



**European Students' Union (ESU)**

Fighting for students' rights since 1982

[www.esu-online.org](http://www.esu-online.org)

10, Rue de l'Industrie  
1000 Brussels, Belgium

**BM76 - Sofia**

## **Internationalisation and Mobility Policy Paper**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTERNATIONALISATION</b>	<b>2</b>
Definition and values	2
On the institutional level	3
The global fight for education	4
Transnational education, university networks, and joint degrees	4
Internationalisation through digitalisation	5
Access to research and open educational resources	5
Virtual international activities	5
<b>LEARNING MOBILITY</b>	<b>6</b>
Definition and values	6
Quality and financing	6
Information provision	8
Recognition	9
Language learning	9
Visas, permits and workers' rights	10
Access, support, and equality	11
Balanced mobility	13

## INTRODUCTION

This paper defines the European Students' Union (ESU) opinions on the topics related to internationalisation and learning mobility. This document is both an advancement and a cohesive overview of ESU's existing positions on internationalisation and mobility in higher education. This paper offers both definitions and elaborations on relevant policy areas, and should function as a framework and a guide for both students and other actors in higher education across Europe.

## INTERNATIONALISATION

### *Definition and values*

Internationalisation can be defined as, *"the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education."*<sup>1</sup>

Internationalisation can be a tool for achieving higher quality education, personal development and intercultural competences of students, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence of people, as well as national and global sustainable development. It is important to keep in mind that internationalisation is a tool for increased added value of education, not an end in itself. Internationalisation defines the self-determined process of strengthening the cultural and social diversity to establish cohesion as well as respectful and peaceful coexistence and collaboration, and to contribute to global sustainable development. The demand for free education is bringing the direct need for education to open up and reflect on how knowledge is gathered, to widen and reflect the western-centric knowledge production with internationalisation.

A mobile student or educator can be defined as an individual who participates in an organised exchange for a specific amount of time, usually as part of an exchange programme. An international student or educator can be defined as an individual who goes abroad for learning or teaching purposes, regardless of whether it is as part of an exchange programme or not.

Intercultural competence and understanding, as well as democratic values and skills and language competences, are needed in the globalised world and the key for development of a society where everyone can live together peacefully. In order to assure the international character of studies for everyone, as well as the general quality of teaching learning and research, each HEIs should pay

---

<sup>1</sup> Knight, J (2004). "Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales". Journal of Studies in International Education.

thorough attention to creating an international environment at their institution; and governments and the EU must offer measures and funding to help the HEIs to achieve this. Every student must have the chance to benefit from a diverse, cross-continental and cross-cultural internationalisation. This international environment shall fight against racism and xenophobia in all institutional levels. To ensure the sustainability and quality of internationalisation, it must be seen as a crosscutting theme and included in the curricula and learning outcomes for students. Internationalisation must be seen as an integral part of education, not a standalone feature or source of profit. Moreover, the diversity of curricula in foreign languages should be designed and offered not only to incoming full or credit mobility students but also domestic students. This process of creating an international environment must include student participation in every step of the way.

### ***On the institutional level***

Higher education institutions must hire international teaching and research staff in order to provide a wider perspective on the subjects taught. This includes both recruiting permanent staff from abroad and staff exchanges between institutions. Mobility for staff should be promoted and valued as it contributes to a more international outlook within the institution, providing staff with relevant skills and experience needed for internationalisation at home and creating opportunities for further international cooperation for the students and institution. Higher education institutions must implement proper measures so that staff teaching in international programmes and/or courses have the sufficient language, pedagogical and multicultural skills to ensure the quality of the courses and programmes. All types of staff should have the possibility of participating in staff exchange, regardless of position and social circumstances. Staff should be trained to work in an intercultural environment with mobile students, enabling the full inclusion of all students and staff in the day-to-day activities of the higher education institution. Programs providing funding for international exchange of staff should be strengthened, and barriers such as bureaucracy and restrictive migration policies should be removed. Knowledge and experiences acquired abroad by students and staff must be integrated upon return to the home institution, and their learning outcomes must be valued. Institutions have to be aware that internationalisation is more than changing the language of the program. It is also making sure that international students have equal opportunities to take part in the learning community. This, for instance, contains housing, participatory bodies and membership of study associations.

