



International Students' Union (ISU) of Norway
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Travel Expenses for the students over 25 years old

As of last year students over the age of 25 have had to pay their own travel expenses from Oslo to the cities of their educational institutions. This is particularly expensive in the case of, for example, a student of the University of Tromsø. This expense was covered by the state before.

Take into account that the majority of international students from developing countries are over 25 years old and that an added expense of even 1000 crowns can easily represent several months salary.

The international students last year had quite a lot of problems concerning the travel expenses. One of the main issues was that the second year quota students were not informed about the changes in the law. Many students had to find the way out in order to leave the country on time. According to the agreement signed by the students when they were accepted to the University, the students were supposed to get the financed ticket till Oslo which they did not.

The Universities that situate in any part of Norway except the South are in the situations of some kind of discrimination caused by the fact that the students as well as the academic staff prefer to go to the southern part of the country instead of the Northern one

Visa application and work permit fee

In February 27 2003, the Norwegian Parliament passed a change in the law regarding foreigners in Norway. This change in the law was enacted on 29th August 2003. The change stated that a fee of NOK 600 would be paid for processing of applications for resident permits, work permits or permanent resident permits or the renewals of such permits, latest with the handing in of the applications.

Some groups were however exempted from this application fee:

- § Applications from children under 18 years.
- § Applications from foreigners from countries covered by the EEC agreement or EFTA convention.
- § Applications for renewals from asylum-granted persons or persons who are under protection against deportation.

From 1st October 2003, this fee was demanded for the processing of applications.

The main objective of the introduction of this fee according to the Standing Committee on Local Government is to reduce the number of incomplete and obviously groundless applications.

National ISU has written a resolution which says that:

The International Students' Union (ISU) feels that the international students studying or wishing to study in Norway should be exempted from paying this fee because of the following reasons:

- § International students apply for student resident or work permits or their renewals only when they have acceptance letters from the institutions of higher education or have letters from their respective institutions confirming their status as students. This therefore means that they have a valid reason to apply for these documents and that their applications do not fall in the 'groundless' category.
- § The goal of the internationalisation process in Norway is to increase student mobility and exchange programs. This fee will contribute to a reduction in the applications from international students from outside the EEC and EFTA convention wishing to study in Norway.
- § The target of this fee is clearly students from developing countries and Eastern Europe, as students from the developed countries are covered by agreements such as the EEC and EFTA. Most of the international students depend on scholarships and other sources of funding for their studies. The introduction of the fee will only increase the plight of students from poor countries and contribute in the clear discrimination and distinction of students from developed and those from developing countries.

The ISU therefore appeals to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to exempt the international students from paying the application fee.

The resolution was supported by the NSU and StL National Meetings in spring.

Here is the paragraph from the NSU's resolution:

“NSU has realized how this will affect international students, since their studies in Norway requires a residence permit. NSU also sees how this change of law is against the intentions in the quality reform, in particular “a wish for more and bilateral exchange of students with countries in the south.” One of the visions for the quality reform, was *“more international students than today, getting their higher education in Norway – students from both industrialised countries, and developing countries.”* And it is students from developing countries who has the thinnest economical startingpoint. An extra fee at present at NOK 1200,- would be a hard burden to carry for most international students from countries outside Europe.

NSU understands that all effects of this change of law has not been apparent, especially regarding international students. We also hope that the government will see how the change of law they have passed, will hinder students from developing countries to apply for higher education in Norway...

On this background, NSU strongly encourage Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet, to make a change in *Lov om utlendingers adgang til riket og deres opphold her (utlendingsloven) §59* and *Forskrift om utlendingers adgang til riket og deres opphold her (utlendingsforskriften) §178*, making students an exemption to this fee.

This resolution is to be sent to The office of the Prime Minister (Statsministerens kontor), the departement of education and science (Utdannings- og Forskningsdepartementet), and the departement of local authorities (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet).”

Instead of exempting International students from the visa application and work permit fees the fee was increased up to 800NOK.

Having the meetings with the newly came international students it is obvious that the visa application fee + travel expenses caused a lot of financial problems to the students. Some of the students had to get into the debts in order to be able to come to study in Norway some of them had to take a year off to save up some money.

University of Tromsø gave the number of students that did not accept the offered place with the scholarship (40 students) and we suspect that approximately 15 of them did not take the place because of the financial reasons.

Gathering all the information mentioned above, National ISU managed to get the meetings with the political parties (Høyre, Venstre and KrFU), the State secretary and the representative in the Parliament from the Labour Party. I was attending some of the meetings with International officers from NSU and StL where they fully supported ISU.

The responses we got were positive. They saw the point and the arguments seem to be quite good, so they are going to look into the cases and ask the questions during the debates why this or that has taken place.

More detailed answer I got from the state secretary where he explained that the travel expenses issue was introduced due to the need to cover the expanses because of the changes in the law concerning the scholarship, which was raised from 70.000NOK up to 80.000NOK, that was one of the reasons why they limited the number of the students (by introducing the age limit) that can get support for going home.

I have also contacted the political adviser from to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (Kommunal- og Regionaldepartementet) and he is working on getting a more detailed information, which I hope to get by the end of next week.

The solutions we offered to the politicians are either to exempt international students from the fee or to let the students be reimbursed. And as for the travel expenses we have written a joint paper together with NSU asking the State to give money in order to cover the travel expenses.