

Strengthening of Students at Risk (StAR)

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Students are key agents of change in any society. They are on the front lines of the fight for democracy, fundamental human rights and more just societies. In this fight, students face great resistance, brutal attacks, persecution, imprisonment, surveillance, and they are often denied the right to study. This is a problem that is growing larger as authoritarian forces advance and new measures are introduced to silence activists and critical voices. Students at Risk (StAR) is a scheme for students who, due to their work protecting human rights, are at risk and/or are denied the right to education in their home country. Through StAR, students are given the opportunity to come to Norway and complete their education here.

StAR is an important program in the fight for democracy, freedom of expression and human rights that provides protection to key actors in this fight – namely the students. The scheme was initiated by the Norwegian Student Organization (NSO) and the Students and Academics International Aid Fund (SAIH) in 2012 and established as a program in 2013. The first students came to Norway in 2015. The scheme is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and administered by the Directorate for Higher Education and Competence (HK-dir). Today, Norway accepts up to 20 students a year through this scheme at universities and college campuses throughout the country. The last two years have seen a significant increase in the number of qualified students, with over 70 nominated in both 2022 and 2023. It is thus clear that the need for programs far exceeds the current financial framework. In recent years, we have also seen increasing interest in the scheme internationally. Establishing similar schemes in other countries is important to meet the growing need. This will open opportunities for students who do not meet the Norwegian requirements for English proficiency, as well as students with study backgrounds that are not compatible with programs at Norwegian higher education institutions.

It is important to acknowledge the challenging situation that Students at Risk students find themselves in when they arrive in Norway. A particular concern is the lack of adequate psychosocial support for StAR students. Several struggle with major trauma and psychological difficulties after having been exposed to threats, persecution and oppression in their country of origin. The combined effect of several challenges upon arrival in Norway, such as integration, limited access to mental health services, and uncertainty about the future, places additional psychological pressure on individuals who are already in a vulnerable situation. There is a need for networks and to create a supportive and safe environment that gives StAR students the opportunity to offer their professional ambitions and further develop their human rights work in Norway and internationally through networking and competence building.

Proposed resolution:

The Student Democracy at NMBU believes that the Students at Risk scheme must be strengthened and the number increased to at least 40 per year.

The Student Democracy at NMBU will work for:

- That measures are established to ensure psychosocial support for Students at Risk students at NMBU.
- NMBU offers more places for Students at Risk.
- To promote the Students at Risk scheme in international forums and encourage similar initiatives.