## ***The global fight for education***

Internationalisation and mobility should not be limited within Europe, rather there should be an aim for a global perspective. For example, when integrating international research into curricula, it is beneficial to include work from different areas of the world. In the same way, when European students engage in learning mobility, it is good that they have a possibility to do so outside of the borders of Europe. As well, European HEIs benefit from receiving students coming from outside the region.

Global educational cooperation is fundamental for quality in education and intercultural understanding of our societies. Therefore, it is important that ESU cooperates closely with students and movements across the world that work for equal access to quality education. ESU's work in the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is a fundamental tool to achieve this goal. Our aim to improve internationalisation and global mobility will benefit from a strengthened student voice and enhanced working relationship with GCE.

As the founding organisation member of the Youth constituency within the GCE, ESU aims to strengthen the movement and include other youth-led organisations as members of GCE to participate in making the movement and partnership stronger. Students and youth must be engaged and be part of planning, developing, executing and evaluating all GCE strategies.

Given global historical and current inequalities, ESU will work so that student and youth cooperation and involvement in GCE involves all regions around the globe equally. ESU will aim to bring regional balance and voices from oppressed groups to the forefront of the global fight for education.

## ***Transnational education, university networks, and joint degrees***

Through increased demand for international education, the establishment of transnational education, franchises, offshore campuses, university networks, and joint degree programmes is becoming ever more frequent. Transnational education should not be used for branding higher education institutions or seeking profit from such arrangements. Instead, transnational education should benefit the local community and the learning environment by providing students with opportunities for quality assured education and mobility, free of charge. When education

institutions collaborate internationally, such as on university networks or joint degrees, this can be of great benefit to the learning and international outlook of students. However, the aim of such activities must be enhancing quality in an accessible way for the wider benefit of students, and not elitism or prestige. It is the duty of the national governments and the EU to ensure that these collaborations are established to the benefit of all the European Higher Education system by ensuring the inclusiveness of any proposed general scheme of transnational collaboration of HEIs, both towards the institutions themselves and the students involved. Physical mobility should be made accessible to all those enrolled in transnational activities. Proper quality assurance and feedback mechanisms must be ensured in these activities. ESU stresses that students' rights must remain at the core of the internationalisation process, and strong representation of students in the development of such activities must be ensured. Furthermore, effective student representation should be established whenever new governing structures are devised. In the event of the establishment of any deep, comprehensive or structural collaboration between HEIs, students should have the same rights on access, tuition fees and student welfare. For each of these rights, the minimum benchmark is set by the institution that has the highest standard. Institutions must set out a clear roadmap for this upward convergence on students rights.

### ***Internationalisation through digitalisation***

#### Access to research and open educational resources

Resources from all over the world are essential for the quality of research outcomes, as well as for giving students and researchers a global perspective on their field. Therefore, universities and decision-makers should stand for making all research and educational resources open and freely available, for example by publishing in open-access journals. Research and educational resources should also be open, freely available, and understandable groups outside of academia. Internationally conducted research should be included in the curricula and teaching to enhance the learning experience, and students should be given free access to these resources.

#### Virtual international activities

Virtual education activities provided across countries can be used as a positive tool for increased internationalisation if the activities are of high quality. However, this is not mobility. It is an add-on, not a replacement of physical mobility, as the international experience gained by mobile students can only be truly experienced in person. Therefore when counting participants in international mobility, participants in virtual activities should not be counted as "mobile students" but as another

category, and funding for these activities should not be taken from the budgets for student mobility. ESU opposes the narrative that virtual international activities are a way of widening access to mobility for underrepresented groups. Groups who are currently underrepresented should not be given virtual options as a “discount solution” to widening access - rather access to high-quality international education, including physical mobility, should be widened for all.

## LEARNING MOBILITY

### *Definition and values*

ESU defines international **learning mobility (hereinafter mobility)** as any activity where learners or educators physically go to another country for the purpose of learning, teaching, or research activities.

