

Functional Overview Tuition Fees

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Introduction to the concept of tuition fees and the state of play in Europe

The role of higher education towards social, economic and cultural development of our societies is certainly unquestionable from various aspects. In that sense, synergy and mutual dependence of higher education and society & vice-versa is a constant of modern times. However, we must acknowledge that all these aspects very often are highly affected by economic policies and financial matters. The influence of individual socio-economic conditions and financial pressure on the accessibility of higher education is evident.

In times of limited financial resources, countries are implementing several measures to ensure the financial sustainability of their higher education systems. The most widely represented measure is the implementation of tuition fees, which equal the financial obligation of students to pay for being enrolled in higher education while higher education institutions profit from this additional source of income. In this context it is obvious that tuition fees are a significant financial burden for students, especially bearing in mind the heterogenous socio-economic background of students. Consequently, this means that tuition fees are highly socially selective and one of the most severe barriers to overcome when accessing and taking part in higher education.

Various studies have been conducted in order to showcase the European state of play with regards to tuition fees. The analysis “National Student Fee and Support Systems in European higher education”¹, shows that among the 43 assessed higher education systems, nine have a systematic no-fee policy for first-cycle full-time home students in place. This group includes Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom – Scotland, Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey. In contrast, in 11

¹ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. National Student Fee and Support Systems in European Higher Education – 2018/19. Eurydice – Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.



higher education systems, which are situated in different parts of Europe, all first-cycle students have to pay tuition fees. Around half of the systems subject to this analysis are located between these two extremities, i.e. some students pay fees, whereas others do not. In some systems, fee exceptions are possible, but are available only to specific categories of students – such as students from low-income families, orphans or disabled students, which generally translates into a high percentage of fee-payers (at least 50 %) and a low share of those exempt from paying fees.

In some other systems, only particular categories of students are required to pay – e.g. students failing to make sufficient academic progress, which goes hand in hand with a relatively low percentage of fee-payers among students (up to 25 %).

ESU is continuously advocating for accessible and sustainably funded higher education and thus sees the use of tuition fees as an unsustainable and unfair method for funding education systems. This approach is fully in line with our organization's [Statement on Countering Commodification in Higher Education](#).

In this context, one group of students is in a specifically complex situation and frequently subject to unequal treatment. International students (non EU/EEA students) are often charged differently - the studies show that in most European countries, international students have to pay higher tuition fees than domestic students.

Unequal Treatment of Non EU/EEA Students - A functional overview

This overview shows how international students in Europe are charged differently for their tuition fees compared to home students and that the fees they pay are higher than those paid by domestic students. The national information provided outlines a huge difference existing between the financial treatment of domestic and international students.

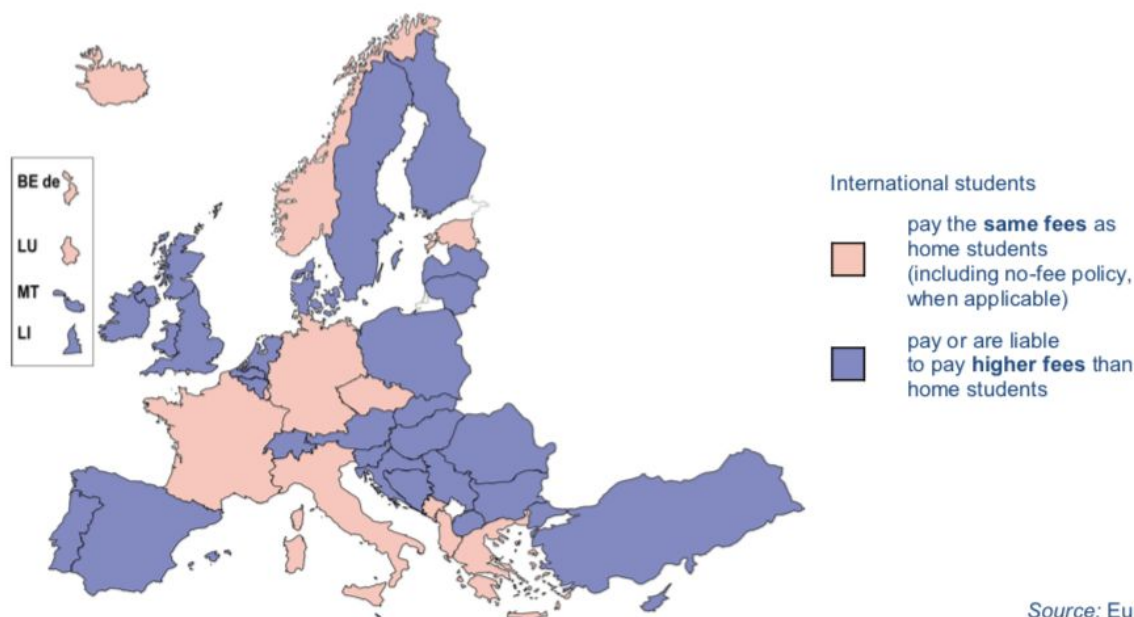
In preparing this overview, we have used the following sources:

