

International Students' Union of Norway (ISU Norway)



Inclusion work from International Students' Union of Norway (ISU Norway)

ISU Norway (ISU) works for the rights of 25,000 international students; that number is only growing, demanding more from ISU at the national and local level, including political support to improve inclusion of international students in Norway and their rights. The Executive Board members in ISU Norway have a growing responsibility, despite having a 25% salary and being full-time students. Nevertheless, the Executive Board and ISU Norway continue to work to support positive inclusion of international students in Norway, both socially and academically.

a. ISU Work Plan

In April 2016, ISU held an Extraordinary National Assembly (ENA) in Oslo. The ENA voted on what to include in the 2016-2017 ISU Work Plan. The Work Plan included points for both national and local efforts for the National Board and the Local Branches. This year's Work Plan includes a large amount of goals that are significant for the social, academic, and political rights of international students, for internationalization efforts, and for student mobility in higher education in Norway. Several points of the Work Plan were highlighted to Bjorn Haugstad (Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education) last 20th October at a joint meeting with Daniel Hernández Iniesta (ISU Norway National President), to show where ISU's efforts and goals can significantly contribute to Norwegian society and the welfare of international students.

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b. Importance of internationalization of education

Internationalization of higher education is to increase cooperation and creates an understanding of a globalized world, enabling students qualified to work and conduct research in an international academic and labor arena. International students are global innovators with global connections: they can help Norway become a future leader in research, innovation and the application of new technologies. ISU has had the opportunity to discuss these issues with Høyre, will meet Venstre, and is waiting for a positive reply from our inquiries to meet with other Norwegian political parties.

Moreover, Internationalization of higher education in Norway is becoming increasingly important and increasingly prevalent within the education policy. Internationalization of higher education contributes to increased opportunities for learning and professional development for students and staff and hence better quality of education.

c. Norwegian State Budget and Kvalitetsmelding

During the last years, ISU discussed several issues about internationalization of education in Norway after the state budget release in October. This year ISU has taken the initiative and given our inputs to the state budget with a working group to discuss issues of interest for international students, and to discuss with the different Norwegian political parties how to improve inclusion of 25,000 international students, student mobility and internationalization of education at home. ISU will send to the Ministry of Education and the Norwegian political parties interested, its inputs on terms of internationalization of education to discuss in the Kvalitetsmelding discussion.

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d. Political cases to help inclusion of international students in Norway

There are two political cases in the Norwegian state budget discussions that ISU Norway would like to address with the Norwegian political parties – the full degree program to support students from developing countries and the long visa renewal process and high amount of visa renewal fees.

1. Full degree program to support students from developing countries

Moreover, since July, ISU has been discussing with several organizations the option to create an educational program that will offer an alternative to study in Norway for students from developing countries, as was the case of the unfortunately discontinued Quota Scheme.

ISU discussed with SiU and the Ministry of Education on a meeting held on 20th October about the progress on that work. ISU has found an option with SiU from the “International Credit Mobility” that can help students from developing countries come to study to Norway.

Nevertheless, this program is limited to one year studies, bilateral agreement between Norwegian universities and students' home universities. This program had 434 places for staff and students coming for one year to Norway, and a funding of 1.7 million Euros from the European Union Commission. ISU will work with SiU to clearly specify the options under how international students can apply to “International Credit Mobility”, and present a report to the Ministry of Education to support a one-year program to complement SiU study option of one year, and offer a full degree program opportunity for students from developing countries to study in Norway.

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ISU believes that a funding for 4-5 million Norwegian kroner could be an opportunity to offer for 50-100 students (we are up to discuss the exact number of students) coming to Norway for a two years' program, to gain a high value of knowledge through education to improve their home countries economy when they are back after they complete their studies. This was the focus of the Quota Scheme to provide education for students from developing countries; a two-year trial program for 50-100 would provide an opportunity to be able to properly evaluate the program outcomes.

The limited amount of money asked of 4-5 million Norwegian kroner divided in two years, will create a real impact back on the economy of developing countries, as well as support aid development assistance and Norwegian foreign policy with students as the best ambassadors Norway can have.

Ultimately, a consistent, funded ISU would contribute to a continual internationalization of education in Norway, and a well-represented international student body. A well-represented international student body in Norway would attract more international students and increase the worrying low percentage of international students to the Norwegian student body.

Therefore:

- ISU asks the Norwegian political parties to meet and discuss the full degree program, to include in the Norwegian state budget.

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2. VISA renewal process and fees

ISU discussed the complexity of VISA renewal process for international students outside EU/EEA area that can take up to 3 months¹, and discussed with the Ministry of Education on 19th October, possible ways to simplify the process and the possibility to eliminate the visa renewal fee of 3200 NOK, that affects international students' finances in addition to the present deposit of 103950 NOK to UDI.

From the 25691 international students in 2015 came to study to Norway², 13392 are from outside EU/EEA³ that each are required to pay 3200 NOK⁴ for their visa renewal if they stay for a full degree program, which is the case for most of those students.

This creates an approximate total revenue on visa renewal fees of 42 900 000 NOK, besides the deposit to UDI which shows that international students can cover one year living expenses for their visa renewal process, making an approximate number of 1 393 000 000 NOK. The UDI deposit to renew every year is a huge amount for students' finances, and it shows as required by UDI that they have capacity to cover living expenses in Norway for one year which they have to show the amount to grant the VISA renewal. International students have to report the UDI deposit from May, which means they should focus on working to get the amount necessary to renew their VISA in study period time. This focus on work rather than study on exams creates anxiety, possible cases of depression and a negative impact on academic results.

¹ VISA renewal process (UDI): <https://www.udi.no/en/want-to-renew/study-permit/#link-992>

² International students in Norway "Antall utenlandske studenter i Norge" in 2015 (SiU): <http://siu.no/Data-analyse-og-prioriterte-samarbeidsland/Data-og-statistikk/Hoeyere-utdanning>

³ International students in Norway by country "Utenlandske studenter per land" in 2015 (SiU): <http://siu.no/Data-analyse-og-prioriterte-samarbeidsland/Data-og-statistikk/Hoeyere-utdanning>

⁴ VISA renewal fees (UDI): <https://www.udi.no/en/word-definitions/fees/#link-3592>

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The approximate revenue on visa renewal fees represents 3% from the total amount of UDI deposit and VISA renewal fees. The high amount for the UDI deposit represents 97% of the total amount, and the 3% will not affect in high terms Norwegian finances, but will represent a big help for international students, besides being unfair that despite showing academic progress and other requirements for the VISA renewal process, international students from outside EU/EEA still have to pay a fee despite fulfilling all requirements.

Therefore:

- ISU asks the Norwegian government, to discuss with ISU the removal of visa renewal fees for international students outside EU/EEA area

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