

Admission to Higher Education - disconnected from the current reality

During these critical times, the disruptive effect generated by the current crisis, **has directly influenced the flexibility and adaptability of the education system**. It is necessary to respond appropriately to the challenges posed by the crisis of the new Coronavirus (COVID-19), including the ones **regarding the first stage of accessing higher education**, which is the **admission process**.

The **National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR)** has analysed the admission process within all public higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country and presented good practices examples implemented by universities around the world. The analysis concludes with a series of recommendations on the admission process to higher education, addressed both to decision-makers and HEIs.

The information gathered showed that, although the *Governments' Emergency Ordinance no. 41/2016* regarding the establishment of simplification measures at national level provided the *elimination of the requirement to submit legalized copies to official papers*, there are still **36% of public HEIs that require mandatory legalized copies of documents in some situation** within the admission to bachelor's studies.

Another finding shows that **only 34%** of civil public universities include in their admission regulations provisions that **ensure equal opportunities for candidates with disabilities, but without concrete measures of special procedures adapted to them**.

Regarding the existence of appeal procedures, all the analyzed universities present such regulations. However, regarding the possibility of **submitting online appeals, only 2 universities (4%)** have such provisions, while for all the other universities it is **necessary to submit the appeals to the secretariat, physically**. Moreover, **only in some cases** students have the possibility to participate in the process of analyzing their own appeal.

In order to offer equitable opportunities to the candidates within the **online admission process, we request the conclusion of partnerships** between HEIs and county school inspectorates. Thus, if a student does not have the necessary possibilities to take part in the online admission, **it should be organized and supported in the nearest educational unit from the candidate's home**, using the devices provided by that specific unit, **under the conditions and on the platforms established by universities**.

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Next, it is essential to take into account the impediments of the current online teaching process. Thus, we think that the average of final grades of high school students should weight a certain percent of the admission result, if there would be an online examination. We consider that the grades achieved within the online teaching and learning process should **weight less than the ones obtained before the pandemic outbreak** and, respectively, before the face-to-face activities were suspended. This approach aims to create a "safety net", thus reducing the possible discrimination caused by the limited opportunities of high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Basically, this would give high school students the certainty that their **final grades would not be negatively influenced by the education received in the online environment.**

At the same time, we consider it a **priority** to adapt the provision of Minister Order no. 6102/ 2016 regarding the *Methodology for organizing the admission process for bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies in order to reduce de bureaucracy of the confirmation process.* Specifically, **we urge the Ministry of Education and Research to amend Minister Order no. 6102/ 2016 regarding the confirmation procedure** and to include **a series of feasible proposals for the Romanian higher education institutions, which would ensure the accuracy of submitted documents and the online confirmation.**

Also, in order to streamline the admission process, we mention the main requests provided in the analysis:

- **universities should urgently establish the online platforms** to be used for the admission process, with IT&C support from the Ministry of Education and Research;
- establishment of **special admission conditions for candidates with disabilities** and development of an institutional guidebook with the steps to be followed by these candidates, in order to benefit from an **admission process adapted to their needs;**
- possibility to **submit appeals and acceptance of places by students online;**
- **prolonged period of time for submitting the admission documents,** with respect to the previous years;
- **reduction of admission fees** (at the beginning of this academic year, ANOSR has conducted an analysis which provides all the unnecessary fees perceived by the public HEIs and their lack of substantiation);
- **various financial benefits for candidates that have been severely financially affected by the COVID-19 outbreak,** such as postponing the deadlines for payment of the first installment of the tuition fee and the possibility of not paying the admission fee;
- harmonization of the current admission regulations at HEI level with the national legal framework in force and **elimination of mandatory legalized copies of some documents** that need to be submitted by candidates in the admission process.

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Although too few universities think about online admission, and decision-makers do not provide concrete solution to the needs of school- and university students, **education remains a priority during the pandemic**. Therefore, the **ANOSR calls for greater attention to education and for the implementation of realistic measures for teaching, in order not to affect the interests of the primary beneficiaries of education**.

*"Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has disastrous effects, it also offers us an **unexpected opportunity to reflect on the Romanian higher education system**, including the admission methods. The future students need an admission system that is **equally fair and effected**, that focuses on the potential candidates and, respectively, their **interests and skills** and, last but not least, to fit in the curriculum they would like to follow as well as possible. All of these measures should be implemented **taking into account their socio-economic background**." - Petrișor-Laurențiu ȚUCĂ, President of ANOSR.*

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