- NUSs replies to the Bologna With Students Eyes 2020 survey
- Commodification survey conducted by ESU among its member unions in 2019
- Various external data sources (reports, analyses etc.)



Overview of tuition fees charged to international students by country:²

Figure 7: Fee policies towards international students (outside EU/EEA/EFTA), 2018/19



1. **Belgium (French Community)** - International students, defined as non-EU students, have to pay additional fees fixed by law. For programmes organised by *hautes écoles* and arts colleges, fees are EUR 992 for professionally-oriented programmes and EUR 1 487 for academically-oriented programmes in the first cycle; EUR 1 984 for second-cycle programmes. For university programmes, the maximum amount should not exceed EUR 4 175. Non-EU students also pay a complimentary registration fee.
2. **Belgium (German-speaking Community)** - International students, defined as students from outside the European Union, pay the same fees as Belgian and EU nationals. In case of exchange students, however, no fee is charged.
3. **Belgium (Flemish Community)** - International students, defined as students from outside the European Union, pay the same fees as Belgian and EU nationals. In case of exchange students, however, no fee is charged.

² *Ibid.*

4. **Bulgaria** - For international students (non-EU/EEA/Swiss), fee ranges are set by the government and depend on the study field. The actual amounts are defined by higher education institutions
5. **Czech Republic** - Fees for international students, i.e. students who are not citizens of the Czech Republic, are the same as for home students, as long as they study in the Czech language.
6. **Denmark** - International students, defined as students from outside EU/EEA, pay fees set by higher education institutions.
7. **Germany** - From 2017/18, international students in Baden-Württemberg, defined as students from outside the EU and EEA countries, have to pay EUR 1 500 per semester.
8. **Estonia** - The same fees apply to international students, defined as non-EU/EEA students, as to national students. Fees may be also charged to those studying in languages other than Estonian.
9. **Ireland** - International student (non-EU and non-EEA citizens) fees are generally two to three times higher than those of full EU fees and are set by the higher education institutions.
10. **Greece** - International students, defined as non-EU-students, do not pay fees for their first-cycle studies.
11. **Spain** - International students, defined as non-EU students, who do not have resident status in Spain may have to pay fees, depending on the region.
12. **France** - International students, defined as non-EU students, pay the same fees as EU and domestic students.
13. **Croatia** - International students, defined as students from outside the EU, also pay full fees.