The purposes of mobility should be the improvement of education quality by increasing international outlook and circulating knowledge, as well as building intercultural understanding, independence, and transversal skills in students. However, some higher education institutions see the value of mobility to rather be a way of promoting themselves in a global competition, or making a profit of international students. When economic reasons steer the internationalisation of higher education with the objective of making a profit, higher education institutions focus on attracting fee-paying students and establishing franchises. The risk is that only economically exploitable programmes prosper and certain countries or regions stay in the focus of interest at the expense of quality in education, the rights of students, and the fundamental values of what education is for.

### *Quality and financing*

Possibilities for mobility should be offered in all education types and all cycles, whether in the form of an exchange, full-degree mobility, short-term courses, or internships. The quality of learning in these mobilities should be properly ensured and not sacrificed with the excuse of an enriching intercultural experience. International students must have the same rights regardless of the type of mobility they engage in - for example, no services should be exclusively reserved for full-degree students. The quality of international internships must be ensured, with a focus on learning, adequate supervision, and workload measured in ECTS. Student representatives should be included in the administration and development of all mobility programmes as well as the designing of new programmes and initiatives at all levels.

The inclusion and involvement of international students, as well as their representation, must be ensured within the higher education community. This includes accommodation support if needed, provision of practical information prior to arrival and support with the process of adaptation which requires good introduction activities and measures to promote inclusion of international students with domestic students also regarding social activities on campus, and student housing. In addition, the actual participation of international students in institutional governance and student self-governing structures should be enabled, actively promoted and equal opportunities created. Hence, decreasing language barriers, for example, by making translations of meetings available for international students, can be a first step to enable them to participate at an equal level with local ones.

Measures must be taken; to properly prepare students for their mobility periods, to provide support throughout, as well as to guarantee the reintegration of students returning from a stay abroad. This includes high-quality study guidance which should be person-centered and adapted for specific necessities, for example, through tutoring and the presence of study supervisors. The expertise students gain from having spent time abroad should be taken into account in the design, development and implementation of the programmes. Student feedback should be used to improve the quality of mobility periods and provide a reference point for students considering going abroad.

To avoid mobility becoming the privilege of a few students with a good financial situation, mobility must be financially supported. Financing is at present the number one deterrent for students to be mobile. Student grants should be high enough to cover actual living costs in the host country, grants should be portable, and additional grants should be available to cover the extra costs associated with mobility. Travelling to home countries for major family events, holidays, or other life events can be economically challenging for students engaging in learning mobility. In the same way, having to travel to their home or host countries given exams or other academic tasks can also be an economic issue. Funding or other initiatives for lowering these burdens should be encouraged. Daily transportation needs in the host country should ideally be free for all students. In case it is not, a transportation pass should be provided for international students at the same price as for local students, and it should cover the entire mobility period. A financially supported mobility also means equal chances in access to higher education regarding tuition fees. That is why HEIs and governments have to ensure that no discrimination ensues between EU students and non-EU students in regards to tuitions fees.

It is important that substantial public funding is set to achieve the goal of wide access to high-quality mobility. On the European level, funding for education within the Multiannual Financial Framework should be increased so that the funding allows for a realistic realisation of the set goals. This entails promoting and supporting individual mobility, providing capacity building opportunities for all levels and stakeholders involved in education and safeguarding of the functioning of international organisations. Within the Erasmus+ Programme, targeted grants should be offered to students from underrepresented groups to widen participation. Erasmus+ grants should be adjusted to cover the study and living costs of the local area of destination. The national agencies are responsible for the implementation of this adjustment. Grants should be topped with structural and institutional financing to ensure that no barriers are created at any point of the mobility period. Countries are responsible for providing portable grants. Financial support for mobility should be a universal right and neither restricted based on merit nor parental income of the student nor based on work placements a student might take while on a mobility. While working towards portable grants in all countries should be the first priority, destination countries should also be encouraged to devise scholarship schemes for international students.

