

European Students' Union (ESU)

Fighting for students' rights since 1982

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ESU report to the BFUG 82, 7-8 November 2022, Brno

Highlights of EHEA-relevant ESU activities since BFUG 80

The European Students' Union (ESU) is the organisation representing 20 million students through our 45 National Unions of Students (NUSes) in 40 countries.

Bologna With Student Eyes

In May 2022 the final conference of the project BWSE FORward was held, where the [final project paper](#) was presented, which was based on the [Bologna With Student Eyes 2020 publication](#) and on the outcomes of the two Peer Learning Activities (PLAs) held as part of the project. The experience will continue with the new project '**Bologna with Stakeholders Eyes for an Innovative, Inclusive and Interconnected EHEA by 2030 (BWSE FOR2030)**', which will run until 2024. The main outcomes will be the publication of the 2024 edition of **Bologna With Student Eyes (BWSE)**, which will be based on a survey targeting ESU's NUSes, as well as a set of policy recommendations to reach an inclusive, innovative, interconnected European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2030, which will be based on three PLAs open to representatives of relevant ministries, higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations, students and other higher education stakeholders from EHEA countries, to be held in 2023. The goal is to have the BWSE publication ready to contribute to the 2024 edition of the Bologna Process Implementation Report, and to have the policy recommendations ready to feed into the final discussions of the 2021-2024 Bologna cycle.

Social Dimension

ESU has continued **co-chairing the BFUG Working Group of Social Dimension**, which finalised the indicators for the Principles and Guidelines on Social Dimension. The work of the WG is supported by the [PLAR-U-PAGs](#)

[project](#), of which ESU is a partner, whose aim is to support the national authorities and higher education institutions in the implementation of the Principles and Guidelines (PAGs) and which will deliver PLAs, a toolkit to support the implementation of the PAGs, a comprehensive mental health action framework and a central web portal on financial assistance and psychological counselling services. The first PLA will be held in Zagreb on 16-17 November 2022, about the principles 1, 5 and 10.

The rising inflation due to the energy crisis provoked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has paired with a pan-European housing crisis, which threatens to be potentially devastating for students and the Higher Education sector in general. We have launched the campaign '**Education is Freezing**', which aims at unifying under one common umbrella the different actions our unions are undertaking at the national level, as well as provide them with European coordination. At the 83rd Board Meeting that will take place in Prague on 11-16 November, we will approve a [common political platform](#) with concrete measures at the institutional, national and European level to tackle the energy-induced student poverty.

Quality of education and recognition

The discussion on the **future of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESGs)** has been an important part of our work on Quality of education. We are chairing the 2022 edition of the **European Quality Assurance Forum (EQAF)**, which will take place on 17-19 November at the West University of Timisoara, Romania, under the theme 'Shaping or sharing? QA in a value-driven EHEA', and will discuss the role that QA can play in shaping, safeguarding and promoting the common values of the EHEA. We are also organising the student pre-conference for all the students registered at EQAF. We are partners in the **QA-FIT** project, which aims at gathering evidence from the different members of the European higher education community in order to evaluate the trends, challenges and future-look of the QA system in the EHEA, assess the fitness of the current ESGs to the new dimensions and challenges in higher education, and propose avenues of reform for the QA system in the EHEA. The survey for the NUSes and students, higher education institutions, QA agencies and HE ministries is finalised and sent to the different constituencies.

On learning and teaching, we contributed to the [final publication](#) of the **LOTUS project**, whose final conference took place in Brussels in September. We extensively worked in preparing a [statement](#) on the future of **Student-Centred**

Learning, which will be approved at our 83rd Board Meeting ([executive summary](#), [historical overview](#)). On the field of recognition, at the Board Meeting we will approve a [resolution](#) on the **Development of Automatic Recognition Processes in Europe**, which highlights the overlaps between the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and the EU Council Recommendation on promoting automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad, as well as outlines that the LRC still needs to be fully implemented in member states and the importance for the review of the council recommendation.