14. **Italy** - International students, defined as students from outside EU/EFTA/EEA, pay the same fees as national students.
15. **Cyprus** - International students pay fees. Fees for first-cycle students admitted from non-EU countries are EUR 3 417 per semester or EUR 6 834 per year.
16. **Latvia** - Fees for international students (students from outside EU/EEA) are higher, ranging from EUR 1 100 to 14 000, as are fees in programmes provided in English.
17. **Lithuania** - HEIs can set different fees for international students, defined as citizens of non-EU and non-EEA countries.
18. **Luxembourg** - International students pay the same fees as national students.
19. **Hungary** - All international students, defined as non-EU/EEA students, pay fees. Information on fee-ranges is not available.
20. **Malta** - International students, defined as students coming from outside EU/EFTA/EEA pay fees, and these are higher than those paid by Maltese and EU nationals.
21. **The Netherlands** - International students – outside the EEA, Surinam or Switzerland – pay non-statutory fees determined by the higher education institutions without any guidelines from the Ministry.
22. **Austria** - International students (defined as non-EU and non-EEA students) at universities generally have to pay fees of EUR 726.72 per semester. Students from developing countries may be exempt from these fees, based on a decision of the university. Students from the least developed countries are exempt from fees. *Fachhochschulen* are entitled to charge cost-covering fees, which are usually higher than EUR 363.36 per semester for non-EU and non-EEA students.



23. **Poland** - Students from the EU and EFTA countries and other defined categories (e.g. students with refugee status) study according to the same rules as Polish citizens. Fees for other international students are decided by higher education institutions (HEIs).
24. **Portugal** - International students pay higher fees than national students, and higher education institutions are autonomous to decide on the amounts charged.
25. **Romania** - International students pay fees. The value of the minimum fee is set by law for each field.
26. **Slovenia** - International students from EU and those who are citizens of countries outside EU that have signed bilateral or multilateral agreements on educational cooperation with Slovenia, pay the same fees as Slovenian citizens. Other international students pay tuition fees.
27. **Slovakia** - International (non-EU) students who study in a language other than Slovak (the state language), pay fees of up to EUR 11 000. Those studying in the Slovak language pay either fees stipulated in bilateral or multilateral agreements or, if such agreements do not exist with their country, fees set by higher education institutions.
28. **Finland** - International students, defined as citizens of non-EU/EEA countries, are liable to annual fees of at least EUR 1 500. Citizens of non-EU/EEA countries, who do not have a permanent residence status in the EU/EEA area, are also liable to these fees in foreign language first- and second-cycle programmes as of 2017.
29. **Sweden** - International students coming from outside EU/EFTA/EEA pay fees. Higher education institutions determine the amount of the fees, based on the principle of full-cost coverage.
30. **UK - England, Wales, Northern Ireland** - For international students (non-UK and non-EU/EEA), fees are unregulated.



31. **UK - Scotland** - Fees for international (non-EU) students are unregulated and set by the higher education institutions.
32. **Albania** - International students pay the same fees as students from Albania.
33. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** - International students, defined as students who are not a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina, may pay higher tuition fees while other expenses are the same. The fees are within the range of the fees for part-time students.
34. **Switzerland** - International students: some higher education institutions charge higher fees for students from EU and beyond.
35. **Iceland** - International students are treated as home students, and thus pay the annual registration fee of ISK 75 000 but no further tuition fee.
36. **Liechtenstein** - International students from non-EEA/EU countries (third countries) pay an annual fee of CHF 2 500 (CHF 1 250 per semester), plus a non-recurring application fee of CHF 100.
37. **Montenegro** - International students, defined as all students coming from abroad, can study under the same conditions as Montenegrin citizens, in compliance with the Law on higher education and statute of institution.
38. **Norway** - International students are treated as home students, and do not pay fees at public higher education institutions.
39. **Serbia** - International students, defined as non-Serbian students, usually pay higher tuition fees. The most common annual fee is EUR 2 000.
40. **North Macedonia** - International students, defined as all students who are not citizens of the North Macedonia, pay higher fees: between MKD 63 000 and 123 390 per year, regardless of the study cycle. These fees are defined by the respective universities.
41. **Turkey** - International students, defined as non-Turkish students pay higher fees, as defined by the government.



The development of tuition fee levels over the past decade

Current trends show that there is a growth in the practice of introducing tuition fees, namely for non-EU students. More and more European countries introduce tuition fees for international students that drastically exceed the levels of tuition fees paid by domestic students. Some of these examples are Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland.