### ***Information provision***

A prerequisite for making an informed choice of study destination is the transparent and comprehensive provision of information on the rights of mobile students. Equal and balanced information provision from and for all parts of the EHEA should be provided regardless of the students' nationality and origin area. ESU stresses that the marketing of study programmes, research and labour opportunities must be factual and accessible, and must not be profit-seeking. Rather than prioritising the marketing or recruiting processes, priority should be given to improving the conditions for applicants and the quality and availability of information on study programmes and opportunities. Higher education institutions, career centres and/or employment offices should assist international students with offering career counselling and provide information on employment opportunities, legal rights and duties. Currently, there is a lack of transparency and dissemination of information about the rights of international students and the support opportunities for students facing accessibility barriers. This must be improved through dialogue between education institutions and other responsible bodies between the sending and hosting countries, involving students previously engaged in international experiences and student representatives, and through the introduction of online tools for informing the potentially mobile students.



## ***Recognition***

Recognition of prior learning must be in place across the EHEA and should be beyond, to ensure all student get equal access to the programmes they have the necessary knowledge and competences for. The mobility must give the student to decide what classes they want to choose for their interests and their studies, and those choices must be recognised. Procedures to identify if specific courses and education activities are comparable between two education institutions should be transparent and user-friendly to enable students to fill their education with the components they wish, and to avoid students ending in the situation of not being able to get all the learning recognized they achieved during mobility. Additionally, to avoid study delay, study programmes should be flexible enough to make mobility periods possible. HEIs should have a system in place to issue required temporary documents for students to meet the application deadlines of the HEI abroad, if these deadlines require an application before finishing the ongoing degree program. There should also be recognition of the informal learning students get from mobility. Including learning outcomes related to intercultural understanding and communication in the curricula, and giving ECTS for it, should be encouraged. However, it should be voluntary for students whether they wish to count such learning outcomes within the ECTS they collect after a mobility period. Countries within EHEA should work towards coherent procedures for recognition of foreign diplomas and professions free of charge, and provide transparent information about the recognition process and decision-making within it. A procedure for appealing decisions about recognition must be in place.

## ***Language learning***

Learning through another language than the student's first language makes mobility an academically and culturally enriching experience, contributing to better integration in the hosting institution and country, and to students becoming responsible and active global citizens. The resources for tuition-free language courses of the destination country must be ensured, also taking into account students with special needs. Language courses that are not part of the curriculum should always be voluntary.

Free language courses should be provided at the home institution prior to the mobility period to secure a sufficiently high level of both general and academic language knowledge to learn through a given language. In the event that language courses of the destination country are not offered for free, these should be paid by the student's home institution. Institutions' multilingualism policies

should address students' knowledge and competences, provide accessible materials, and address the needs and capabilities of students to actively participate in society. Learning and teaching in languages other than the student's first language should be supplemented by courses emphasising academic language and intercultural communication. Free language courses must be offered to both exchange students and full degree students and should be provided to such an extent that will enable full participation in society. Such courses must also be available for all national students who wish to participate, such as refugees and migrants, to ensure equal access to education and mobility. This should include preparatory courses before entry to education as well as continuing access to language courses throughout their education. Language courses should also be freely available for students who speak sign language, so they can become confident in international sign languages as well as the sign language of the hosting institution. When it comes to the assessment of language skills and competence in higher education, existing measures should be supplemented by measures assessing students' knowledge of their specific subject area in order to provide a more genuine outline of language learning outcomes.

### ***Visas, permits and workers' rights***

Free movement must be ensured for students, who undertake stays for the purpose of study or educational training, for teachers, staff and researchers. Bureaucracy and inconsistency in the provision of student visas and residency permits constitute barriers for both short and long-term mobility and for the integration and employment opportunities of international students. Getting visas and permits should be made as easy as possible for students. The procedures for getting student visas should be made to fit the procedures of getting admission to the education institution, to ensure that students will receive their visas in due time. ESU is therefore in favour of regulations on how quickly visa applicants must receive a reply on their applications. Getting visas should be an inclusive process. Therefore, age limits for fee waivers for visas should be raised, application forms should be gender-sensitive, offices for handling visa-applications should be designed in an accessible way, and procedures should be in place to make it easy to apply for visas no matter where you are located.

ESU suggests using all EU member state embassies as the visa contact point for a visa to any EU member state on the contrary to the current procedures demanding to acquire the visa at the country embassy where the intended stay is expected for the longest period. Digitalisation becomes a substantial part of visa policy modernisation, therefore online uploading of supporting documents and tracking of the visa application status should be secured. The online tools used for visa processes

should be accessible, based on universal design principles, and easy to use. All documents and websites needed for visa and permit application processes should be available in all official European languages, and staff should have good communication skills in required languages. All costs for students related to visa procedures, such as travelling to embassies, documents preparation, translations costs, financial statements obligations, proofs of savings for the entire period of stay and finally the visa fee, are all negatively affecting study accessibility. ESU calls for fees on student visas and permits to be abolished. This includes free applications for work-permits all students regardless of EU citizenship status. Visas should be valid for the entire duration of the study program plus some time before and after to give the student time to move and adjust to the new country before beginning the study, and to start applying for jobs after graduation if they wish to stay.

Furthermore, graduates should have a fair and accessible chance to expand their visa indefinitely to remain in the country after graduation. It should not be necessary to renew the student visa every year. Students should be allowed to work on the side of the studies to the same extent as national students, and there should not be any limit on the number of work hours that does not exist for students in general. Students from all countries regardless of EU citizenship status should be granted the right to work and study in the hosting country on the same level as domestic students. International students should have access to the same rights as other citizens, including the right to protest and strike.

The procedures to recognise one's refugee status are extremely time-consuming and they affect people's right to live normally and safely. They affect refugees' rights to education. Not only do these procedures have to be shortened and simplified, but it is also urgent that Higher Education Institutions can accept asylum seekers as students even during the waiting period. Similarly, it is important to protect migrants' and refugees' rights and allow them to quickly apply for a visa and engage in international mobility, thus being able to study and work with the same rights as every other student. Regardless of their employment status or EU citizenship status, all students should maintain the same rights as nationals within that country with respect to the access to and supply of goods and services made available to the public.

### ***Access, support, and equality***

ESU demands equal access to knowledge and education for all. This also includes student mobility. ESU is against tuition fees and other extra costs imposed on international students, regardless of EU citizenship status. ESU condemns the discrimination, stereotyping, and negative rhetoric international students face. All students should have the possibility to be mobile while they should

also be free to choose not to be mobile, without any negative consequences on their education. For example, international mobility periods cannot be a prerequisite for receiving a qualification.

The mobile student population should reflect the diversity of the population. Governments and higher education institutions should conduct research on the barriers non-mobile and underrepresented groups face. Mobility programs must oppose inequalities. Therefore special programs and funding for students with disabilities and accessibility requirements need to be established, and HEIs should be given additional funding to provide suitable access for those groups. In order to make mobility a real opportunity for all, governments and higher education institutions need to take measures for widening access for all, in addition to taking a comprehensive approach to dismantling existing barriers to mobility. In order to increase the participation of underrepresented student groups such as students with disabilities, students with caring responsibilities, and students from disadvantaged or lower socio-economic backgrounds, adequate support measures and resources must be put in place, and students must be well informed about their opportunities for going abroad and their opportunities for getting support.

Measures should also be taken to make mobility programs accessible to participate in for all institution types, not only wealthy or prestigious institutions. All students, regardless of the length of the stay, must be guaranteed equal access to the student support services of the hosting countries and institutions, including health care, student grants and child care services. The need for mental health support needs to be acknowledged and taken into account to ensure that all students in need of counselling and therapy get access to them, whatever boundary conditions they are facing; this includes access to information, raising awareness and funding, and counselling and therapy offered during mobility periods.

The needs of international students should be catered for by ensuring that staff have relevant expertise and language skills to provide such services. The specific needs of students with disabilities must be taken into account by governments, higher education institutions and student unions, as lack of support for students with disabilities during the stay abroad creates a barrier to participation and at present results in students with disabilities being severely underrepresented in mobility. Therefore, mobility grants should also cover the extra expenses related to having a disability or illness.