Internationalisation and mobility

At the 82nd Board Meeting in Paris, May 2022, we approved a [statement](#) on **Brain Drain within the EHEA**, which builds on a [previous report](#) we published in 2021 on the issue. Much of the work has been conducted within the framework of the **Erasmus+ programme**, including to enhance its **sustainability** (via the project [Green Erasmus](#)), and its **social inclusivity** (via the project [Erasmus for All](#), which aims at proposing more equitable, alternative methods of calculation of the Erasmus+ grants).

We have been supporting our Swiss member in the discussion on the **re-accession of Switzerland into the Erasmus+ programme**, in the bid to decouple the EU-Swiss talks on the matter from the discussion of the economic relations between them.

Fundamental Values

ESU has been working on inquiring students' views on academic freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity. With this goal, as part of a project on academic freedom funded by the Open Society Foundations, we launched a survey which reached 645 students from 30 countries. The report with the findings of the survey is in the phase of drafting. Within the framework of the project, we also held the workshop '[Academic Freedom 101](#)' in October in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, which gathered 25 students from 15 countries and explored the topic of academic freedom from the scholarly, practitioners' and activists' perspectives. We also worked extensively on Academic Integrity: the result will be the approval of a [statement on Academic Integrity](#) at the 83rd Board Meeting in Prague, November 2022. Due to this work, the **BFUG WG on Fundamental Values has entrusted ESU in leading the drafting process of the EHEA statement on Academic Integrity.**

We continue supporting our Belarusian members, under repression or in exile, both in their efforts to call for the release of the students detained by Belarusian authorities as political prisoners, as well as in their advocacy to continue their studies in Europe. For the latter, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the support the Belarusian regime gave to the invasion, Belarusian students have been subject to institutional discrimination in some European countries. The 82nd Board Meeting in Paris approved a [resolution](#) condemning the role of the Belarusian authorities in the war and calling for an end of institutional discrimination towards Belarusian students, many of which are exiles from the regime.

Ukraine

We have scaled-up our work on Ukraine by creating an internal working group within ESU's Executive Committee, with specific tasks defined by ESU's Plan of Work. We have worked to highlight the need for scholarships for Ukrainian students temporarily residing in Europe in order to allow them continue their studies: we presented a [joint statement](#) to request **an increase in the Erasmus+ budget to guarantee the scholarships for Ukrainian students.** We also highlighted the problem of the **international students that were studying in Ukraine** and were not automatically included within the scope of the EU Temporary Protection Directive, which did not allow them to enrol in higher education in Europe and put several of them in an educational limbo, especially in the cases where their countries of origin did not (or could not) re-enrol them in their higher education institutions. We have also [raised awareness](#) on the issue of the **Ukrainian male students regularly enrolled in higher education abroad and denied, since September, the possibility to leave the country and join their colleagues.** A situation that needs the collaboration of both the Ukrainian and European authorities, in order to ensure them the right to education by joining their peers.

Structures of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and synergies with the European Education Area (EEA)

At the 82nd Board Meeting in Paris, May 2022, we approved [ESU's vision on European Higher Education Policies](#). In the Policy Paper, **ESU supports exploring the possibility of a permanent Bologna Secretariat**, relying on the collective support of the Bologna participating countries and organisations, with a fund to support the permanent structures and common projects and events on relevant topics. **ESU strongly supports an independent monitoring**

and reporting mechanism for the Bologna commitments, including via data gathering from different sources of information at the national level (including students and their representatives) and on-site visits by experts from other countries. **ESU supports the creation of ‘national BFUG structures’, with the involvement of HE stakeholders**, which would be responsible for the implementation and follow-up of the Bologna commitments.

Regarding the synergies between the EHEA and the EEA, the Policy Paper states that ESU believes that **the EHEA and the Bologna Process should remain the main policy-making forum for higher education in Europe**. The **EEA should be a space where to experiment** and find solutions to the obstacles to achieve the common goals of the EHEA and the EEA, in order to be later discussed and approved at the EHEA level.