In a survey conducted in 2019, ESU has questioned its member unions on the reasoning used by authorities of the respective countries to justify tuition fees. Providing multiple-choice answers by national unions of students (NUS), this survey has shown that authorities are convinced that tuition fees should be applied since they would encourage a greater responsibility of learners to finish their program within the standard period of study. 52 % of the responding NUSs indicated that this is the case in their respective countries.

Other significant reasons pointed out in this survey are:

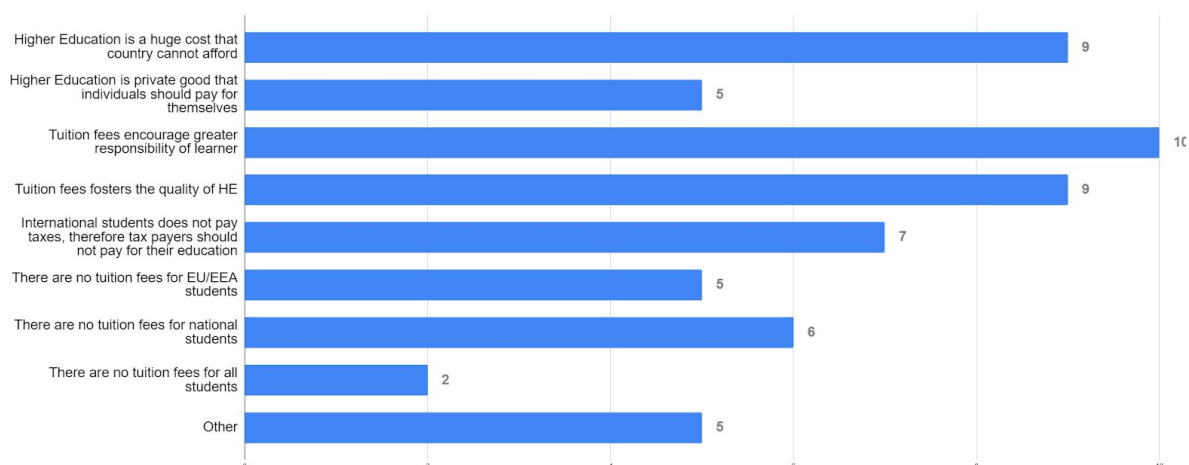
- Higher education is seen as a huge cost that countries cannot afford (9 NUSs or 47.4% of replies given)
- Tuition fees are believed to foster the quality of HE (also 9 NUSs or 47.4% of replies given).

One of the most worrying responses we have received indicated that in seven countries (36.8 % of responses given), the justification for tuition fees imposed on international students is based on the reasoning that "international students do not pay taxes and that therefore taxpayers should not pay for their education". This point of view is short sighted and does not take into account the financial resources international students bring to a national economy while studying abroad.



Bologna with Students Eyes 2020

What reasoning is used by the authorities of your country to justify tuition fees?



Another problematic trend shows that tuition fees are rising in most of the respondents countries. NUSs state that there was an increase of tuition fees in 15 countries at the institutional level in the period between 2018-2020 and in 7 countries at the national level in the same period.³ In one country there has been a decrease of tuition fees at the institutional level and only in two countries at the national level. All policies that result in increased tuition fees are problematic for domestic students, but for international students the problem is even bigger as they usually pay drastically higher fees. This approach is thus endangering internationalization efforts and will most certainly have a negative long term effect on the quality of higher education.

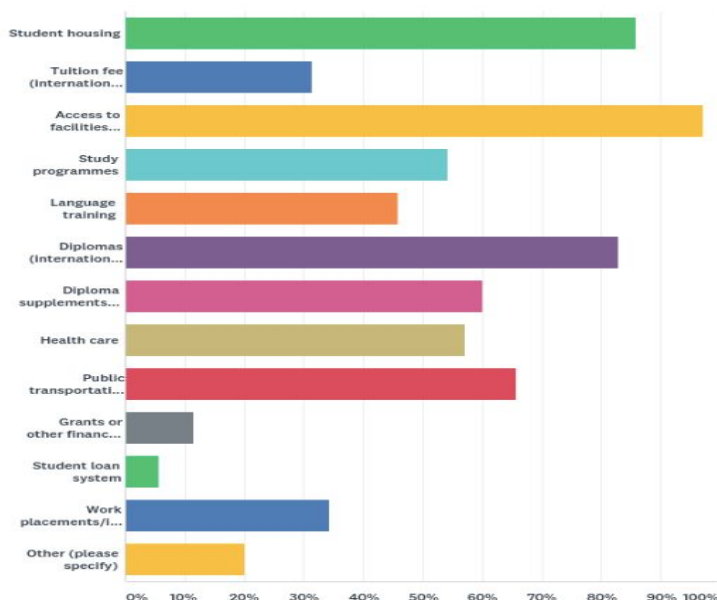
It is evident that in most of the European countries unequal treatment of international students compared to domestic ones is an everyday practise, especially when it comes to tuition fees. Responses given by NUSs for the purpose of BWSE2020 clearly show that only in 30% of countries tuition fees are the same level for both categories of students. The numbers appear to be even worse when it comes to accessibility for international students to student loans and grants. This means that governments do not see international students as an added value to the national

³ BWSE 2020 survey.



economy nor as people who contribute to the forthcoming of our societies as a whole and this malpractice needs to be tackled efficiently and thoroughly.

Q23 Are any of the following arrangements available for international students to the same extent as for domestic students? (Multiple Choice)



Unequal treatment of domestic vs. international students the quality of higher education. It undermines proclaimed efforts to foster the internationalization of higher education in Europe and drastically lowers the numbers of international students enrolling in European higher education institutions. These forms of unequal treatment furthermore encourage commodification tendencies, since international students are very often seen solely as consumers of higher education, that mostly pay significantly higher tuition fees. This leads to a perception of education as something that is bought and sold for individual use which is a fatal conceptualisation that neglects the inherent value of education and it's core mission to improve society as a whole.

Recommendations and Policy Demands

- National authorities must tackle the issue of unequal treatment of international students very seriously and thoroughly. They are expected to create legislative and administrative framework that will bridge the gap in tuition fee levels between these two groups of students.
- Students unions are expected to raise awareness on unequal treatment and show solidarity with their colleagues coming from abroad.
- Higher education institutions and students unions should create a welcoming environment for internationals by providing guidance and information to incoming students.
- Students unions should foster the participation of international students in their own structures in order to combat the massive underrepresentation of international students within their unions.
- ESU and its membership should lobby towards all relevant stakeholders to start discouraging the practice of unequal treatment of international students.
- Internationalisation must finally be a prioritised topic in Europe to achieve set goals.
- Special attention needs to be paid to internationalisation strategies. Students as a crucial part of internationalisation must be included in the creation and implementation of such strategies.
- Language learning must be made available to both international and local students in Europe as language skills are crucial for quality internationalisation.
- Attention must also be paid to developing the language skills of both academic and non-academic staff in higher education institutions.



- The EU Visa Directive must be implemented efficiently. Visa periods should last the entirety of a degree/students stay in a country while sufficient opportunities to work are essential.
- Initiatives regarding marginalised groups in mobility must be priorities over the next Bologna cycle. The integration of students from lower socioeconomic background, students with disabilities, and refugees into higher education is a must.
- Students' rights and access to education need to be protected during Brexit negotiations.
- Free higher education must be seen as an investment in the future.
- Students must be given adequate support through publicly funded grant systems. Student support through grant systems must be preferred over re-payable support systems.
- Governments must review and adjust students support systems to ensure students' access to higher education, and acceptable living conditions during higher education.
- Governments and HEIs must discontinue discriminatory practices regarding study fees, such as enforcing mandatory fees for international students. These practices are counterproductive in regard to internationalisation.
- Governments must stop producing more education restrictions based on national economic policies to ensure accessible higher education without labour market as the main player in higher education policies.