UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LAW
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Master's degree in

European and Global Studies

STUDENTS AT RISK
A NORWEGIAN APPROACH FOR SUPPORTING
ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Supervisor: Prof. FRANCESCA HELM

Candidate: JULIA MARIA THERESE BERGSTEN

Matriculation No.   2050648

A.Y. 2022/2023

Abstract:

This study aims to investigate how the Norwegian Students at Risk (StAR) program works, from primarily a student perspective, and how this further can be understood from internationalization and critical internationalization as the theoretical framework. To gain better insight and understanding of this, the focus has been on the participants of the program, together with a thorough understanding of the term Academic Freedom. The literature review, therefore, consists of information about academic freedom, historically but with a particular focus on the European context as it is of great relevance to the subject matter. The literature review also includes information on internationalization and critical internationalization as the study's theoretical framework, which directly connects to programs similar and comparable to the Students at Risk program. The students involved in the Students at Risk program constitute a central point of the analysis, as a case study and qualitative methodological approach in the form of semi-structured interviews were conducted. The analysis is furthermore based on a thematic analysis, where similarities between the interviews were coded into common themes and then the theoretical framework was applied. The study results show characteristics and essential information about the Students at Risk program, from a practical personal perspective. This furthermore helps us understand how the program works practically and how it is experienced and perceived from the participant's point of view. Subsequently, it also demonstrates how an internationalization perspective as well as an critical internationalization perspective is important in understanding the current global higher education discourse. Furthermore, the result hopes to act as guidance for future implementations of similar programs in other countries and universities.

Keywords:
Students at Risk, Academic Freedom, Critical Internationalization, Qualitative Research, Norway

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

In the spring semester of 2022, I took part in a seminar called *Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Seminar* at the University of Padova. As we were encouraged to explore the Scholars at Risk network as well as the term academic freedom. This experience did not just open my eyes to Scholars at Risk as a network but also to the infringements on academic freedom going on in the world currently. The seminar worked specifically on three different topics: one group worked on the case of Belarus, one group worked on writing a manifesto and one group worked with national students at risk programs. I was in the last group and I personally put most focus on the Students at Risk program that Norway has, but as a group, we also focused on the national students at risk program that exists in Germany. Our aim as a group was to get an understanding of how national students at risk programs work around Europe, in order to further understand the possibilities to implement a similar one in Italy, or at least at the University of Padova. My personal focus was mostly on the Norwegian program, due to my understanding of the Norwegian language and society as a Swedish person. By studying the program on its website, reading published reports, and speaking with representatives from the program and organizations connected with the program- I found a growing interest in the program and felt eager to learn more about it. The topic for this dissertation is thus built on the knowledge I obtained from the Norwegian Students at Risk program while attending the Scholars at Risk Student Advocacy Seminar at the University of Padova.

The argument/rationale that this dissertation has is based on the connection between the idea of academic freedom and the internationalization of higher education. First of all, academic freedom is of huge relevance and importance to today's academic society as well as society as a whole. The increase in conflict, invasion, and discrimination across the world, and close to Europe is affecting different freedoms of individuals, academic freedom being one of those highly affected. Organizations monitoring the state of academic freedom show in recent reports how the European context has changed, to a more aggressive global political situation, and thus also the approach towards academic freedom. Some of these global crucial situations are the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, no matter their geographical and geopolitical location, being in

Europe or not, affects the freedoms and the importance of protecting them, in Europe as well (Scholars at Risk, 2022). There are also threats to academic freedom that are coming from within Europe, which are less related to global political and geopolitical situations. The discourse of populism, such as related political parties as well as populist actions and ideas has been on the rise within Europe for the past few years (United Nations, 2020b). Students have been experiencing fewer options for studies as the closure of courses has been prominent due to political reasons and ideas, which personal attacks on studies also have been. Freedoms related to democracy have thus shown to be threatened in Europe in the last few years.

In response to this, an increasing amount of literature has been produced, and organizations and initiatives have been created and started. However, there are still gaps in research and action on academic freedom, one of them being the involvement and visibility of students. One of the main incentives for this research project is the lack of student involvement and visibility there is in programs and initiatives that have their basis in academic freedom. More often, programs, declarations, and initiatives take scholars and other academics into account in relation to work towards and for academic freedom. Students are left out and/or forgotten- which will be further made visible in the literature review where the common as well as relevant definitions of academic freedom are accounted for. The connection between academic freedom and internationalization is also connected as academic freedom is a concern globally (not only nationally or regionally)- which automatically connects it to the globalization of academics and higher education.

Secondly, the issues that are arising in relation to academic freedom seem to be connected to the globalization of academics, such as mobility programs for students and academic staff, as well as collaborations of translational research. Lastly, the work currently being pursued to protect academic freedom, that is not connected to a single government and or/university- is conducted by organizations and institutions that are international. Scholars at Risk is a great example of this- as it is a global network of higher education institutions that are focusing on academic freedom. Scholars at Risk furthermore divides academic freedom into three main pillars: Learning, advocacy, and protection- all of which are focused on internationally rather than nationally[1]. This thesis specifically puts focus on the protection pillar of academic

---

[1] Scholars at Risk .(2023). *About.* https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/about

freedom, in addition to the specific focus on students. This phenomenon is further rather new and under-researched- which makes a case study on such an organization of this kind more important and interesting.

This kind of research also needs to take a critical approach, as it consists of material based on internationalization. Internationalization itself is often criticized by scholars. The criticism is connected to issues such as Eurocentrism, the relationship between the Global South and the Global North, and the power dynamics between these. These issues are further relevant to this case study and are therefore addressed in the literature review as well as the discussion of the findings.

The purpose and aim of this research are to conduct a case study on the Norwegian Students at Risk program, to focus on a program based on academic freedom where students are the main target and main participants. The method adopted in this thesis is thus a case study, and the research questions that will be addressed and guide the analysis, as well as the research in general are based on the case study of this program as a certain phenomenon within the context of internationalization as well as academic freedom.

The questions this research is looking to answer are:

> *How and why was the Norwegian Students at Risk program created?*
> *Who are the key stakeholders?*
> *What are the characteristics of the Norwegian Students at Risk program?*
> *What are the critical issues that have emerged as seen from the key actors?*
>   - *From the creators' perspective?*
>   - *From the students' perspective?*

These questions are chosen on the basis of trying to explain and present the program as well as possible, in relation to the research being carried out as a case study. The result therefore hopes to show and present the program in such a way that would be helpful for actors considering implementing a program for students at risk.

An overview of the dissertation will now be presented: Chapter one, which is this one, introduces the topic of the research as well as the argument/rationale, aim, and objectives,

and finally, the research questions the study will be based on. The second chapter presents the literature review and theoretical framework. These are internationalization, critical internationalization as well as academic freedom. The third chapter focuses on the methodology and material of this thesis. The idea of a case study as the main methodological approach will be presented, as well as qualitative interviews and the thematic analysis that will be applied to the interviews in the findings section. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study. This chapter is divided into three sections, the first one provides findings from an analysis of two evaluation reports conducted on the Students at Risk Program and an interview with two of the main actors in the program, conducted for this research - in order to provide further information and background on the context of the program. The second section presents some background through relevant organizations that are closely related and connected to the Norwegian Students at Risk program. The third section of the findings will present the main themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with the participants (students) of the program. The fifth chapter will present a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review, as well as some recommendations for other programs. The sixth, and final chapter of this thesis will present the conclusions of the study based on the discussions chapter, as well as recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter will present the literature review as well as the theoretical framework related to this paper. The basis of this research can be found in the relationship between academic freedom and internationalization, as described in the introduction. The case study that this paper is carrying out is concerned with a certain phenomenon that exists in an overlapping context of internationalization and academic freedom. This section will present an overview of the field of internationalization, critical internationalization, and academic freedom- which are important key aspects relevant to this case study.

2.1 Internationalization & Critical Internationalization

2.1.1 Internationalization

As this dissertation seeks to analyze and investigate an organization within higher education, theorizing it according to a critical internationalization perspective is appropriate.

Critical internationalization theory is derived from internationalization theory in higher education. Internationalization in connection with higher education has arisen as a response and a product of globalization. As education has become more and more globalized and connected to other institutions and markets, the internationalization of the field has increased rapidly. The global international markets' involvement with education, therefore, creates internationalization within higher education. Internationalization is not something that developed within higher education alone, it instead originates in other fields and institutions of society such as the economic societal sphere. It is therefore essential to understand and define internationalization within higher education to later be able to understand and apply critical internationalization to issues and contexts concerning higher education in a globalized world (Munusamy & Hashim, 2020).

Internationalization within higher education dates back to a global shift where education was no longer just subject to social rationale and collaborations but to political and economic rationale and competition, this shift is due to education being subject to globalization which has created factors within the higher education system such as multi-national and online education (Munusamy & Hashim, 2020). There are many different definitions of internationalization in higher education, but the most accepted and famous one is by Jane Knight (2003): *Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education* (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

Defining internationalization in higher education is not easy, and this is why there is no clear definition, rather just a somewhat accepted one. The difficulties in defining the term lay in the breadth of the context, where it must be able to be applicable on many different levels- culturally and within different countries and educational systems. Therefore, it is important to use the definition carefully and with the understanding that it does not apply fully to all parts

of the internationalization of higher education, as all actors, activities, stakeholders, beneficiaries, or rationales might not be identified just by this definition. The most important defining factor is that all characteristics of education relate to international dimensions and their part in society (Knight, 2008).

A significant term within the internationalization process is *borderless*. The term borderless connects to internationalization as it refers to the globalization of, in this case, education. It emphasizes the new transnational world where physical borders do not trap the educational system anymore but instead create it. The term is important because it signifies the process as a system without borders. This term is not always useful when explaining the practicalities of the internationalization process within higher education, as it misses the importance of the actual physical borders in some conversations and contexts when they are meaningful in relation to internationalization- like when it comes to funding. The term *cross-border* is therefore also useful in the context of internationalization. Cross-border can be used to explain the international dimension that the internationalization of higher education exists within. As more countries crave and want more options for further education, academic mobility has expanded. Traditionally, it has been students who have been responsible for the mobility of education, as they have moved between countries for educational purposes- but now programs and providers are also moving crossborder in the name of internationalization (Knight, 2008).

Elizabeth Buckner and Sharon Stein discuss what counts as internationalization in *What Counts as Internationalization? Deconstructing the Internationalization Imperative* (2019). Buckner and Stein apply a critical discourse analysis on the presiding discourses concerning internationalization in Western establishments. The scholars further describe how in the current dominant discourses of internationalization, internationalization is considered and promoted as a need, requirement, and aspiration. The type of internationalization that is thus promoted and desired is the technical quantitative understanding of it, which lacks a perspective that is relevant for understanding the full intersectional picture of internationalization. By examining the three different associations: the International Association of Universities (IAU), NAFSA, and the European Association for International Education (EAIE), Buckner and Stein find that discussions regarding power imbalances and global inequality are non-existent. The lack of these perspectives within the associations reproduces the historical and geopolitical inequalities that internationalization possesses. The

associations furthermore lack an understanding, or at least an acknowledgment, of the power dimensions of the world, historically and currently. Privileges that institutions in the Western world obtain in relation to their English-speaking institutions, for example, are completely absent from the internationalization discourse of these Western associations (Buckner & Stein, 2019).

Buckner and Stein also observe that there is a vague understanding of the word international, in the internationalization discourse. What Buckner and Stein can see is that colonial, Eurocentric, and Western ideas are dominating the discourse and the idea of what international means. According to them, the term international in regards to internationalization is divided into two categories: local/national and abroad/foreign. The identity that is referred to and understood as local/national is furthermore understood as homogeneous, non-indigenous, and non-immigrant- which means that the other term is perceived as the opposite. These created identities reproduce inequalities and create a very segregated and non-diverse understanding of the people (as mentioned above-students) taking part in internationalization practices and also of the knowledge that is being taught (Buckner & Stein, 2019).

2.1.2 Critical Internationalization

As Knight, as well as other scholars, has expressed and explained, it is hard to include all aspects of internationalization in one definition or explanation, thus it as a process can be considered to lack an intersectional and inclusive perspective. This is something that critical internationalization theory explores further. The goal of critical internationalization theory is therefore to address and clear up structural inequalities within many contexts of internationalization (Varvus & Pekol, 2015). Furthermore, critical internationalization theory focuses on the division of the Global South and Global North which is often not recognized within the process of internationalization. To disentangle the existing inequalities within internationalization in higher education Frances Vavrus and Amy Pekol (2015) divide internationalization into three dimensions from a critical theoretical perspective: 1) a representational dimension, 2) a political-economic dimension, and 3) a symbolic capital dimension. Varvus and Pekol highlight the importance of addressing the different positions the Global South and the Global North obtain in relation to political economy- which plays a

big role in the process of internationalization. They furthermore argue that internationalization has to be complemented by these dimensions to be able to include systems of education anywhere (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

The representational dimension is connected to globalization, in which representation can be considered a process of globalization, which has become more and more prominent. Due to globalization, representation has created a form of privilege connected to the Western identity, which creates an understanding of the rest of the world as marginalized. This identity is not only connected to colonialism but rather to the placement of other identities the Western identity creates. The representational dimension largely lives on due to marketing and media concerning the globalization of the educational sphere, where the images and way of market education differ significantly in the Global North and Global South. In which the Global North tends to focus on putting themselves in the central position in the narrative of world-class education. These representations of the Global North and the Global South are strongly connected to the market of studying abroad and international university partnerships, creating different positions for universities and scholars of the Global South and the Global North (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

The political-economic dimension also makes a connection between globalization today and the history regarding inequality in the flow of capital. The political-economic dimension puts focus on how references and patterns from a past historical-colonial- context are valid even today when talking about the internationalization of education. English-speaking countries make up the majority of the percentage of being host countries for international students. This is reflected in the market share that these international students bring, which makes the English-speaking world (or more likely- empires) make the most of the dollars found in the *industry*. This makes the history of colonialism and empires repeat itself. Another aspect of the political-economic dimension is how social inequality is reproduced due to how access to quality education is globally unequal. Due to the globalization of the education system- internationalization- people are moving countries and universities to study. Students with more money choose countries that are more appealing, which have been shown to be in the Global North and mostly the English-speaking empires. The flow of money and resources, therefore, continues to gain the universities in the Global North which continue to reproduce the unequal distribution of funds (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

Knowledge economy is also an important term regarding the political-economic dimension of internationalization. When certain countries and educational institutions have more power they are also given interpretive priority on research and development within the educational sphere, and therefore also capitalize on this. This means that the knowledge economy that shapes internationalization to a big extent, is driven by Western perspectives (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

The symbolic capital dimension is moreover concerned with reputation and image. In this particular narrative that means what kind of image and reputation a certain education or university gives you. Some argue that within internationalization, Western education is the ideal and has the highest symbolic capital value. This can be measured by the outcome in relation to one's education. With a Western education, more benefits will appear both work-wise and in the personal life and status of a person. It is clear that Western education holds a symbolic capital value as this seems to be true for whatever educational diploma you hold from a Western university, no matter if the university is highly ranked or not. As the perception is that Western education is better than any other education just because it is Western. A great part of symbolic capital being connected to the Western world is once again, the use of English. As English holds such a strong position in the academic world, English-speaking countries are considered more developed, advanced, and desirable. But also because of the knowledge economy, which largely is produced and capitalized on by the Western world- is the perception of the Western education system viewed as having the most symbolic capital and therefore creates a system that scholars and universities everywhere have to follow as it is seen as the best system (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

Hans de Wit (2019) discusses internationalization within higher education from a critical perspective and also touches on the terms and processes which are very prominent in the literature regarding internationalization but also bring other perspectives. De Wit focuses on some of the implications of internationalization within higher education. One main difference between internationalization currently and in the beginning is the shift from cooperation to competition. As internationalization is a product of globalization, cooperation was an important factor in making internationalization happen within higher education. By exchanging knowledge, cultures, and languages- the institutions within higher education have become more interconnected. Currently, it seems like the competition is more in line with what internationalization has come to be. Universities and institutions need to compete for

crucial resources because of internationalization- like funding and international students. Students within the internationalization network are also affected by this competition, as they have to compete for funding, places at universities, access to the education they wish for, etc. This shift has made the narrative of internationalization more elitist (de Wit, 2019).

Even if many people argue that internationalization has a very Eurocentric and post-colonial vein, the shift of the paradigm from cooperative to competitive feeds into the belief of internationalization to gain a certain group of people in society and to oppress others. The elitist competitive character of internationalization from a university standpoint as we know it today seems to affect the students and staff of these institutions the most, as the competitiveness often seems to revolve around the reputation and image of the universities rather than the quality of the education (de Wit, 2019).

Furthermore, this connects to research done on the perception of internationalization from different universities. De Wit discusses how certain universities, through maintaining the perception of internationalization as important and crucial, also maintain the system of higher education as elitist and oppressive as internationalization has become a product of competition. Upholding the system continues to uphold and put pressure on English as the main language in research and teaching, as research will continue to be focused internationally where publications are of competitive character. The result is thus that the higher education system around the world will continue to become more exclusionary and oppressive. De Wit also makes the distinction between internationalization as a goal and a means. Internationalization is seen by many, according to him, as a goal in and of itself. This is a rather problematic way of looking at internationalization as it removes many aspects within the framework which makes many impacts and processes connected to it invisible (de Wit, 2019). De Wit also argues that the current political climate of the world is not compatible with making internationalization more inclusive and less elitist- yet this political landscape also makes inclusive internationalization more needed than in the past (de Wit, 2019).

Savo Helata and Samia Chasi (2023) focus on a South African decolonial approach to internationalization in *Rethinking and redefining internationalization of higher education in South Africa using a decolonial lens*. Helata and Chasi explain how the definition and understanding of internationalization in South Africa have historically been situated in the

understanding and definition of internationalization as portrayed by the Global North. Helata and Chasi suggest that the idea of internationalization as it is understood in South Africa must be rethought- as it is not applicable to the South African, or global, context of internationalization based on colonial history. The internationalization that exists and is situated in thoughts, ideas, and scholars from the Global North have a Eurocentric core, which translates into the production of knowledge- not only in the Global North itself but also in the Global South. Helata and Chasi claim that Eurocentric knowledge is viewed as the truthful knowledge in South Africa, which produces ideas and knowledge about higher education, and thus internationalization based on these Eurocentric views. Helata and Chasi rather suggest that the reconceptualization of the idea of internationalization in South Africa must be transformed based on a decolonial approach. One crucial aspect of this transformation is the universities themselves. Universities must be on the front line of this decolonial transformation. The knowledge taught and obtained at the universities must move from Eurocentric ideas and knowledge by actively working to include a broader more intersectional pool of knowledge at their university. This means that existing definitions regarding internationalization can not be used at these higher education institutions. Using these definitions would not be to show the whole historical truth, but rather a fabrication of it. Helata and Chasi rather suggest an alternative definition of internationalization that should be used by higher education institutions in South Africa, more catered to and produced from the history of South Africa itself. This definition is based on the colonial history of South Africa which plays a big part in its identity as well as the production of knowledge (Helata & Chasi, 2023). The definition that Helata and Chasi suggests is: *Internationalisation of higher education is a critical and comparative process of the study of the world and its complexities, past and present inequalities and injustices, and possibilities for a more equitable and just future for all. Through teaching, learning, research and engagement, internationalisation fosters epistemic plurality and integrates critical, anti- racist and anti-hegemonic learning about the world from diverse global perspectives to enhance the quality and relevance of education* (Helata & Chasi, 2023, p. 269-270). This definition has three important key components which are crucial for a decolonial approach to internationalization: criticality, plurality, and positionality. The definition that Helata and Chasi suggests has a critical deconstruction of the relevant discourses which has dominated the idea of internationalization. It refers to complexities of the world, past and present as well as originating in a progressive and intersectional viewpoint regarding the production of knowledge as it makes us reflect on the existence of different perspectives globally, and thus

the various knowledge productions that might exist based on geographical identity (Heleta & Chasi, 2023).

Other scholars and articles also explore different paradoxes and dimensions of internationalization. Sharon Stein (2019) discusses an approach to critical internationalization which seeks to problematize neoliberal internationalization in order to fight for more ethical and responsible forms of internationalization. Stein furthermore presents her theoretical framework in regards to critical internationalization where she explores and proposes a strategy of critical internationalization where a neoliberal mindset is absent. She explains how the current discourse surrounding critical internationalization has a neoliberal foundation- which does not get challenged. A neoliberal mindset in regard to critical internationalization looks to the past to promote the future. This is problematic because it is romanticizing an age that had a lot of issues, which are now made invisible. Furthermore, the neoliberal mindset tells us that there is only one option to critical internationalization theory- which Stein questions and challenges. The main issue that lies in the neoliberal view and understanding of critical internationalization is the ignorance towards the Eurocentric, Western, and colonialistic mentality that is imprinted in it. Similarly to the previous scholars mentioned in this chapter, Stein describes internationalization as catering towards the Global North, in which globalization of higher education, internationalization, is seen as created for the Global North and therefore creates a methodology and framework for its benefit and gain only. Stein furthermore connects critical internationalization with internationalization and claims that the neoliberal view that exists currently has the same methods as internationalization theory itself. As the whole system of internationalization is based on the needs and wants of the Western world, a critical internationalization perspective needs to first and foremost dissect and rethink the international arena of higher education and universities, in order to form a theory that is not based on the Western ideas (Stein, 2019).

Stein furthermore suggests a different approach to internationalization and critical internationalization. She does not aim to alter the existing critical internationalization or to remove the theory completely from being used. She suggests adding existing approaches within the critical internationalization theory by then finding a common approach that acts to pluralize and make it into one approach with broader inclusivity and understanding. To do this she uses social cartographies. Stein means that this approach encourages a more dimensional approach that works to trace implicit political and theoretical investments and

assumptions of the different approaches, to better understand the relationships between different approaches, and to more fully appreciate the possibilities and limitations that each can produce (Stein, 2019).

Stein discusses two different social cartographies, one that focuses on mapping ideology to measure the level of change from theories. Another that focuses on mapping different levels of intervention. The first cartography seeks to explore different ideologies and theories to place and position critical internationalization studies. Stein (2019) focuses on three different theoretical approaches- liberal, anti-oppressive, and decolonial. The theoretical approach most applicable to this study, according to Stein's research on cartographies, is the anti-oppressive internationalization theory. This approach in relation to critical internationalization seeks to view and aim internationalization to be for *global solidarity.* What makes this approach applicable to this particular paper is its connection to the Scholars at Risk network. Stein explains that this approach focuses on theories of an anti-oppressive character that tend to focus on problems that are related to exploitation, competition, and silencing- by problematizing capitalism, racism, nationalism, and sexism. Stein takes the Scholars at Risk (SAR) network as an example as this specific approach and aim of internationalization focus on empowering individuals that are situated in a marginalized position due to different reasons (Stein, 2019).

The main incitement of this approach is to look at inequalities globally- currently and historically. By applying the kind of internationalization this approach suggests and wants it can work as a way for marginalized groups and individuals to be empowered. To make this happen, internationalization has to make resources available and mobilized strategically in order to make a systemic change (Stein, 2019). An example of this is thus the Scholars at Risk network. The Scholars at Risk network does have the kind of approach that is comparable with the cartography for global solidarity of internationalization- as it aims to protect and encourage scholars in marginalized positions in order to make a change. Another example that Stein gives in relation to this cartography is student protests. This is also highly comparable and applicable to this specific study, as it aims to do research on a network where student activism, and therefore protests, are the base of the selection process of the methodology. The belief system of this approach is therefore that internationalization can be a means to reach global justice (Stein, 2019).

This thesis aims to use critical internationalization theory with intersectional eyes, building on the points and framework made by Stein. As she positions the SAR network within the framework of internationalization for global solidarity, this thesis will build upon and apply that in the material collected in the analysis. The internationalization of global solidarity is quite compatible with a belief in academic freedom and human rights- as it aims to make internationalization as equal and diverse as possible. Stein furthermore discusses the methodology of this particular framework, which is based on the recruitment of students- in which diverse recruitment is to be preferred and aimed towards. However, she also problematizes this approach, by asking further questions that are meant to keep the understanding of internationalization intersectional and not stuck in one single view independent of context, situation, and future. A decolonial framework in regard to internationalization also aims to break down and dissect the understanding that the West is the central point of higher education- which can be argued to be representative of the Students at Risk program as well, therefore will this approach also be used in this thesis in order to analyze the material collected through the interviews (Stein, 2019).

Sharon Stein and Vanessa Oliveira de Andreotti explore how internationalization is connected to the experience of racism in *Cash, competition, or charity: international students and the global imaginary* (2015). Stein and Oliveira de Andreotti state that the Western supremacy that creates the perception of the West is at the peak of the hierarchy of education globally, which they use to recruit international students within the context of internationalization- also consists of the racism international students might experience when they arrive. They present the term *the dominant global imaginary* and explain it as a process in which the epistemology and ontology of the West are applied globally and further produce the image of the West as superior to everything else, which includes education. This dominant global imaginary translates into the process by which students from the Global South come to the Global North to study, and how racist experiences are often part of this. Stein and Oliveira de Andreotti state that these racialized logics are part of the dominant global imaginary that puts the West at the top of the global hierarchy. This presents yet another challenge within the context of internationalization. Not only does the dominant global imagination create racist and discriminatory behavior against international students at the universities in the Global North, but it also welcomes this type of behavior in regard to its efforts to change the narrative. Stein and Oliveira de Andreotti further argue that the foundation of this issue, and the only way to change and obtain a more ethical approach to internationalization in regards

to this issue, is not only to change the vocabulary that is rooted in this dominant global imaginary but study and analyze it as well in order to hopefully abolish the grammar that creates this dominant global imaginary (Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2015).

2.2 Academic freedom

Academic freedom is currently experiencing threats in many different contexts, and Europe is no exception. This chapter, therefore, aims to give a brief overview of the history of Academic freedom outlining commonly presented issues, narratives, and definitions in relation to it in order to dissect what Academic freedom means. Following this, the section will go through how it is currently relevant to a European context and why that is.

The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) project was developed in 2017 for consultation. In 2019 it was given financial support from a number of researchers and institutions, among them the Scholars at Risk network. Because of this, the first index was able to be published in 2020. The AFI is further based on five indicators: freedom of academic exchange and dissemination, institutional autonomy, campus integrity, freedom to research and teaching, and freedom of academic and cultural expression[2]

The current state of the world in regard to academic freedom is shown in the Academic Freedom Index (AFI) project of 2023 conducted by the University of Gothenburg and the University of FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg. The updated index includes 179 countries and presents certain countries where academic freedom is surely on a decline. The index further introduces who and how people are affected by the decline of academic freedom. In the 2023 index, 22 countries are specifically recognized as having a substantial decrease in academic freedom in the last ten years, affecting over 50% of the population of the entire world. In comparison, there are five countries that have seen an increase in academic freedom compared to ten years ago, which due to their size as smaller countries only benefit 0.7 % of the world's population [3].

---

[2] Friedrich- Alexander- Universität & V- Dem Institute .(2023). *Academic Freedom Index.* https://academic-freedom-index.net/

[3] Friedrich- Alexander- Universität. V- Dem Institute .(2023). *Academic Freedom Index- Update 2023.* https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf

In general, academic freedom has ceased to develop in most of the countries considered in the index which means that individuals experience less academic freedom. In fact, the average person experiences the same amount of academic freedom as the level registered four decades ago. One update that is specific to the 2023 index is the rise in the number of democratic countries that have experienced a decrease in academic freedom[4].

2.2.1 Definitions of Academic Freedom

This section of this chapter will present famous and important definitions of academic freedom. This is an important aspect to include as it introduces and presents the context in which the Norwegian Students at Risk program is rather situated within. This section will thus provide an understanding of what academic freedom is in order to understand why it is important and related to the phenomenon which is studied in this case study.

In 1997, there was a conference in Paris of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in which a document titled *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* was produced. The motive of the conference and thus the document was primarily recommendations in regard to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. The recommendations are furthermore also based on Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights from 1966. This means that freedom and equality in regard to higher education and academia are the centers of attention in the recommendation. The document thus includes discussions of different terms connected to higher education institutions, freedom, and equality. The recommendations apply to all Member States of the United Nations and include as mentioned relevant terms, as well as guidance, initiatives, and policies the Member States are proposed to adopt. Institutional autonomy is further one of the terms that are mainly discussed and referred to in regard to duties, responsibilities, and rights. UNESCO is eager and makes the Member States aware of how institutional autonomy should be tackled from the perspective of higher education universities, taking everyone included in the discourse into account and consideration. UNESCO refers to institutional autonomy as

---

4

Friedrich- Alexander- Universität. V- Dem Institute .(2023). *Academic Freedom Index- Update 2023*. https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf

interdependent with academic freedom, as academic freedom within institutions is upheld through autonomy. In order to ensure academic freedom, Member States are called upon to protect themselves from threats to their autonomy. Autonomy is mentioned as important as it plays the role of a means to reach and uphold academic freedom. The liberties and ebulliences that come with academic freedom demand someone to take responsibility for the duties it takes to reach and maintain it. Institutional Autonomy is considered such a *duty* that Member States and their higher education authorities need to take responsibility for (UNESCO,1998).

The document of recommendations thereafter discusses academic freedom. Academic freedom is here connected to individual rights, civil rights, publication rights, and the international exchange of information (UNESCO, 1998). The definition of academic freedom that came from this conference, and was agreed upon unanimously by UNESCO reads: *The freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely opinions about the academic institution or system in which one works, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies*[5]. This definition has since been the most cited one referring to academic freedom and is also considered one of the most well-known definitions. Institutions and organizations working with and towards academic freedom, as well as single scholars, can be found using the definition. The Scholars At Risk network is one of the organizations which works with academic freedom and uses the definition provided by UNESCO in 1997[6].

Academic freedom is furthermore explained in regard to the means it takes to maintain its existence in the higher education context. As presented above, the UNESCO recommendations discuss the responsibilities and duties it takes in order for these freedoms to survive. Not only are specific duties and responsibilities put on Member States and bigger institutions but also on the personnel working in academic institutions, such as professors and teachers. A responsibility that falls on the staff working within the higher education institutions according to the recommendations by UNESCO, is furthermore to not take academic freedom for themselves for granted, but instead conduct their work with academic

---

[5] UNESCO .(2023). *Protecting academic freedom is as relevant as ever.*
https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/protecting-academic-freedom-relevant-ever, para. 5

[6] Scholars at Risk (2023) *FAQs.* https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/faqs/#2

freedom as a foundation in everything they do as higher education personnel. This way one understands that academic freedom continues and is maintained by individual effort rather than just existing in the context without any personal responsibility attached to it. The recommendations furthermore extend to specifically include women, people with disabilities, and people working halftime- making the definition and understanding of the topic more intersectional (UNESCO, 1998).

In 2020, however, the United Nations Human Rights Office issued a report on the promotion and protection of academic freedom. This report discusses the definition of academic freedom and states that one single definition issued by one institution is not efficient as it makes the understanding of the term less intersectional and with less chance to be applied to all cases relevant to it. They instead proposed a general idea of how to view academic freedom, based on research done by the Committee of Economic, Social, and Cultural Right (United Nations, 2020a): *Members of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation or writing. Academic freedom includes the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the State or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction. The enjoyment of academic freedom carries with it obligations, such as the duty to respect the academic freedom of others, to ensure the fair discussion of contrary views, and to treat all without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds* (Economic and Social Council, 1999, p. 9).

As this is an understanding of academic freedom published by the United Nations which is a global institution as late as 2020, it is an important pillar in understanding how academic freedom can be reasonably defined- or at least understood even if the recommendations from 1997 are more frequently mentioned. The observations made by the responsible UN committee who released the statement are an important foundation to further understand focused acts and strategies on academic freedom from institutions around the world, and most relevant in Europe and the European Union. The important parts to take into account from the UN observation are furthermore that everyone within the academic perspective/community is included in the academic freedom context, not only professors, teachers, or students but also

faculty staff, and should protect ideas and research conducted by these individuals in regard to human rights law. No one should thus feel scared or threatened in regard to their academic activities (United Nations, 2020a). Academic freedom is further frequently discussed by scholars in different contexts. Therefore, the research field will be investigated to understand the context in which Europe and the European institutions and perspectives relevant to this paper's case study are situated.

In the publication *Promoting Higher Education- A Guide for Discussion* (2020) Scholars at Risk explain that its understanding of higher education values is made up of five core values that are based on a shared understanding of the matter by UNESCO instruments, statements by civil society and international human rights law. Academic freedom is one of these core values, together with Equitable Access, Accountability, Social Responsibility, and Institutional Autonomy. Similar to what the United Nations Human Rights Office stated regarding a possible definition of academic freedom, the SAR publication states that a precise definition is impossible. The publication discusses the two main different approaches and views to academic freedom, the more traditional view and the more modern contemporary view: *socially engaged* academic freedom. One could claim that the latter- the modern view- is a bit critical of the traditional view. The traditional view can be explained as the view that is most often connected to the definitions of academic freedom and what academic freedom is most often easily explained as. The report furthermore shows and determines what is considered *academic* in the traditional view of academic freedom and therefore can and should be protected by the practices of academic freedom. According to the report, four characteristics can be used to explain the traditional view of academic freedom:

1. Academic journal articles are seen as the academic setting of the statement in question. Settings such as newspaper columns and public blogs are not seen as academic.
2. A data-heavy analysis is seen as the academic format of the expression.
3. The academic target audience is people in the higher education sector
4. The location of the academic work can be within or outside the classroom.

These characteristics are important as they also explain the limitations of the traditional view of academic freedom, which the contemporary view aims to challenge. The modern view of academic freedom is often referred to as *socially engaged* as it aims to incorporate areas that

should be protected under academic freedom but that are not under the traditional definition due to its strict limitations. Furthermore, the socially engaged view of academic freedom thus primarily says that the traditional view of academic freedom oversimplifies situations which therefore excludes topics, subjects, and people within these that are subject to threats and persecution. The main criticism from the contemporary socially engaged view of academic freedom has to do with the lack of intersectionality and the strictly limited view of who gets to be included. The contemporary version is more relevant to this study. The definition of academic freedom in the Students At Risk network is no single definition, and how the students that are chosen to participate are chosen is not by one simple rule or one characteristic, it is more individualized based on an intersectional view and mindset (Scholars at Risk, 2020).

What characterizes the contemporary view of academic freedom- other than criticizing the limitations of the traditional view- is mostly the definition of *academic*. The view of the contemporary is furthermore, as earlier also referred to as, a social-engaged viewpoint and approach. Thus, the characteristics that are the basis of academic freedom traditionally do not apply here in the same strict manners, instead what is considered academic is more based on embracing social responsibility- which erases the idea of putting limits on what is considered academic in the way that the traditional view does on academic freedom (Scholars at Risk, 2020).

Karran (2009) claims that the threat to academic freedom can be considered similar to the threat of terror to society (Karran, 2009). It is important to consider the United States when speaking about the background of academic freedom, as acts and legislation coming from the government of the United States have seemed to affect academic freedom not only nationally but internationally, especially since the events on September 11, 2001. This is important to mention and understand as this narrative currently translates to Europe in a sense, in which Russian students and researchers have been subject to the dismissal of academic opportunities in Europe because of its government's decision to invade Ukraine (Burakovsky, 2023).

One can also view academic freedom as a necessity rather than a right or a privilege. Thomas Docherty discusses just this in *Academics and Other Freedoms* (2016). Docherty expresses how academic freedom is a necessity for academic communities to continue and thus for all scholars to even exist. Docherty furthermore explains how the existence of academic

freedom, therefore, affects not only the people within academics but also people and the population in general. As academic freedom is a necessity for scholars and academics to exist- it is also a foundation for higher education institutions to exist, which affects most people in society more or less. Docherty, therefore, connects attacks on academic freedom to attacks on freedom and democracy in general. Furthermore, Docherty uses the term academic freedom to explain how democracy and injustice are being attacked- by hiding attacks on the greater democracy by disguising them as attacks on *just* academic freedom (Docherty, 2016).

2.2.2 Academic Freedom in Europe

2.2.2.1 Timeline of the Section

Academic freedom in relation to Europe is of interest in this thesis as the case study is based on a program with these characteristics. Speaking about academic freedom and Europe there are a few documents that are very prominent in regard to the discourse and the historical as well as current situation of academic freedom and precautions on an institutional level. This section will go through these from a recent time period, starting in 1980 and until the present. The literature review of academic freedom in Europe will therefore take off 1980, and more specifically 1988- speaking about the *Magna Charta Universitatum* which is a key pillar in the context of academic freedom in Europe. The year 2018 will also be mentioned in connection with this aspect as the Magna Charta Universitatum was re-signed at this point. The timeline will continue with the year 2009 when the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU* was entered into force by the Treaty of Lisbon. Next in this timeline, is the year 2010, when a report was published by the League of European Research Universities with the aim of protecting academic freedom in Europe. Furthermore, in 2019 a joint statement by All European Academies (ALLEA), European University Association (EUA), and Science Europe was published discussing the possible risks of infringement of democracy in the European Union. In 2020 furthermore, the Italian BFUG Secretariat released a statement on *Academic freedom* in collaboration with the European Higher Education Area, and the Bologna Process. In 2020, the *Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Researc*h was published and adopted by the EU, which is further discussed in this section. The next document discussed in this section is the 2022 *Free to Think* report from the Scholars at Risk network- which is further compared to the Free to Think report published by the network in 2015. In 2022 moreover, a statement was released by the European Commission and was

aimed at the European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee, The Council, and The Committee of the Regions on a European Strategy for Universities. The statement promotes the ability and power universities hold to ensure a *European Way of Life.* From 2022, the *Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation* will also be discussed in this section. The declaration further discusses the Bonn Declaration. After this declaration is discussed, the timeline will briefly jump to 2018 to discuss the report on *Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action* by the European Parliament. This document is discussed at this point in this section as it introduced the topic of the document that is presented following this report, which is a document by the European Commission from 2023 called *Tackling R&I foreign interference.* Next in the timeline is a 2023 brief from the European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit titled *The State of play of academic freedom in the EU Member States Overview of de facto trends and developments.* From 2023, moreover, will a study called *How academic freedom is monitored- Overview of methods and procedures* from the European Parliament and the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology be explored further.

2.2.2.2 Review of the Material

Academic freedom as an acknowledgment by higher education institutions in Europe dates back to 1988 when the *Magna Charta Universitatum* was signed due to the 900th-year celebration of the University of Bologna. The document involves 388 universities located within Europe, as well as outside. The Magna Charta Universitatum is meant to act as guidance for universities' governance and self-awareness onwards as it holds propositions on academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum, 2020). The 1988 document contains four fundamental principles which build on the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Furthermore, the four fundamental principles presented in this document define the university (as an institution) as central to society and its culture. It is important that the research conducted have to be independent of, (intellectual and moral) economics, ideology, and politics in order to keep its position as a fair and central institution in society. Furthermore, scientific progress and developments, and demand from society are dependent on the unification between teaching and research. Moreover, higher education institutions as well as the state authorities must protect and promote the freedom of research and education. The sharing of knowledge

between teachers and students is fundamental in order to develop knowledge and research further. Lastly, the European humanistic tradition is dependent on the higher education institutions in Europe. Universal knowledge should be a goal for these institutions, which requires boundaries connected to geography and politics to be dismissed. Cultures and societies should thereafter be promoted and encouraged to influence each other in order to exchange knowledge (Sveriges Universitets & Högskoleförbund, 1999).

The goals that are presented in the 1988 document further need tools as means to reach these goals prior presented. The means are customized based on the time that the goals were established, to make them as effective as possible at that time. First of all, it is important to make sure that there are resources available within the higher education system and academic community to support and promote freedoms connected to higher education. Secondly, the recruitment process of personnel within the academic community should be based on the perception that research and teaching are interconnected. Universities should with the resources that they have protect academic freedom in regard to the students that attend the university as well as make sure that the education they receive is fair and qualified. European universities especially, should use their knowledge to share and exchange information with their European counterparts in order to create and build more knowledge. This initiative further calls for equality in the recruitment process as well as fair and equal resources and employment conditions within the universities for staff all over European universities (Sveriges Universitets & Högskoleförbund, 1999).

In 2018 it was considered that the Magna Charta Universitatum document needed to be revisited. As it was signed by the rectors and universities in 1988 when the means to reach the goals were based on the context which they were in at the time- with other challenges than in the current context. A group was appointed from multiple different universities with various nationalities in order to review the document and propose changes to the means- in order to reach the goals set in 1988- from the current challenges and situations in the world. The updated document does not add any fundamental principles but simply acknowledges the current state of the world and the differences in society from when the document was first signed. The document is therefore helpful in ways that tell us how to tackle the current state to reach the goals set as fundamental principles back in 1988. Not only has the world changed in regards to ideology, conflicts, politics, economic positions, etc- but also in regard to the diversity of students, amount of academic staff as well as institutions. One of the biggest

changes to society in connection with higher education since 1988, although, can be considered technology. All of these changes have resulted in a distrust in academia, which means that new directions and means must be introduced in order to reach the goals of 1988 which are still as relevant and important today in the twenty-first century (Sveriges Universitets & Högskoleförbund, 1999).

Academic freedom in Europe is often connected to a Western idea of the term. The understanding of it is often that academic freedom exists in Europe, and the threat to it exists in other parts of the world. This relates to the view of the Global South and Global North- and how academic freedom is often portrayed as something taken for granted in the Western world, by the Western world itself (Karran, 2009). But as a matter of fact, academic freedom is a growing necessity, and interest within Europe has been on the rise in the last decade. In 2009, The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU was entered into force by the Treaty of Lisbon, although it was already proclaimed in 2000. Article 13 of the Charter protects academic freedom as a fundamental right in the European Union. So how has the term been addressed since then? (Vrielink, Lemmens & Parmentier, 2010).

In 2010, a report was published by the *League of European Research Universities* which aimed to present academic freedom through different dimensions in order to create a foundation on which policymakers could look in order to form policies and legislation to promote and protect academic freedom in Europe. Most importantly, the report does not consider academic freedom a goal but rather a context that academic institutions and thus its individuals need to exist in, in order to protect current and future research. The report states that academic freedom as a fundamental right as established by the EU a year prior was at this point not obvious. Even after the implementation of the charter, research had still been subject to scrutiny on a legal level as well as a public one. This suggests that it takes more than a charter to implement an understanding and change of behavior as well as a state where academic freedom is self-evident. Therefore, the authors and universities writing the report provide advice to make sure that Article 13 of the Charter for fundamental rights is implemented by institutions concerned with academia (Vrielink, Lemmens & Parmentier, 2010).

The concerns that are introduced in regard to the possible risks of infringement of democracy in the European Union are moreover based on a joint statement from All European

Academies (ALLEA), European University Association (EUA), and Science Europe from 2019. The statement underlines the importance of academic freedom and institutional autonomy from an academic and research perspective- as the organizations making the statement represent this perspective themselves. The statement furthermore calls on governments to protect and promote academic freedom and institutional autonomy within Europe, with the motivation that governments have the most power. Through legislative power, economic power through funding opportunities, and authority, it can set cultural standards in regard to academic freedom and higher education. The aim of this statement is to draw attention toward governments instead of universities, which can be explained by its origin as written by educational institutions (All European Academies, European University Association & Science Europe, 2019). It can be somewhat confusing who possesses the most responsibility and power in regard to the discourse of academic freedom in Europe, as various institutions and statements seem to direct the responsibility and attention in different directions. This can, in other words, become somewhat problematic as the shift of responsibility between institutions can result in a situation where no one takes authority over the discourse. It is therefore important to consider different documents, reports, and statements in regard to the context of academic freedom, as this might help to get a more clear picture of how the context of academic freedom is situated in Europe. In order to further understand the context in which the Students at Risk program exist within and on what premises.

In 2020, the Italian BFUG Secretariat released a statement on *Academic freedom* in collaboration with the European Higher Education Area, and the Bologna Process. The statement is meant to provide understanding in regard to the importance of academic freedom to higher education in Europe, and produce further assistance and work on the topic. The statement describes academic freedom and its importance in regard to other concepts, such as democracy- which is a recurring perception in the context of academic freedom. As earlier stated, an understanding of what academic freedom means and who it targets differentiates between scholars. This statement which comes from and targets institutions within the EU specifically, describes academic freedom as *Academic freedom can be understood to comprise the freedom to learn, teach, and research, with each of these freedoms entailing the freedom to think, question, and share ideas, both inside and outside the higher education sector* (Italian BFUG Secretariat, European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process, 2020, p. 3). The statement calls on public authorities and higher education governance to ensure,

support and promote academic freedom (Italian BFUG Secretariat, European Higher Education Area, Bologna Process, 2020).

The *Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research* (2020) adopted by the EU additionally addresses the importance and relevance of scientific research for society to further advance society. The declaration focuses on the freedom of scientific research, which can be understood as a pillar within the concept of academic freedom. The definition of freedom of scientific research further reads as follows: *It encompasses the right to freely define research questions, choose and develop theories, gather empirical material, and employ sound academic research methods, to question accepted wisdom and bring forward new ideas. It entails the right to share, disseminate and publish the results thereof openly, including through training and teaching. It is the freedom of researchers to express their opinion without being disadvantaged by the system in which they work or by governmental or institutional censorship and discrimination. It is also the freedom to associate with professional or representative academic bodies* (Bonn Declaration, 2020, p. 2). This definition and approach are furthermore important to consider and understand as it is signed by all Member States in the EU, and touches on certain aspects and factors of freedom within higher education that might be forgotten or made invisible in some discourses discussing merely academic freedom. The perception of freedom of scientific research as adopted and established by the declaration is part of the EU's fundamental rights considered a universal public good (Bonn Declaration, 2020). Furthermore, governments are once again mentioned as key actors in regard to the protection of freedom.

In regard to the understanding of academic freedom, Scholars at Risk have been conducting a project every year since 2015. The project called *Academic Freedom Monitoring Project* is central to the Scholars at Risk understanding of academic freedom. Academic freedom, or the abstinence of it, can to some extent be understood from numbers and data of attacks. The monitoring project brings together six different natures of attacks on academic freedom and their magnitude By monitoring the attacks themselves, responses to them are hoped to be easier developed in order to protect the academic communities affected. The variety of attacks that are considered in the project is furthermore: Killings/violence/disappearances, Wrongful prosecution, Retaliatory discharge/loss of position/expulsion from the study,

Wrongful imprisonment/detention, Restrictions on travel or movement and other significant events[7].

The project is releasing a report every year called *Free to Think*, which presents the findings in connection with the six different types of attacks identified. The Free to Think report from 2022 is important to consider in relation to properly understanding what the main threats currently to academic freedom mean for academic freedom in Europe. The Free to Think report presents Killings, Violence, Disappearances, Wrongful Imprisonment, Prosecution, Loss of Position, and Travel Restrictions as the main threats to academic freedom. Scholars at Risk furthermore highlight individual attacks which put the academic freedom threats and punishments in practical perspective and give us an understanding of where the attacks happen, to what extent, and thus also the methods of execution. In the report from 2015, the main countries mentioned as victims of attacks on academic freedom are mainly countries outside of Europe. Kenya, Mexico, China, and Myanmar are mentioned with particular incidents connected to attacks on academic freedom- all of whom are outside of Europe. The data collected on incidents related to academic freedom is reported by the Scholar at Risk monitoring project which lists incidents by type, date, university, and country. The table of incidents from 2015 (which is the first Free to Think report), does not list any countries within Europe, except for Turkey which is partly geographically within Europe (Scholars at Risk, 2015). This differs from the Free to Think report from 2022, in which countries within Europe frequently show up on the table of incidents. Apart from cases in Turkey, Ukraine is most prominently mentioned followed by Greece, Belarus, and the United Kingdom (Scholars at Risk, 2022). This shows a distinct difference between 2015 and currently, which gives us a clear indication of why academic freedom is of increased importance and relevance in Europe.

European institutional responses to academic freedom, confirm that Europe has been getting more involved in the context of academic freedom recently. Even if European countries still often act as receiving states in regard to the relocation of victims of academic freedom through for example the Scholars at Risk network, the recent political changes in the global arena have produced a growing concern and interest in the theme. In regard to the increase in Ukrainian incidents, it is clear that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the main reason for the

---

[7] Scholars at Risk (2023) *Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.*
https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academic-freedom-monitoring-project/

increase in incidents (Scholars at Risk, 2022). Armed conflict within and closer to Europe might therefore make the threat feel closer and thus increase prevention and tactics within Europe. A rise in nationalistic and populistic views and ideology within Europe can also explain the current increase in interest in academic freedom. Belarus can especially be connected to this kind of theory. Since the Belarusian election in 2020, global institutions have called on Belarus to protect and respect human rights. In the aftermath of the election in 2020, Belarusian authorities have attacked academic freedom by targeting journalist students, human rights defenders, and members of strike committees on political grounds, it has led to the imprisonment of numerous political prisoners. Tactics used by the Belarusian government to further infringe on human rights, and academic freedom, have been torture and degrading treatment of peaceful protesters as well as enforced disappearances (United Nations, 2020b). According to the academic freedom index from 2023, Belarus is at the bottom 10% of the index, meaning that the level of academic freedom in Belarus is one of the lowest in the world. In regards to a diagram that shows the increase and decrease in academic freedom in 2021-2022, Belarus is at the top of the decreasing score[8].

The rise of populism is furthermore relevant for Europe in general, as populist parties all over are getting more support and votes and thus influence, this can be demonstrated in for example the Swedish 2022 elections where the populist party Swedish Democrats got the second most votes[9].

The discourse that Europe is the helping institution, and countries outside of the EU (most prominently the Global South) are the targets for threats to academic freedom and human rights is therefore starting to fade. Newly published reports, documents, and statements from different European countries and regions as well as the European Union itself confirm this mode of thought. The European Commission released a statement in 2022 aimed at the European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee, The Council, and The Committee of the Regions on a European Strategy for Universities. The statement promotes the ability and power universities hold to ensure a *European Way of Life* (European

---

[8]

Friedrich- Alexander- Universität. V- Dem Institute .(2023). *Academic Freedom Index- Update 2023*.
https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf

[9] Valmyndigheten .(2023). *Valresultat 2022*.
https://www.val.se/valresultat/riksdag-region-och-kommun/2022/valresultat.html

Commission, 2022a, p. 1). Furthermore, The European Commission puts universities at the center of this European way of life and emphasizes the importance of higher education institutions in Europe for the whole societal improvement and survival of the EU. The statement claims that the importance of universities does not only relate to fields of academia or innovation but is also crucial to fields related to diversity, equality, and big societal challenges. Furthermore, universities are mentioned as very important institutions for the European Union's political agenda. The statement proposes a certain framework where four main goals/objectives are introduced. These objectives are:

- Make the European dimension stronger in regard to higher education and research
- Place support on universities within the EU as pillars in the creation of the *European way of life*
- The European Union's global role and leadership should be driven by the universities
- Universities should be included and involved in the digital transactions and green shift

To reach these objectives within the timeframe that is set (mid-2024), a strategy is further developed. The central point of the strategy is the close cooperation between the different levels of the EU. The statement makes it clear that policies within national, regional, and institutional levels need to be prioritized towards these goals- Member States and universities are thus expected to have closer cooperation among each other as well as with European Union institutions. Great awareness is also drawn toward the economic ambitions of the strategy. International programs which are EU funded seem to be perceived and understood as very beneficial and are further promoted by the Commission. Other than promoting the power of EU funding, though, they also urge the individual Member States to support international cooperation by aiming state funds toward higher educational programs.

The statement moreover raises concerns about the current state of academic freedom within European universities and raises concerns about democracy in Europe. Universities are further described as a foundation for the survival and development of democracy within the European Union, as the Commission identifies a growing threat to democratic values in the last few years. Democratic values, such as freedom, tolerance, citizenship, diversity, equality, and critical thinking are understood by the Commission as most thriving at universities- which means that universities need to be actively protected and nurtured. Therefore, the European Union itself as well as the Member States are asked to defend and protect their universities in order to maintain and progress democracy in the EU. A main pillar in doing

this is funding. Member States and the EU are not only asked to aim policies towards this but also funding opportunities (European Commission, 2022a).

The need for freedom of scientific research to be enforced as a common value and principle has moreover been on the political and EU agenda after and because of the Bonn Declaration. The *Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation* (2022) further discusses the Bonn Declaration and scientific research freedom. The declaration is the product of a conference organized by The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It aims to create and promote a stronger relationship and international cooperation between countries globally through a more holistic approach in relation to gender inequalities in research and innovation (R&I). The Marseille Declaration presents *The development of the Union's key principles and values for international R&I cooperation* (The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022: 3) in which scientific research and academic freedom are mentioned as core principles and needs in international research and innovation. Furthermore, the Marseille declaration suggests that the European Union enters into dialogue with its main international partners about research, innovation, and higher education cooperation, in order to ensure global solidarity that protects from dangerous foreign interference (The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022).

Furthermore, the context in which academic freedom needs to exist is not limited to one area, as the current state of academia and education is very much globalized. Therefore, is it important to not only work with and towards academic freedom within the area in which documents and reports on academic freedom might be published (such as the European Union) but also work towards promoting and protecting academic freedom globally. Members of the European Parliament published a report on the *Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action* in 2018. This report discusses academic freedom in relation to the European Union's foreign policy and furthermore adopts recommendations to make academic freedom a human right. The report refers to different types of treaties, arrangements, frameworks, declarations, etc to get support on why and how academic freedom should and must be seen as a human right in EU foreign policy. The view to make academic freedom a human right does not come out of the blue. The report itself is based on documents supporting academic freedom as a human right (European Parliament, 2018), and the United Nations, as we know, does also support academic freedom as a human right. Furthermore, the

European Union's foreign policy is highly relevant to the discussion of its stance on academic freedom. The topic of foreign interference is on top of that highly publicized and considered.

Tackling R&I foreign interference document (2022) by the European Commission affirms that academic freedom is greatly valued in regard to strategies and guidelines for dealing with foreign interference. The report includes a section where academic freedom is explained and defined. This section is very interesting as it applies the concept of academic freedom to the particular aspects the report touches upon rather than an overall definition or understanding of the concept. Thus, the report discusses academic freedom in relation to the risks that follow international cooperation and exchange. Internationalization and academic freedom are mentioned as interconnected in this discourse, as the widespread internationalization within the EU is central to the current position of academia in the EU. The change to liberal democracy that has been present over the last few years, such as the case of growing populism and nationalism, also changes the approach to and for higher education. Academic freedom, therefore, needs to be addressed differently in Europe currently (European Commission, 2022b).

The State of play of academic freedom in the EU Member States Overview of de facto trends and developments (2023) brief by the European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit suggests that there are some current increasing threats within European Member States in regard to academic freedom, the main threats currently identified are *Political interference in determining which academic fields are scientific and which are not* (European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit 2023:2), *Governmental interference threatening institutional autonomy* (European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit, 2023:2), *Institutional leadership and management threats to academic freedom* (European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit, 2023:3), *Growing civil society threats to academic freedom* (European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit, 2023:3), *Growing private sector threats to academic freedom* (European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit, 2023:3) and *Threats to conditions for academic freedom* (European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit, 2023, p. 3).

Many of the documents issued by institutions within the European Union have discussed the ongoing threats to academic freedom as well as the responsible institutions for maintaining it

as well as how it is supposed to be maintained. In 2023 the European Parliament issued a study from the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology titled *How academic freedom is monitored- Overview of methods and procedures.* This study addresses the increasing interest in academic freedom by European institutions but questions if this increase can result in changes in laws and regulations concerning academic freedom within the European Union. On that note, the study calls for the development of a course of action to ensure the monitoring of changes in academic freedom within European Union Member States. The study analyzes different existing methods of monitoring academic freedom, such as the Academic Freedom Monitoring Project by Scholars at Risk, the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), Freedom House's Freedom in the World (FIW) report, the European University Association's University Autonomy Scorecard, the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Human Rights, Institutional investigations by the Academic Freedom Committee of the American Association of University Professors, the Joint International Labour Organization–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART), case studies on different states from experts as well as academic surveys. The study concludes that the existing methods of reviewing academic freedom are often not consistent and are repeatedly analyzed with another topic as interconnected rather than by itself (for example human rights) which might take the focus of academic freedom. Another common aspect of these monitoring methods is to centralize certain fragments of academic freedom- such as the comparison of nations. This method has the potential to make the understanding of academic freedom purely data-based, which can result in the loss of information on what is outside of the numbers of focus. Other methods that purely focus on different characteristics of academic freedom tend to make the understanding of it less intersectional and are thus unable to explain and present academic freedom in full detail (Kováts & Rónay, 2023).

After analyzing current methods for monitoring academic freedom, the study highlighted aspects that they see as missing in the existing ones. Recommendations on further aspects to consider to develop a more comprehensive monitoring procedure within the European Union are thereafter presented. The study calls for an instrument to be put in place to monitor possible changes to academic freedom within the Member States. The study recommends this instrument to be: Systematic, comprehensive, formative, independent, able to integrate existing methods in a new methodology, and finally be able to contextualize existing results

in order to discover alarming tendencies and make them clear early in the process (Kováts & Rónay, 2023).

To incorporate these objectives into policy, the study gives policy recommendations and alternatives for further examination. The policy alternatives include making the juridical definitions and framework stronger in order to ensure that Member States do not change these based on current political ideology or interest. Moreover, the study recommends a policy to be put in place to create a larger collaboration between the European education area (EEA, the European higher education area (EHEA), and the European research area (ERA) in order to create an independent monitoring system based on their individual ones. The development of the monitoring instrument would also benefit from increased involvement by stakeholders as well as developing methods in order to make academic integrity stronger. The independent monitoring procedure is furthermore promoted as creating various possibilities, from obtaining a self-assessment course of action, like the United Nations, as well as self-assessment like a quality accreditation process. Self-evaluation within the academic community is also a possibility as well as experts conducting meta-evaluations (Kováts & Rónay, 2023).

2.2.3 Universities and Academic Freedom

As seen in the reports and documents mentioned in regard to the European stance in regard to academic freedom, certain institutions are more considered when speaking about responsibility for academic freedom. The institutions often mentioned are first and foremost the EU itself and the governments within it. Secondly, universities as higher education institutions are considered very important in regard to the theme of academic freedom- as that is where academia is being pursued. So what are universities doing to support and ensure academic freedom?

First and foremost, networks operating in and for the universities within Europe are an eminent pillar in positioning academic freedom in a practical framework and context. The Scholars at Risk network has been mentioned in this chapter previously with reference to their data on monitoring academic freedom, and it is moreover an important network to mention. The Scholars at Risk (SAR) network of partner institutions, through its organization

and publications, positions academic freedom within a framework of Core Higher Education Values. As the higher education sphere consists of multiple institutions, frameworks, systems, and conditions- it would be a disservice to define academic freedom, as well as other values, by one simple definition. By having identified values that are present in both higher education principles and international human rights standards one is left with a framework that protects academic freedom in multiple ways, as they have an impact in different ways and in different parts of the discourse. This is useful as it makes the context both broader and more focused- as more contexts are included and confirmed as academic freedom. The broadness of the terminology also leads to confusion, as it can be hard to distinguish between the different principles to which the matter of issue answers[10].

Furthermore, the Scholars at Risk network are working on the basis of three main pillars: Protection, Advocacy, and Learning[11]. The two latter pillars are quite well-researched in regard to academic freedom. Advocacy is widely considered in the discourse, as advocacy practically is represented in all of the documents, statements, and reports presented in this chapter. The third pillar- Learning, can also be connected to the majority of existing literature and research on the field, as many of the documents published aim to present evidence and research from which other institutions and organizations can learn from. The first pillar, on the other hand- Protection, can at a glance seem as widely researched as the other two pillars- as the words *protect* and *protection* often is reappearing and are mentioned in the literature, understandings, and presentations on academic freedom. Although, a very important part of the protection pillar, speaking specifically about the SAR network, is hosting- which is a rather unexplored area of research. This thesis looks at this specific area of interest, and furthermore in a context that aims at at-risk students and Europe. This context is quite limited in terms of existing research, as there are not many programs aimed in this direction, and those that are are not old. Scholars at Risk focuses strictly on hosting scholars, not students. However, some members of the Scholars at Risk community are starting to look at protection in relation to students. This thesis will explore this further.

The European Student Union published a report in 2023 called *Survey on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and Academic Integrity from a Student Perspective.* This report is concerned with academic freedom and focuses on the student's perspective, which is quite

---

[10] Scholars at Risk .(2023). *About* https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/about
[11] Scholars at Risk .(2023). *About* https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/about

different and unique from other articles and reports discussing the topic. This report is comparable with the study this paper aims to conduct as it has a similar methodological approach and uses the same or a similar theoretical framework- which makes the aim of the research similar and useful to this study. Even though the aim of the European Student Union's report is not connected to the Norwegian Students at Risk program, it still raises the same issues and problems that the network is working with and founded on and because.

The report states that it aims to further the understanding of academic freedom, as the understanding of it currently is a bit narrow. The report, therefore, aims to broaden the understanding of academic freedom and thus where they see the most invisibility in regards to the term- students' perspectives. The report also focuses on institutional autonomy and academic integrity. The survey done based on students' thoughts and experiences is divided into these three themes based on which the questions asked are based. The questions and statements based on *Academic Freedom* include for example *I feel free to choose my field of study* (ESU 2023, p. 5), *Because of what I study, I have been subject to intimidation from academic staff.* (ESU, 2023, p. 6), *Have you ever self-censored yourself regarding your political views*? (ESU, 2023, p. 7), and *During the course of your studies, have you ever felt the threat you might face consequences from your institution for voicing your personal beliefs?* (ESU, 2023, p. 7). These questions are of great importance and interest for this study as they can be comparable with questions that are relevant to the aim and research questions of this paper. The theme *Institutional Autonomy* includes questions such as: *Does your university have its own security service?* (ESU, 2023, p.14), *Is there any form of video surveillance on the premises of the institution?* (ESU, 2023, p.14), and *Does your student union operate independently from the institution and its staff?* (ESU, 2023, p.15). The *Academic Integrity* theme-based questions and statements consist of questions such as: *Have you ever witnessed corruption in the academic community (e.g nepotism, clientelism, etc)?* (ESU, 2023, p.17), *There is a culture of trust between academic staff and students.* (ESU, 2023, p.18), *Have you ever experienced any unfair treatment in your experience in Higher Education?* (ESU, 2023, p.19), *Have you ever witnessed blackmailing in higher education?* (ESU, 2023, p. 19), and *Can you express feedback towards academic staff without the fear of being a victim of discrimination or retaliation?* (ESU, 2023, p. 20).

The result of the study is thereafter turned into a discussion, where it was shown that many of the students that took part in the survey did not have enough knowledge to answer the

questions and statements asked. This is problematic because it shows that these important topics are not broadcasted and made visible enough for students to be aware of how they and their rights are affected by policies and structures regarding for example academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and academic integrity (ESU, 2023). The study also showed that many students do not feel safe and comfortable expressing their personal beliefs as they are scared about possible consequences from their higher education institution, therefore they expressed having self-centered some of their views (ESU, 2023).

2.3 Students at Risk Programs in Europe

There are not that many organizations, programs, or networks that are working to protect students in the name of academic freedom. Of course, there are programs in Europe especially targeting students that are at risk due to conflict, but most often these programs focus on one specific country. These programs are often not funded by the state and do not exist nationwide in a country but rather at a specific university with the help of certain funding and donors. There are, however, some programs within Europe that exist nationwide in that country rather than at one certain higher education institution. These are of relevance to this study as it introduces an image of the field and context in which the Norwegian Students at Risk program exists. A table with a summary of the most important characteristics of each of the programs will be presented and further elaborated and described in this section.

2.3.1 German Students at Risk Programs

Program:	The German Hilde Domin Programme
Start of the program:	2021
Target Students:	Students as well as doctoral candidates at risk
Recruitment process:	Nomination by institutions or organizations
Annual funding for the program:	The Federal Foreign Office (AA)

Funding for the students:	Monthly scholarship for necessary expenses: rent, food, clothes, technology, health, accent, and liability coverage, an individually based travel allowance, and additional financial benefits
Duration of funding for students:	Up to 36 months
Additional benefits:	Preparatory German language course if individually required

In Germany, there is a student-at-risk program called *Hilde Domin Programme*. This program is a scholarship program and is administered by The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The program was started in 2021 and targets students as well as doctoral candidates that are at risk of being refused rights or education. Through the scholarship program, the selected students get the chance to continue their studies safely at a German university. The Hilde Domin Programme defines the *at-risk* factor as threats to the student's identity in regard to sexual identity, gender identity, religious identity, or ethnic identity. If the student's involvement in civil or political engagement puts them at risk, that is also grounds for applying and being considered for the program. The civil or political engagement needs to be towards a positive social change in communities based on principles of democratic and liberal standards and can be composed of both individual or group action. Other than the student showing that they are in danger due to the at-risk factor they are experiencing, they also need to meet some other requirements. The student needs to have a sufficient academic record, with knowledge and certificates of English at least at a B2 level. The student may not live in the European Union or Germany when they are being nominated.

The selection process is made through a nomination procedure which means that the students can not apply to the program directly themselves, but must be nominated by an institution or organization. Then nomination is to be done by the management of the organization or institution in question, which can nominate as many students as they want. The organization/institution needs to focus on research, teaching, or science, or alternatively promotion of democracy and peace or protecting and supporting human rights. It must be

domiciled in Germany and be a legal entity. These organizations are asked to fill out a nomination form in order to nominate candidates of their choice- which make the nomination process completely in the hands of the organization rather than the individual student. This formally recognized form is the only way in which a student can be nominated. Candidates that are considered eligible by DAAD are furthermore contacted by DAAD directly and are now asked to personally apply. A DAAD-appointed committee makes the selection process of successful candidates.

If successful, the student receives funding based on the type of education they are going to pursue in Germany on the Hilde Domin Programme. If the student is accepted for a bachelor's degree, they can receive funding for up to 36 months, as well, in some cases, for a preparatory course which is during 12 months. If the student is pursuing a master's degree they can receive funding for up to 24 months. If the student is pursuing and is selected for a doctoral degree they can receive funding for up to 48 months. The funding includes a monthly scholarship to cover necessary expenses such as rent, food, clothes, technology, etc. In addition, the student also receives health, accent, and liability coverage, an individually based travel allowance, and additional financial benefits. The students, if eligible, can also receive funding for a preparatory German language course if individually required, as mentioned previously[12].

In addition to the Hilde Domin Programme, there are other similar initiatives in Germany. *The Philipp Schwartz Initiative* is one of these. The initiative is part of the Humboldt Foundation. The Humboldt Foundation sponsors scholars and scientists in order to support progress and development in the scientific field as well as give strength to Germany as a research nation[13].

The Philipp Schwartz Initiative is a further initiative for researchers at risk by the Humboldt Foundation. This program does not target students, but rather researchers, which makes the initiative more similar to the network Scholars at Risk. The Scholars at Risk network is a close collaborator in this initiative as well as a somewhat crucial one, as the at-risk factor the

---

[12] German Academic Exchange Service .(2023). *Hilde Domin Programme*
https://www.daad.de/en/study-and-research-in-germany/scholarships/hilde-domin-programm/

[13] Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung .(2023). *About the Foundation.*
https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/explore/about-the-humboldt-foundation/about-the-foundation

researcher must experience should be recognized by a network such as Scholars at Risk[14]. This initiative targets researchers rather than students and is thus not as relevant for this particular thesis, but it is important to mention it in order to get a picture of the German context.

2.3.2 The Hungarian Students at Risk Program

Program:	The Hungarian Students at Risk Program
Start of the program:	2022
Target Students:	Ukrainian students
Recruitment process:	Application by the students themselves
Annual funding for the program:	The Hungarian Government
Funding for the students:	Monthly stipend for necessities, free tuition fees, contributions for accommodation, and medical insurance
Duration of funding for students:	1-6 years
Additional benefits:	Preparatory language course before starting their academic studies in Hungary, in English or in Hungarian

Hungary also has an at-risk program that targets students[15]. This program is a subprogram to the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship program and focuses on students at risk specifically from Ukraine. The Students at Risk Sub Programme for students fleeing the war in Ukraine is managed by the Tempus Public Foundation and supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was started in 2022. Students and researchers from Ukraine who can not continue

---

[14] Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung .(2023). *Philipp Schwartz Initiative.*
https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/en/apply/sponsorship-programmes/philipp-schwartz-initiative

[15] https://stipendiumhungaricum.hu/studentsatrisk/

their studies because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine shall be given the opportunity, through this program, to continue their studies in Hungary at academic institutions. The funding includes a monthly stipend for necessities, free tuition fees, contributions for accommodation, and medical insurance. Ukrainian students are made aware that the financial contributions will not cover the cost of living completely, and that they need to financially contribute themselves in order to accept the scholarship if offered (& Tempus Public Foundation, 2023).

Similar to the Hilde Domin Programme, are the students offered a preparatory language course before starting their academic studies in Hungary, in the English language or the Hungarian language (Stipendium Hungaricum & Tempus Public Foundation, 2023).

In order to be eligible for the program there are some requirements that must be met by the student. The student must be Ukrainian, and can not hold Hungarian citizenship (even if dual). The student must also be able to prove that they have concluded 11 years of public education, therefore, the student must have acquired their secondary education graduation certificate before enrollment in the Hungarian program (Stipendium Hungaricum & Tempus Public Foundation, 2023).

The Students at Risk Subprogramme of the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme offer certain study fields which the students can choose freely from, most of the offered courses are in English. The timeline in which the students are offered to study rang between 1-6 years depending on the program they apply for and are selected for. The students apply themselves to the program and do thus not go through a nomination process (Stipendium Hungaricum & Tempus Public Foundation, 2023).

2.3.3 Polish Students at Risk Program

Program:	The Polish Students at Risk Program
Start of the program:	2020
Target Students:	Belarusian students

Recruitment process:	Application by the students themselves
Annual funding for the program:	Co-funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Funding for the students:	Financial aid in case of personal or economic need
Duration of funding for students:	Up to 10 months
Additional benefits:	Preparatory Polish courses online that is possible to take before arriving in Poland

Solidarity with Belarus is a Polish program for students at risk, through its sub-initiative *Solidarity with Students*. This initiative came about in the academic year of 2020/2021 in response to the increase in repression of academic freedom against people, and not at least students, in Belarus. The initiative is furthermore a scholarship program launched by NAWA (Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange), in addition to two other initiatives called *Solidarity with Scientists* and *Solidarity with Teachers* as part of the *Solidarity with Belarus* one. The student program offers scholarships for Belarusian students in need for up to 10 months, to take part in courses and or/studies at Polish universities in the Polish language. Preparatory Polish courses online that are possible to take before arriving in Poland, are free of charge for the Belarusian Students eligible for the scholarship program[16]. For the call of the program in 2021, NAWA presented that 395 Belarusian students had received support through the scholarship program. These students were both beginning first-degree studies, second-degree studies, or at Master's degree study level[17].

[16] Polish Aid .(2020). *Solidarity with Belarus" - NAWA scholarships for students, scientists and teachers.* https://www.gov.pl/web/polishaid/solidarity-with-belarus---nawa-scholarships-for-students-scientists-and-teachers

[17]NAWA .(2023). *A helping hand for students from Belarus* https://nawa.gov.pl/en/nawa/news/a-helping-hand-for-students-from-belarus

2.3.4 The Swiss Students at Risk Program

Program:	The Swiss Students at Risk Program
Start of the program:	2023
Target Students:	Students and PhD-students that are at risk
Recruitment process:	Nomination by institutions and organizations
Annual funding for the program:	Funding has yet to be decided
Funding for the students:	Funding has yet to be decided
Duration of funding for students:	Funding has yet to be decided
Additional benefits:	

More similar to the Norwegian Students at Risk (StAR) program, there is a Swiss Students at Risk (StAR) program that is just in its starting phases[18]. The Swiss program is quite newly developed, as it was announced as recently as 2022. The Swiss StAR program was presented by the Solidarity and International Commission of the Swiss Student Union (VSS-UNES-USU) to the delegation assembly of VSS-UNES-USU in 2022 and was launched as a project to develop the same year. The Swiss StAR project names the Norwegian as well as the German student at-risk programs as inspirations for the Swiss one. It also names the Scholars at Risk (SAR) network as a role model for the motivation to create this project. The project targets students and PhD-students that are at risk of losing any human right or being denied education. The program has two current goals: Short term, a pilot program should be developed and launched, as well as financial support should be found in order to do this. The pilot program itself should act as a basis for a future permanent national program. Long term, the program aims to create an opportunity for students at risk to complete their studies in a safe space and continue to develop as protagonists of change. This

---

[18] https://vss-unes.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023-02-02_StAR_Dossiere.pdf

program is especially important to mention as it is in the early stages of development, which can be helpful in order to understand whether, for example, something is done differently from the Norwegian program.

As the program is not yet in action, a timetable with key points in the development plan is presented. The timetable of development reaches over five years and starts with the funding phase, and later ends with the completion of the pilot project and the launch of the project. First of all, is the funding phase. The funding phase is scheduled between August 2022- July 2023. This phase is crucial in order to be able to continue with the project. The funding that is collected in this phase is meant to support the set-up of the program as well as the pilot project. Between August 2022- July 2023 begins the first set-up phase. This phase is described to contain the important administrative and preparatory work in order for the program to be set up. The future Swiss StAR students are part of this phase, as the nomination process as well as the selection of the first StAR students put in this phase of the development timeline. This set of phases is also characterized by administrative work and economic work in relation to the scholarships the students will receive. Next on the list is the first year of the pilot program phase. The timeline for this part is between August 2024-July 2025. This phase is meant to contain the launch of the pilot program as well as welcoming the first students at risk to Switzerland on the program. This phase also requires administrative work, especially connected to the students, which is put into practice in the same phase- such as language classes and other practical implementations. As this is the first time students will arrive with this program in Switzerland, it is important to include the routine of evaluation in order to make the program work as well as possible. The second year of the pilot program, set between August 2025- July 2026, therefore also includes evaluating the program in order to have it continue. The last phase in the timetable is the third year of the pilot program, which is titled the last one. This phase, therefore, aims to take the program from a pilot program to an integrated project program in Switzerland. This phase, as the last one, also aims to make long-term financing of the program possible (VSS, UNES & USU, 2023).

In regards to the structure of the plan for the program, it seems to be similar to the German Hilde Domin Programme and the Norwegian Students at Risk, which is not surprising as those programs are named as role models for the Swiss Students at Risk Program. The process of selecting the candidates for consideration is going to be made through a nomination process, in which unnamed institutions are going to be in charge of this part of

the process. What is named, though, is that the nomination institutions are formed by heterogeneous groups- such as Swiss embassies, local student organizations, NGOs, or the higher education Institutions themselves. The Swiss embassies are also mentioned as having a role in the structure of the program. The Swiss embassies are currently aware of the program. The importance of the Swiss embassies being aware of the topic of academic freedom is mentioned in the dossier stating the facts about the program. If the Swiss embassies are aware and obtain knowledge about the topic as well as the program, they can be of better assistance to the students that are applying for visas in order to come to Switzerland as a student at risk of this specific program (VSS, UNES & USU, 2023).

VSS-UNES-USU acts as the coordinator for the program and is also as mentioned in the prior text the initiator. VSS-UNES-USU is therefore responsible for coordinating between actors that are participating in the program, which also means the nominating actor and the student, as well as working out the formalities and principles that shape the program. The higher education institutions are an important pillar in the program and are therefore kept up to date with information about the program at all times. The higher education institutions are also encouraged to participate in shaping the program by being asked their opinion and stance in questions that touch on all the different aspects and phases of the program. The higher education institutions have agreed to make sure that the anonymity of the StAR students that will attend their academic institution will be kept, as well as their safety. One easy method for this is to make sure that the institutional treatment of the students does not differ publicly from that of other international students (VSS, UNES & USU, 2023).

Another crucial pillar of the program is the funding. As the funding institutions are not known at this point, they can not be named in the dossier. Although, the financiers that will be part of the process will have the choice of whether or not to be publicly connected to the program. The financiers will moreover be part of the progress of the program throughout the process. Which includes being made aware of important information and questions that might arise (VSS, UNES & USU, 2023).

3. Methodology

This chapter will present the methodology applied to the material in this thesis. This study is an empirical-based research, and will therefore include methodological approaches of this character. The base of this study is a case study, which will therefore be presented here. In addition, information about qualitative interviews, thematic analysis, choice of respondents, purposive sampling, approach, and ethical discussion will also be included in this chapter.

3.1 Case Study

This thesis is based on a case study of the Norwegian Students at Risk program. A case study is an empirical method that is used for research when one wants to study a real-life phenomenon or case. A case study can furthermore be defined by a two-part definition. The first part of the definition is identifying a case study as a research method as an empirical method, which is searching for an in-depth study of a situation/phenomenon within a context, instead of separating it from the context. In research where case studies are suitable to apply, the context and the phenomenon are often hard to separate from each other as their differences might not be obvious- the context is thus utterly important to the phenomenon you want to study (Yin, 2018).

The second part of the two-part definition handles the features of a case study. The main feature, as said, is the connection between the context and the phenomenon. However, as these can be hard to distinguish in real life, other features relevant to the case study are here presented. First of all, many technical attributes are featured in a case study.
Secondly, a theoretical framework as well as data collection is beneficial to a case study. A case study must also have different types of evidence to be considered a case study, this can include documents, interviews, observations, etc. The purpose of a case study is to properly obtain an understanding of the case rather than draw generalizations (Yin, 2018).

When the overall definition of a case study is presented and established, the application of a case study to this particular research can be introduced. In regards to approach, this thesis takes a constructivist approach. A constructivist approach to a case study means that one is

looking for a result based on the different participants' thoughts, ideas, and reality. The aim of the case study is thus to attempt to source and gather the different aspects and focuses that the participants are bringing in, as well as collect evaluation reports on the program, in order to get a result. In order to conduct a case study, one needs to plan the research design. A case study as a method for research differs from case to case, in regards to material collection, research question, etc. There is not one definite way of designing a case study- the research design that this thesis will set is based on recommendations from Yin, in *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (2018). Yin writes that a research design of a case study originates in establishing questions you want to answer and connecting these questions to data as well as an appropriate theoretical framework. The research design furthermore consists of five elements; the case study needs to have a clear case study question; which translates into this thesis' research questions. Secondly, the case study should make possible propositions in addition to the study questions clear. If the research needs some guidance to make the case of the study clear other than the actual research question/s, propositions, as statements, can be included to help direct attention to what exactly should be studied in the case study. Thirdly, the case itself needs to be identified. The research question and possible propositions further make the aim of the research but identifying the case itself is important in order to make it a case study rather than another type of research. Yin explains that identifying the case has two parts- which are already explained above. After identifying the case, one must identify the logic in linking data to the proportions. This part makes sure that the methodology, material, and analysis steps you pick are suitable for answering the research question and understanding the phenomenon which makes up the case. The last element in the research design is to decide the criteria for understanding the findings. It is important in a case study to be ready to, and be able to address rival explanations for the findings in the analysis (Yin, 2018).

As mentioned above, the data that acts as the basis of a case study can have different origins. This thesis will have two different types of material as part of the case study: two evaluation reports of the program (documents), as well as qualitative interviews directly with participants of the program. As for the first type of material that is going to be used: documentation, Yin describes documentation as five different types of documents, one of the types is *Formal studies or evaluations related to the case that you are studying* (Yin, 2018: 156). This is exactly what this case study is focusing on as part of the material collection. The second type of material that is going to make the case study is furthermore interviews. Yin

describes interviews as a crucial data-gathering method in many case studies, as it is often very beneficial in answering such research questions that are often asked in a case study. Case studies are often done on a topic/phenomenon which is very relevant to human perception, which makes interviews an important way of collecting information (Yin, 2018).

