensitive manner while also avoiding possible triggers.

Maintain and consider increasing resources and training to raise awareness about LGBTQIA+ issues.

- All (s)elected representatives of ESU must complete Diversity Equity and Inclusion training.
- Provide training and workshops for staff and student representatives on diversity, equity, and inclusion topics, including addressing unconscious bias.
  - ESU will add EDI trainers to the Pool of Trainers.
  - Including awareness training to prevent harassment and discrimination, and ensuring trainees' preparedness for handling any incidents in the best way.
    - Including measures against, but not limited to: gender based violence, xenophobia, islamophobia, racism, ableism, anti-Romani discrimination, antisemitism, and LGBTQIA+phobia.

4. Safety

For a variety of reasons, marginalised groups may face additional barriers to their safety, including risk of violence. ESU must take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of all participants, especially marginalised groups, and in particular should ensure the enforcement of the Code of Conduct in all matters of safety. The Code of Conduct must always acknowledge and protect people from marginalised groups that in certain environments may be unsafe, while recognising that the needed solution may vary for different individual safety needs.

5. Organisational structures

Within ESU, structures and guidelines need to ensure that ESU is a safe space for everyone, and as such need to be revised and changed if required.

- Develop, implement and expand upon guidelines, like the CoC, for both physical and digital tools and environments, also ensuring that EU and UN legislation and recommendations for accessibility are being incorporated.
- Ensure all ESU events and activities are inclusive.
- Build and expand on the meetings and sessions for specific groups we already have by exploring the need to restructure the mandatory sessions during statutory meetings and creating networks outside of statutory meetings.
- Update the current gender binary election system, by BM86, while exploring how the election system can be more intersectionally inclusive.
- Actively combat any discrimination within ESU.
- Make structural changes within ESU to include more racialised people.
- Actively combat racial and ethnic discrimination within ESU.
- Explore mesures to pave the way for better inclusion of more neurodivergent and Disabled people within the (s)elected and staff roles in ESU.

6. Inclusive membership structures

In order to reach these goals, not only must ESU work on its internal structures, but also be active in cooperating with its members and stakeholders. In cooperation with ESU, its members can further dialogue at the local, regional, and national levels to expand conversations around equity, diversity and inclusion.

Actions:

- ESU will support its members in their EDI work and in developing measures within their structures.
- ESU should advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in all platforms it is present.
- Identify structural barriers for the participation of racialised people in ESU and actively work against these barriers to every extent possible.
- Implement accommodations and structural changes to the organisational structure to improve access for Neurodivergent and Disabled people.
- Identify and secure funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within ESU.

7. Diverse representation

Proper representation offers a diversity of stories featuring people of all backgrounds. In the past and to this day, portrayals of marginalised communities have often created and reinforced harmful stereotypes. Such stereotypes promote a narrow understanding of those communities and make people struggle with their identity development, or form negative perceptions of their own groups. They might see their own identity or background as burdensome, unpopular, embarrassing or even immoral. A diverse representation allows these communities to feel validated and that their opinions can be expressed comfortably. Therefore, fostering diverse representation in all the areas of ESU's work will enable the organisation to create an environment where ideas are diverse, perspectives are varied and everyone feels valued. It will allow us to reach our goal of a higher education system based on the values of quality, equity and accessibility for all.

Action :

- When organising panels, gender balance among their participants must be pursued to ensure diverse representation. This must take intersectionality into account. Failure to do so must be reported to the Executive Committee by the organisers of the panel, showing why this was not possible.
- Strive for diverse representation in all committees, working groups, and events.
- Strive for diverse participation in external events, by either actively urging the organiser to diversify panellists, or by sending an equally capable person that diversifies the panel.
- Implement initiatives to promote gender balance and diversity in leadership and representation.

Assessment process

This strategy is based on Horizon Europe Guidance on Gender Equality plans and therefore follows a similar structure. It works both generally, and at its sub-parts through a continuous cycle of analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring,

evaluation and so forth. This assessment is to be viewed as a continual process that can never be fully completed. It should constantly be evaluated and expanded upon according to current developments and needs.

- **Analysis**

This phase should include the collection of data and review practices to identify inequalities and their causes. In this phase, data will be collected in order to ensure that the measures implemented can be evidence based and allow for targeted actions and priorities. Once gathered the data should be analysed to understand the key differences and challenges. The Equality Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that this is carried out. In particular, data will be collected on participants at ESU's events and on ESU's (s)elected, appointed and employed persons. There should be further collaboration with associate members to collect data and to promote recommendations on the issues related to discrimination of underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable students in higher education.

- **Planning of goals**

During this phase, ESU will set the objectives and targets for the strategy alongside a roadmap of specific actions and measures. This phase also includes the allocation of resources and responsibilities for the delivery of the EDI Strategy and agreeing on timelines for implementation. The Equality Coordinator is in charge of developing a plan of actions to work on during their mandate, with a list of indicators to assess the results. The plan and the indicators should then be discussed and must be adopted by the Executive Committee.

- **Implementation**

During this phase the roadmap of activities is implemented, including the development of new policies and procedures. This phase should include awareness raising and training efforts to build capacity and achieve support for the plan throughout the organisation as well as enhance visibility internally and externally to the EDI Strategy.

- **Monitoring**

In this phase the delivery of the plan and progress towards its objectives and aims are regularly monitored. Following the indicators outlined during the

planning of goals, the Equality Coordinator is in charge of gathering all the relevant data concerning the planned actions. If some data not mentioned in the indicators seem to be relevant for the evaluation process they will be collected as well.

- **Evaluation**

Regularly ongoing review of findings and progress will provide space for learning and feedback to enable adjustments and improvements on interventions. Once the data has been collected and analysed the findings can be used to identify gaps. The data and the evaluation outcome should be reported to the Board at every Board Meeting.

  This will enable ESU to understand progress and identify where activities are having an impact and where there are barriers for the implementation of the EDI Strategy. The strategy can then be reviewed and updated based on the findings, using evidence based approaches.

Alt text. Figure with arrows in a circle showing the cyclical process of the EDI Strategy
https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffcb06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232129669

ESU EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION