

# Resolution on Accessibility

## Arrangements

In Switzerland, accessibility arrangements for students with disabilities mentally and physically are essential to ensure equal opportunities in higher education. However, the current system faces significant challenges and inconsistencies. While federal law and international conventions, such as the Swiss Constitution's Article 8 on equality, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 24, and the Swiss Disability Equality Act, all emphasise the right to equal access to education, many students find these protections insufficiently implemented at the institutional level.

Swiss higher education institutions (HEIs) currently lack a standardised approach to accessibility arrangements, leading to discrepancies across institutions and even within faculties. In many cases, the process of securing accommodations is slow, bureaucratic, and stressful for students. Students often face hurdles in accessing needed support due to complex requirements, limited resources, or varying interpretations of eligibility criteria, sometimes leaving students with disabilities in a position where they must take legal action to assert their rights.

Funding for accessibility arrangements is another pressing issue, as resources are often spread unevenly, with each faculty or department applying its own criteria and sometimes prioritising its own budget over the needs of students. Without centralisation or national standards, students' experiences and the support they receive can vary dramatically depending on the institution, faculty, or even the specific staff responsible for administering accessibility measures.

Adding to these structural issues is a broader lack of awareness among staff and students, which can contribute to an environment where accessibility needs are overlooked or stigmatised. The absence of centralised information and dedicated support staff at many institutions further limits students' awareness of their rights and the support available to them.

Addressing these gaps is essential to foster a truly inclusive environment in Swiss HEIs, ensuring that all students, including those with physical disabilities,

neurodivergent conditions, mental health challenges, and other accessibility needs, can pursue their education on equal terms.

In recognition of the rights of all students to equitable access to education, this resolution seeks to address the need for comprehensive, harmonised, and efficient accessibility arrangements for students with disabilities and neurodivergent conditions in Swiss HEIs. Accessibility arrangements must accommodate a diverse spectrum of challenges beyond traditional physical disabilities, including but not limited to mental health, neurodivergence, and mobility limitations. This resolution emphasises the need for consistent procedures and a legal framework that ensures equitable access to educational resources and opportunities across all Swiss HEIs.

For example, the following situations have been observed:

- **Current Inequities in Access:** Many students with disabilities, mentally and physically, in Switzerland face inconsistent accessibility arrangements, sometimes even having to battle for accommodations through court procedures. The lack of a uniform approach to accessibility arrangements within HEIs leads to unequal access and undue burdens for students who already face significant challenges.
- **Legal Framework:** According to Article 8 of the Swiss Constitution, Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Swiss Disability Equality Act (Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz), Switzerland has committed to ensuring equality and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. However, effective implementation within HEIs remains inconsistent. Recent cases, such as the court battle over support for a student with dyslexia, underscore the challenges in obtaining accessibility arrangements.
- **Necessity for Accelerated Procedures:** Delays in implementing accessibility measures prevent students from accessing necessary support, thereby impacting their educational outcomes. Streamlined and accelerated processes are essential to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to succeed.
- **Decentralised Decision-Making:** Accessibility arrangements are often fragmented across faculties, leading to significant discrepancies in available support. A centralised approach to funding and decision-making

within universities is necessary to standardise accessibility arrangements across all departments and faculties.

- **Awareness and Inclusivity:** There is a pressing need to increase awareness about accessibility arrangements among lecturers, administrators, and fellow students. An inclusive and understanding campus culture benefits not only students with disabilities but the entire university community.
- **Missing Information and Support:** HEIs do not actively inform their students on how to apply for an accessibility arrangement and provide zero guidance on how to go about an application. This adds another layer of stress to students who need an accessibility arrangement.

This resolution seeks to create a unified, inclusive, and legally aligned framework for accessibility arrangements across Swiss HEIs. We call on universities, faculties, and policymakers to adopt and implement the following recommendations to ensure that students with disabilities and neurodivergent conditions are granted equitable access to education without discrimination.

The undersigned student bodies call for the following measures to improve accessibility arrangements in HEIs.

## **Our demands**

### Enhancing Acceptance and Awareness

There is a necessity to promote awareness and equal treatment of all disabilities, recognizing the diverse and individual needs of students.

### Fostering an Inclusive Environment

Cultivate a culture of inclusivity within universities, ensuring both staff and students are aware of and supportive of accessibility arrangements.

Design for all: Incorporate principles of inclusive design into all aspects of campus life, ensuring accessibility benefits the entire community.

### Create Inclusive and Adaptive Practices

Recognize and address the differences in accessibility needs across various disabilities, providing equitable accommodations for physical, mental, and neurodivergent conditions.

Demand greater flexibility for individualised solutions tailored to each student's unique circumstances. That goes beyond the normal more time allowance approach, like adaptive digital platforms, accessible online examinations, and support for those with limited access to digital tools or internet connectivity.

#### Guarantee Confidentiality and Respect for Privacy

Ensure the application process for accessibility arrangements respects students' privacy and dignity, with strict confidentiality in handling their personal information.

#### Simplify the Application Process

Simplify the process of applying for accessibility arrangements, as current procedures are often overly complex and can be discriminatory.

Eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic barriers, such as requiring redundant medical confirmations from university-affiliated doctors when documentation already exists.

Address the requirement for ongoing evidence of current treatment, particularly for lifelong disabilities, as it creates unnecessary hurdles for students.

#### Centralise Accessible Support Structures

Establish a centralised, accessible support office within each university to offer guidance and assistance to students applying for accessibility arrangements. Make sure this centralised coordination prevents inconsistencies across faculties, departments and institutes.

Provide a dedicated contact person for faculties to facilitate the implementation of accessibility measures.

#### Accelerating and Harmonizing Procedures

Expedite the review and granting of accessibility arrangements to ensure students receive timely support without compromising quality.

Advocate for national-level harmonisation of accessibility procedures to ensure uniform standards across all Swiss HEIs. Changing universities or even institutes should not impact students' access to measures.

#### Provide Support and Guidance for Implementation

Universities should offer structured support for implementing accessibility arrangements, providing practical advice and training for lecturers and faculty members.

Develop resources such as podcasts, online lectures, and interactive guides to create an understanding and inclusive environment.

### Proactively Communicate and Heighten Transparency

Universities must proactively provide information about accessibility arrangements through emails, clear sections on their websites, and during the enrollment process.

New students should be informed of their rights and the steps to apply for support, including the option to indicate disabilities during their application process.

By adopting these recommendations, Swiss HEIs can create an equitable and inclusive educational environment that upholds the dignity, privacy, and rights of all students.

This resolution seeks to create a unified, inclusive, and legally aligned framework for accessibility arrangements across Swiss HEIs. We call on universities, faculties, and policymakers to adopt and implement the following recommendations to ensure that students with disabilities and neurodivergent conditions are granted equitable access to education without discrimination.

In conclusion, the Swiss Student Union, VSS-UNES-USU, together with ESU urge higher education institutions to:

1. Enhancing Acceptance and Awareness
2. Fostering an Inclusive Environment
3. Create Inclusive and Adaptive Practices
4. Guarantee Confidentiality and Respect for Privacy
5. Simplify the Application Process
6. Centralise Accessible Support Structures
7. Accelerating and Harmonizing Procedures
8. Provide Support and Guidance for Implementation
9. Proactively Communicate and Heighten Transparency

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Proposers: VSS-UNES-USU

Secunder: FEF