

Statement: ESU stands in solidarity with students in Iran!

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The European Students' Union stands in unwavering solidarity with students in Iran who, in response to fighting for freedom and democracy, are facing systemic repression, arbitrary arrests and grave violations of their fundamental rights. Students and academic communities have emerged as central actors in the struggle for freedom and dignity, and are paying a disproportionate price for their courage.

In response to peaceful student-led mobilisation, Iranian authorities have escalated violence and control over higher education spaces. Security forces have entered university campuses and student dormitories, students have been injured or arrested and academic life has been severely disrupted through closures, surveillance and internet shutdowns. Universities, which should be safe spaces for learning and critical thought, are increasingly treated as security zones, undermining academic freedom and the right to education.

Beyond physical violence, students face intense psychological pressure. Fear of arrest, retaliation against family members, uncertainty about academic continuity and prolonged isolation caused by communication blackouts have created an environment of chronic stress and trauma. Ideological screening and political conformity requirements further exclude students from education, scholarships and future employment, forcing many into silence or exile and denying equal access to opportunities.

The repression of students cannot be separated from the broader human rights crisis in Iran. Women and students are at the forefront of a nationwide movement demanding civil rights, democracy and accountability – and the state has responded with extreme violence against civilians and systematic suppression of information. These actions represent serious violations of international human rights standards and demand urgent international attention.

Students do not live or study in isolation from society. The ongoing violence, mass arrests, and large-scale killings of civilians have created a climate of collective fear and trauma that affects the entire population. Many students have lost family members or friends to death, injury, arrest, or disappearance. Even when not directly targeted on campus, they continue their studies under psychological stress, grief, and constant insecurity. Such conditions severely undermine

students' mental health, their ability to concentrate and learn, and their prospects for academic success. The crisis therefore extends beyond institutional restrictions on education and constitutes a broader humanitarian and societal emergency that directly compromises students' right to study with safety and dignity.

ESU strongly condemns the persecution of students for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and participation in society. No student should face violence, imprisonment or exclusion from education for standing up for democratic values and human dignity.

Europe has a responsibility to act. European governments, institutions and higher education institutions must move beyond expressions of concern and take concrete actions to protect Iranian students at risk. Protecting students at risk is a core expression of Europe's commitment to academic freedom, the right to education and international solidarity. An attack on academia anywhere is an attack on academia as a whole.

ESU calls for dedicated European funding and the creation of a coordinated European Students at Risk programme to ensure equal access, long-term support and safe educational pathways for students forced to flee repression. **A European approach to safeguarding students at risk is not optional – it is a necessary protection mechanism.**

Solidarity with students must be translated into protection, access and sustained commitment. **Defending students in Iran is not only an act of solidarity – it's a defence of academic freedom, the right to education and the core values that underpin higher education worldwide.**