3.2 Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative Interviews are a method that aims to collect information from an individual perspective. The goal of qualitative interviews is thus to get a personal insight into the material being studied. Interviews can both be qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative interviews use a questionnaire/survey as their tool to interview. The framework in quantitative interviews is thus quite limited, as the questionnaire consists of set questions by the researcher with a restrictive and inflexive chance to affect the questions asked, as the format simply prevents the participant from doing so. This means that personal ideas or reflections are not wanted or asked for in quantitative interviews and the interviewer is the person in charge of the narrative rather than the interviewee. The main goal of a quantitative interview, therefore, is to gather information about a certain topic where no subjective interference, perspectives, or information is needed (Corbetta, 2020).

Qualitative interviews, on the other hand, aim to get beyond answers to simple questions and instead understand the perspectives of interviewees. The qualitative interview is thus more flexible than the qualitative questionnaire. The qualitative interview is searching for more depth than the quantitative one, which is searching for more broad information. The selection is thus different when it comes to the two different interview types. The breadth of the quantitative interview makes the selection of participants (the sample) broader- as it is looking for simple answers in regard to a phenomenon or in order to prove a hypothesis that needs data/statistics rather than personal perspectives like the qualitative interview is looking for. Quantitative interviews therefore have a more standardized method and framework while qualitative interviews have more of a non-standardized format (Corbetta, 2020).

This thesis is applying a qualitative approach to the collection of data, through the collection of interviews. Furthermore, there are different approaches to qualitative interviews: Structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. This thesis uses a semi-structured

qualitative approach, which means that an interview guide and outline have been produced and presented to the interviewees, but this outline is not completely set in stone as other perspectives and ideas are allowed to surface during the interview. This form of qualitative interview technique thus puts the power in the interviewer's as well as the interviewee's hands. The semi-structured interview is meant for cases where there is a clear aim and topic, but where the personal perspectives of the interviewee are just as important as the questions set by the interviewer. Unstructured interviews, on the other, are completely in the hands of the respondent. During unstructured interviews, the interviewer is simply there to set the topic of discussion rather than preparing specific interview questions. During structured interviews, the interviewee is simply there to answer the questions asked by the interviewer. As the perspectives of the respondents as well as set questions are of essential importance to the thematic analysis and result of this study the semi-structured interview form was chosen (Corbetta, 2020).

3.2.1 Thematic Analysis

One of the most common methods for analyzing qualitative data, such as interviews, is a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis aims to discern codes in the material collection, which is the transcription of the interviews for this thesis. This choice of method is applied to the analysis in order to create an analysis based on the information and perspectives the participants (interviewees) bring. Through the application of the thematic analysis of the material, themes have been identified based on the repetition of words and perspectives as well as on similarities and differences. The themes that will lead us through this part of the findings are divided into five overarching themes: The selection of participants, the application process, the challenges of the program, the benefits of the program, and the changes that should be made (Bryman, 2018).

3.2.2 Choice of Respondents

This thesis aims to study the Norwegian program Student at Risk, which makes the selection of the participants quite focused and narrow. The thesis is furthermore presenting a new perspective of analysis in regard to the topic- the students/participants themselves. As the

topic of conversations is rather personal and/or sensitive, a purposive approach was applied in order to find the respondents who were willing to participate. The choice of interviewees (the sample) was thus not completely made by the author of the thesis, but from the willingness of the participants themselves. The interviewees are further made anonymous, but they are all current, or past students in the Norwegian Students at Risk program. The sample is made up of seven men and women, from four different continents and placed at different universities in Norway. The real names of the participants will not be used, nor the specific countries they come from. Instead, pseudonyms of all respondents have been made. The names that will be used in the findings in regard to direct citations from the interviews are: Eric, Lisa, Clara, Yousef, Adam, Anna, and John. As the countries and nationalities of the participants will not be presented, if they are mentioned by the interviewees in the interviews they will be replaced by dots.

Two representatives of the Student at Risk program were also interviewed, which will be used in the findings to add more to the context and background of the Students at Risk program.

3.2.2.1 Purposive Sampling

The sampling was carried out with a so-called *purposive sampling.* Purposive sampling means that the collection of the sampling material is based on the judgment of the researcher completely, and does not have a random selection element- it is thus a non-probability sampling method. The key element of purposive sampling is that the selection of the sampling is done strategically, in order to match the aim and research question/s of the study. As this study is a case study of a specific program as the phenomenon in focus- The Norwegian Student at Risk Program. The sampling has been done with very specific characteristics in mind. Although it is a non-probability sampling method, a purposive sampling method differs from convenience sampling- as the aim and goal of purposive sampling are to sample with the specifics of the research rather than just a generalized population (Bryman, 2012). The purposive sampling collection for this research was strategically selected as the participants are related to the Norwegian Students at Risk program- students. As the topic is quite sensitive, the sampling was not direct but rather through a gatekeeper. The gatekeeper reached out to a sampling pool of individuals with the

specific characteristic that the researcher was looking for, and the individuals themselves came in contact with the researcher by their own will.

3.2.3 Approach

An interview guide was created in relation to the aim and research questions of the thesis. The interview guide furthermore consisted of ten questions, but as the interview was based on a semi-structured interview framework the questions were rather open (Bryman, 2018). The aim of the research as well as the interview questions were sent to the responsible organ for contact with the participants (students) in the Students at Risk program. They furthermore forwarded the information about the thesis to the current and past students through their contact list. The students were thus in charge of contacting the responsible person for the thesis, which gave them a completely free choice on whether to participate. When in contact with the interested StAR student, over email or phone, the interview was scheduled at a time that was convenient for both parties. The interviews were held over Zoom or Google Meets because of the distance between the students and the thesis author, being located at different locations in different parts of the world. The interviews took approximately 30- 45 minutes. Before the interview took place, the thesis author presented herself as well as the thesis itself. The participant got the chance to ask questions before the interview started, and was also made aware of the ethical principles in relation to the interview- such as anonymity, how the interview was going to be recorded/transcribed as well their approval of the material that was going to be used in the result. The semi-structured interview framework was presented and the participants were prompted to add perspectives, questions, and answers that they saw as relevant to the study if they were not already included (Bryman, 2018).

3.2.4 Ethical Discussion

The information and material collected have only been used for research purposes. The participants gave consent to the audio recording of the interview and were informed that it was going to be deleted after the transcription. The majority of the interviews were held over Zoom through the account provided by the University of Padova, and two of the interviews were conducted over Google Meet as per the participants' request. The method of collecting the material was therefore given consent by the participants, as well as the final quotes that

were chosen to be included in the final section. Furthermore, the participants have been de-identified, the names of the participants as well as their nationality are therefore not connected to the quotes that will be included in the interviews. That means that it should not be possible to chart, for the independent reader, the identity of the participants based on the information provided in the thesis. The de-identification and anonymity were discussed and consented to by the participants before the interview itself started (Karlsson, 2020).

4. Findings

In this chapter, the results from the analysis will be presented. The Norwegian Students at Risk program (StAR) program is the subject of this thesis. The main methodological approach of this thesis is a case study, which means that the material that the analysis consists of has to be collected from different sources. To make sure that the phenomenon (in this thesis: The Norwegian Students at Risk program), is researched appropriately. Therefore, this analysis will consist of three parts. The first part will be based on two different evaluation reports that have been published on the Norwegian Students at Risk program. The first report was published in 2017, as a halfway evaluation of the pilot program. The report was made by SIU, in order to evaluate how the implementation of the program as it was planned, had worked out. The report was further conducted on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (SIU, 2017). The second report was published by Ideas2evidence in 2020, as a final evaluation of the first established pilot program. This evaluation was conducted on behalf of the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku). This report, as an evaluation of the pilot program in full, evaluated the program with the aim of finding out *whether* and possibly *how* the program could continue (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020).

These reports will be part of the analysis, as they represent important information on the practical implementation of the program. They will further also act to provide background information on the program itself. The reports are also relevant to this study as the methodology is similar to the methodology of this thesis, as the focus was put on first-hand participants, such as students- and in this case also stakeholders and involved institutions. The report published in 2017 conducted the research based on data from interviews with involved actors (SIU, 2017). The report published in 2020 conducted the research based on

data from a survey with students, as well as data from The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, and by conducting a case study in regards to how the program has been implemented, focusing on two countries (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). This part of the analysis will in addition to these reports also include a self-conducted interview with two of the responsible and most involved individuals for the Students at Risk program, as they are able to add more current practical information about the program since the latest report from 2020. This part of the case study is therefore more focused on the practical aspects of the program. The interview with the key representatives of the program was conducted in 2023 and is therefore a good addition to this part of the case study. The interview reviewed some of the changes in the program since its implementation, and changes that have been made since 2017, as well as 2020. The approach of presenting the findings of these reports will also be based on the thematic analysis that was presented in the methodology section. Themes and codes that are relevant to answer the research questions as well as can be identified in relation to each other will be the basis of the titles and information brought up in this section of the findings.

The second part will consist of information and background on relevant organizations to the Norwegian Students at Risk program. This is important in order to understand the different important actors that make the Norwegian Students at Risk program exist and to situate the program within a certain context.

The third section of findings consists of empirical material in the form of interviews with students of the program. This part, therefore, hopes to give a more personal perspective to the understanding of the program and will be more focused on experience and feelings rather than practical information.

4.1 The Norwegian Students at Risk (StAR) Program

This part of the analysis will consist of important practical information, including some background of the program, such as how the program came about, the recruitment process, and funding- as these aspects are important for understanding the program as well as being central in evaluations of the program. Benefits of the program, as well as advocacy and

marketing in relation to the program, will also be presented. This information will be sourced from two evaluation reports published on the program. The evaluation report that was published in 2017 was produced as a halfway evaluation report of the Students at Risk program as a pilot program (SIU, 2017). The 2020 report was published as an evaluation after the end of the original pilot program (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). The section will also include some aspects retrieved from a personal discussion with two representatives from the StAR program.

4.1.1 Creation of the Program

In 2012, the Norwegian student organizations *Studentenes og Akademikernes Internasjonale Hjelpefond* (SAIH) and Norsk Studentorganisasjon (NSO) provided a statement that declared the wish for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to respond to the need that exists in regards to protecting students that are victims of breaches to academic freedom. SAIH and NSO thus urged MFA to initiate a four-year pilot program that targeted students dismissed from their studies due to their political activism. In that same year, 2012, parties and party members within the Norwegian parliament raised the question to the government asking whether creating a program of those characteristics was possible. SAIH and NSO then worked together and individually to promote the program during the rest of 2012, going into 2013. In April 2013, SAIH presented a program draft to The Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU). The draft that was presented was created as a collaboration between different actors of higher education in Norway: SAIH themselves, students within NSO, the MFA, the University of Oslo, the Ministry of Education and Research (MER), and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MJPS). In September of 2013 at a press conference arranged by MFA, SAIH, and NSO, the Students At Risk program was announced by the Norwegian ministers of foreign affairs (SIU, 2017).

4.1.2 Recruitment Process

In the coming year of 2014, SIU prepared guidelines, agreements, and procedures for the program- as this was not yet decided on when the program was agreed upon by SIU and MFA. The practical participation in the program started in November of 2014 when the opening for nomination started. The application, and thus the selection process of the

Norwegian Students at Risk program is carried out through nominations, rather than an individual application process. This was decided early on in the theoretical design process of the program. The decision of implementing this system helped achieve many other important pillars of the program. Nominations can further be done by (65) entities according to the program guidelines: Norwegian embassies in developing countries, SAIH, NSO, Norwegian Higher Education Institutions that are taking part in the StAR program, the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR), The International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN), and Amnesty International. By dedicating the nomination process to these entities, the program obtains expert knowledge of different actors which are operating in countries and societies that the students are going to come from (SIU, 2017).

The number of students being considered for a placement within the program is kept at a manageable level due to the nomination process. The nomination process is also positive in regards to giving students hope of placement, as they can not apply themselves- not as many students are given false hope (SIU, 2017). There are of course some restrictions on candidates to be nominated, these are established in the design of the program and can be categorized as: age, residence, student status, and travel documents (SIU, 2017). More specifically, in order to be considered the student needs to be between 18 years old and 35 years old. They need to be actively involved in human rights activism in a country that is eligible for the Norwegian Students at Risk program, and experience risk because of this. The student also needs to have their residency in a country that is eligible for the program. The student must have valid travel documents, such as a passport. The student must have started a university program in their home country, on a Bachelor's or Master's level, and must have been an active participant in that program at least 2 years before the date of nomination (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). As being at-risk is a great criterion of this program, the program being named Students at Risk, it is interesting to understand what at risk-means. When asking the StAR representatives during the interview, this was the answer that was given:

> It varies across contexts. So an activist in Syria is very different from an activist in Zimbabwe, for example. So you know what's possible, what's the room for their activism and also the different levels of activism as you know, it could be that the student was part of a protest and unfortunately because of that day they were arrested and maybe tortured and followed and that was that one activity. So they

didn't have a huge background in activism but their activism has resulted in them being at risk and or losing access to higher education or it can be someone with a much longer history of human rights work and activism and you know the profiles vary so much that we kind of try to assess based on the country. Yeah, and not across countries because again, as I said in Eswatini, Swaziland, it's much different than Zimbabwe, but, but I would argue each is at risk in their own way, so that's how we do it, but of course, other organizations might have a different way of assessing their risk. They might only prioritize the most, like violent kinds of aggression. I don't know, We haven't actually spoken so much with them because we're the biggest, one of the biggest nominators. So it's us and the embassies that mainly nominate in Norway.