Transparent and accessible information should be available online about the accessibility of education institutions and student housing, so international students can be well-informed when

choosing where to go abroad. This information should include for example accessibility for students with disabilities, the gender-sensitivity of facilities, and the possibilities to freely practice religion on campus. Ensuring a certain level of accessibility should be a prerequisite for an institution being allowed to participate in the Erasmus program. Ministries or agencies should give targeted support to institutions which can't currently provide the required level of accessibility.

Governments, higher education institutions, and municipalities must guarantee affordable, quality accommodation for incoming students so that housing does not become a barrier. International students are more vulnerable to exploitation in the housing market because they often lack a network and an understanding of the hosting country's housing laws. Measures should be in place to prevent discrimination of international students by all types of housing providers, as well as to provide international students with information about their rights in the housing market to prevent fraud. Policies affecting the rental market should take into account their effect on housing accessibility for mobile students as well as students with diverse needs in terms of for example family situation or need for physical accessibility.

### ***Balanced mobility***

Mobility of students and staff benefits both sending and hosting institutions by circulating knowledge and exposing students to different cultures. Hosting countries also benefit by spreading an understanding of their culture to the home countries of the visiting students, as well as increasing the cultural diversity in their workforce through those international students who choose to stay after graduation. These benefits should be equally distributed between countries, and brain drain should be avoided, rather brain circulation should be made attractive and accessible. Unbalanced mobility where some countries receive many more students than others can be a sign of barriers in the mobility system. This could, for example, be in the form of prejudice, lack of opportunities for language learning, or insufficient financial support. Therefore, when unbalanced mobility is observed, it should be taken seriously, and the underlying reasons should be addressed. The solution to brain drain is not to make quotas for how many people should be sent between countries, the solution is rather to address the underlying reasons why the mobility may currently be unbalanced.

## **Appendix 1 - Global fight for education**

In addition to the ongoing collaboration with UNESCO, ESU joined the Board of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) at the GCE World Assembly in November 2018. It is the first time a Youth Caucus has been brought together, as a way to enhance visibility and impact of the youth agenda within GCE. The Youth Caucus aimed to be an inclusive, social and educational event with the purpose to transform GCE's work on youth engagement through lively discussions, presentations, and development of policy motions by global youth representatives, and engagement with GCE members.

At the 2018 GCE World Assembly, the motion of having two youth seats on the board was approved, creating a youth constituency. Members agreed to strengthen its membership by getting more regional and international youth-led organisations involved, as well as encouraging national coalitions to strengthen and develop the inclusion of youth-led organisations.

In order to further strengthen this movement, youth engagement must be increased.

### **Global Campaign for Education (GCE)**

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) is an international civil society movement working to end the global education crisis. GCE has 120 members, working across over 100 countries, and its membership includes international NGOs, regional and national coalitions (themselves each representing anything from tens to hundreds of members), movements, teacher unions, and youth-led organisations. GCE is governed by its members, which are represented by an elected Board.

GCE is supported by a full-time Secretariat, and headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa.

### **Education Academia Stakeholder Group**

The Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (EASG) brings together human rights-based education civil society organisations as well as academia organisations and networks that work to promote the right to education as a State responsibility.

EASG self-organises to engage with the monitoring and review of the Sustainable Development Goals. The EASG is open to all organisations working for the full realisation of the right to free, inclusive quality education for all, the implementation of Agenda 2030, and of SDG 4 in particular.

The EASG is a self-governing body not under the control of any political party, government and ideological or religious grouping.

In the spirit of principles enshrined by the SDG Agenda, the EASG organisations embrace principles that include: • a commitment to promoting human rights and dignity for all • working towards the overcoming of all forms of discrimination • the peaceful resolution of conflicts • the enhancement of democracy and social justice. I. Governance: the Organising partners 1.

Four Organising Partners currently work together to coordinate the constituency:

- Global Campaign for Education
- Education International
- International Council for Adult Education
- European Students' Union.