<div align="right">Students at Risk Representative</div>

The answer that was given from the program's side of this matter is thus that there is no ultimate definition of what at-risk actually means. This criterion is also mentioned in the evaluation reports. In both the halfway evaluation report from 2017, as well as the evaluation report from 2020- some questions regarding the recruitment process were raised. In 2017, the evaluation report questioned the criteria regarding activism - and what *actively involved* means. Another criterion that was questioned is the one stating that the student needs to be at risk, as this term without a clear definition is very subjective and open to interpretation (SIU, 2017). This criterion was further also discussed in the evaluation report 2020. The report that was published in 2020 questioned the at-risk criterion in regard to the rest of the criteria. As the nomination process involves different actors, rather than just one specific one, is it not clear how the individual criteria should be evaluated against each other. For example, it is not clear if the at-risk factor should be assessed higher than the academic record. The evaluation report from 2020, therefore, calls on more clear guidelines with information on how the individual criteria should be assessed. This would benefit the selection process as it would be more equal and coherent (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). The evaluation report from 2020 references that one problem for nominating actors to assess the criteria is made clear by an embassy informant stating that having the papers in order is in many instances worth more than how at-risk you are- which can be confusing as the program is targeting, and is called, Students at Risk (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). The at-risk criterion is also questioned in another aspect of the program- the returning home aspect. The 2020 evaluations report questions how the criteria of being at risk interconnect and correspond with the requirement of returning to one's home country after finishing the Students at Risk program. What the

<div align="center">58</div>

evaluation report specifically is questioning is the program's at-risk criteria with the immigration criteria by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). The report finds that UDI takes the return possibility into consideration when approving a student's residence permit. There is thus a conflict between the at-risk criteria of the program itself, and the return criteria that the UDI has for residence permits (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). The return of students to their home countries was mentioned in the 2017 report as well, where the writers of the report concluded that the criteria of UDI go against the mandate of the Students at Risk program, as well as keeping the students in Norway would possibly create brain-drain in countries in which these students are from (SIU, 2017).

During the interview with the important StAR actors that was held the topic of return for the StAR participants came up.

> Yeah, like return tickets, for example, before they gave the students money or something when they were going to return. Now they buy the tickets kind of to incentivize them to return something like that
>
> Students at Risk Norway Representative

The StAR representative spoke about changes to the program and discussed how internal changes have been made to the program, which this was an example of.

The report of 2017 explores the success of the program in regard to its recruitment process. As halfway through the pilot program, the nomination process as established in the general design of the program, was seen as successful. Although, halfway through the program, some questions of concern were raised about the recruitment process, mainly by the stakeholders and entities themselves. The question of relevant marketing targets as well as sufficient knowledge of the programs by the nominating actors were the main issues raised. These questions were raised due to the low number of qualified nominees during the first two years of the pilot program. At this time, there were more placements at Norwegian universities allocated for the StAR students than there were qualified nominees. Therefore, the question of marketing strategies was raised. SIU could establish that many of the nominees during the first two years were themselves members of a human rights organization and furthermore heard about the Norwegian Star program from that organization, or from friends that also were members of an organization (SIU, 2017).

Another important aspect in regard to the recruitment process is the visa process. This is not touched on that greatly in the evaluation reports but was mentioned and discussed during the interview with the StAR representatives. When discussing the recruitment and nomination process, the representatives spoke about how one of the only changes that have been made since the start of the program has to do with the visa process. The representative discussed how important it is to maintain a good relationship with embassies in order to be able to obtain visas for incoming students.

> You need the embassies to be willing to process visas. There are very difficult situations, so we work with the embassies in the nomination process even though it doesn't go through them if that makes sense.
>
> Students at Risk Norway Representative

The embassies do thus play an important and crucial role in the nomination process.

4.1.3 Funding

In order for the program to be established, SIU and MFA needed to come to an agreement-which they did in the fall of 2013. The budget for the program was distributed in the State budget of 2014 and was passed in December 2013. In December 2013 it was further decided how the program should be funded in the four years it was agreed on, as a pilot program.

The budget for the program was further decided at NOK 23,5 million over four years of the pilot program. The money is allocated from the State budget as part of the Norwegian government's development aid budget (SIU, 2017). As the money is part of this budget, the recipients of the funding are on the DAC List of ODA recipients as per OECD. The DAC list is a list of countries and territories that according to publications and definitions by the World Bank as well as the United Nations qualifies to acquire official development assistance (ODA), which the Norwegian government's development aid budget qualifies for. G8 members, EU members as well as qualified EU members do not qualify for ODA. The DAC list is furthermore revised every three years, which thus affects the possible recipients and candidates for the Norwegian Students at Risk Program[19].

---

[19] OECD .(2023). *DAC List of ODA Recipients.*
https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/daclist.htm

The 2020 evaluation report states that since establishing a pilot program, the funding has been extended one year at a time. This aspect of the funding is further addressed and presented as a complicated aspect of the program- as this system prohibits nominating actors to work at the pace that they should work at in order to complete all the steps that a nomination takes at the time that the nomination procedure should be done. Extending the funding for more than one round of nominations would be an easier process for the nominating actors as they would be able to perform the necessary tasks with more foresight which would ease the whole process (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020). The report also states that the program is jeopardizing evolving the quality of some aspects of the program by only getting approved funding one nomination round at a time. This aspect of the program makes the understanding of it temporary which is keeping the stakeholders from putting in efforts to improve themselves and their work, as they do not know how many more rounds the funding for the program will be renewed. This keeps the stakeholders from developing their work in order to develop and improve the processes of the nomination/recruitment process (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020).

In terms of the funding that helps the individual students pay for monthly expenses, that is funded by the government, which was discussed during the interview with the Norwegian Students at Risk.

> *The thing is that politically in Norway, they're talking about charging international students with tuition fees and we don't know if it will impact students at risk at all but up until now that has been the way it has been. They have been getting a monthly stipend just like a Norwegian student would get but they don't have to pay it back.*
>
> *If there is a change now with tuition, that's a discussion we need to have because then someone needs to pay for the tuition fees for these students as well, in addition to the cost of living costs stipend that they're receiving from the government.*

Students at Risk Norway Representative

Thus, in terms of monthly expenses, these are paid for through a monthly stipend that is issued by the government. Up until now, the program itself has not had to worry about

finding funding for tuition fees to individual higher education institutions, as Norway does not charge tuition for Norwegian students as well as for international students. This has thus made the implementation of the program easier, as funding has not had to be found to the same capacity as similar programs in other countries. This might change, as the political power in Norway is looking to start charging tuition fees for international students, which would affect the program.

One proposal is that the university doesn't charge a student, the university takes that cost. Another proposal for example from one of the universities was that each university gets a percentage of students that of international students that the government will pay for and that they can allocate those funds. So for example, if that's the proposal that gets through, then what we would need is for every university to allocate some of those funds to StAR students. And it's because of the same thing with collaboration. For example, if the university has a collaboration with the University of Columbia and they feel like that's the important one they don't want them to pay tuition fees. Then from that let's say 5% of that they are allowed and they are paid by the government, then they will allocate that to the Columbia project because they believe that's in their interest. So this hasn't been approved, so it's still in hearings in the Parliament, so we don't know how it will land, but there are a lot of different options on how StAR students should be able to continue studying.

Students at Risk Norway Representative

There are furthermore different proposals for what could happen and be implemented to protect the programs that rely on free tuition fees for international students. It is not yet decided what will happen if this change goes through in the parliament, but the different options include the university itself taking the cost of not charging the tuition fee for these students. Another option would be to have a certain percentage of international students that receive free tuition, which the universities can allocate how they see fit. This option, according to the Students at Risk representative, has the opportunity to be very competitive between different programs and might act to support the interest and relationships that certain universities hold with countries and universities in other countries the most.

4.1.4 Other Important Aspects of the Program

There were also a few other important aspects of the program that were brought up in the evaluation reports as well as in the discussion with the StAR representatives. These are titled benefits and advocacy and marketing.

4.1.4.1 Benefits

An important discussion in regard to the program is concerning the benefits it brings students as well as other actors. The 2017 evaluation report stated that the Students at Risk students can be viewed as an asset in regards to a multiple of the actors that are involved in the program. Not only is the student an asset to the university they will study at and bring perspectives into, but also to the Norwegian society and the Norwegian embassies. The 2017 evaluation report also states that students who have attended the Students at Risk program are a great asset in their home countries in regard to human rights (SIU, 2017). The 2020 evaluation report also discussed the benefits that have emerged from the Norwegian Students at Risk program. In comparison to the evaluation report of 2017, did the one of 2020 connect more financial benefits to the aspect of benefits of the program. In regards to financial benefits, the 2020 evaluation reports that stakeholders connected to the program such as nominating actors say that the financial benefit is small but compared to the workload the program takes, it makes the financial benefits reasonable. The reports also discuss benefits from an academic perspective, where the academic benefits that the students receive as part of the program are seen as the biggest benefit for most people they have asked. Another high-scoring benefit among the students, from this report, is the possibility to come back and work for change in their home country after finishing the program in Norway (Jones, Nordhagen & Dahle, 2020).

When asking about benefits in the discussion with the StAR representatives, the representatives also had quite a clear picture of the biggest beneficiaries of this program.

> After the students, maybe it's the universities and especially the faculty and the
> programs where these students come. It depends on the relevance of what studies

they get offered. But if you have someone, for example, in the social sciences, political science, I will say that if you get someone with a strong background in student leadership and politics into one of these programs, kind of the knowledge and the discussions that this person can bring to that faculty, you just can't get it in another way. So there's a big benefit for the faculty, the professors, and the classmates of that student at-risk if there is that exchange of knowledge. That will be the first one. And then the Norwegian government is also benefited like there's a lot of way in, in, in into soft power when you talk about human rights and this is a human rights protection mechanism under the government's prescription. So being able to profile yourself as a country that is promoting and protecting human rights and then you even have mechanisms to give safe haven to those human rights defenders that are at risk gives you a lot of power in international politics? We have been criticizing that Norway doesn't use that as much as they could and should. And that program has not been kind of a flagship program for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here, but it could very easily be and it could very easily be a card you play in international fora when talking about human rights and the role that Norway has. And it's the same with all kinds of aid. Aid is good, yes. And it's helping others. But there are also a lot of soft power dynamics in that play. And why do you invest so much money in Aid? It's because it gives you, yeah, a saying, a lot of things internationally, I would say that students then universities or the academic environment and then also the country that is receiving the students, can be benefited.

<div align="right">Students at Risk Norway Representative</div>

I would also argue that, in many cases, the home country or activist backbone, because not everybody, but a lot of them come to Norway because then they're safe, increasing their advocacy and activism. They're working on monitoring and documenting human rights violations back home. And they're part of organizations here raising issues for like Belarus for example, that honestly wouldn't be so visible and high on the Norwegian agenda or in civil society if those students weren't pushing it.

<div align="right">Students at Risk Norway Representative</div>

The main beneficiaries of the program in their opinion are thus similar to the ones that have been mentioned in the evaluation reports. Although, they touched on the concept of aid further and the beneficiaries that get created through the process and power dynamics of development aid work and programs.

4.1.4.2 Advocacy and Marketing

The evaluation report of 2017 touched on the problems that emerged in the first years of the program. One challenge that was stated in the report was the invisibility of the program, which led to the program obtaining more spots available than eligible applications. The problem in the report represented to be the marketing of the program to the appropriate target audience- stakeholders and actors that had the opportunity to be nominating actors. The 2017 evaluation report furthermore presents that informants had expressed concerns about whether or not the program was properly targeted or not due to the low number of applications received (SIU, 2017). This concern was not mentioned and the matter was not explored further in the 2020 evaluation report. In the discussion with the Norwegian Students at Risk representatives, the topic of advocacy was further discussed. Advocacy was mentioned to be a big part of the program, and also for future similar programs that are emerging.

> *Well, the networks can be very different. I feel that's one of the big lessons from us trying to be abroad and trying to get people to do similar projects. Here it worked with the Norwegian Student Organization, but also I believe like you know, just an organization here has already a pretty well-established kind of image and access to politicians that is not the same in many other countries. So I think when it comes to advocacy, the biggest players will always be the universities, actually. Like if you get directors on board and if it's kind of a university project and they're the ones pushing it, it will be easier. Students can play a very important role just to show that it also supports the student base. But something we haven't really gained experience with this is also just using the other human rights organizations that can support civil society. Human rights in other countries are way stronger than the student movement, and maybe that's where advocacy efforts should be targeted. Or they are the ones that should be pushing it. We have very little experience on the whole process from advocacy to success because it's only Norway. And then Germany started from the bureaucratic side, same for Poland. And now we will see in Switzerland where the students are also the ones pushing for it and they're supposed to present their draft program this summer. Yes. So maybe Switzerland will be the second kind of case where you see that it was the student movement that made this a reality. But so far it's only Norway. So I think advocacy should be broader to make this a reality because the student movement In many countries where we have collaborated with them in pride, really doesn't have the capacity to push an agenda like creating students are risking their country. It's just too overwhelming. And that's also why Norway like having SAIH support it was site and so yeah there's a*

lot of knowledge and capacity from the side that was really the one pushing forward and then NSO also supporting there but I'd like if it was that combination, maybe like a civil society organization or human rights organization and the student organization, then you can really push forward. But just from the student side, I feel like it's very, very hard.

<div align="right">Students at Risk Norway Representative</div>

Advocacy is therefore also a big topic of concern and interest discussing such a program as the Students at Risk program, according to the representatives themselves.

4.2 Relevant Organizations for the Norwegian Students at Risk Program

This section will present organizations that are relevant to the Norwegian Students at Risk program. The organizations presented are involved or related to the Students at Risk program in different ways, but they are all important to present in order to understand the full extent of the Norwegian Students at Risk program. This section will begin to present the definition of academic freedom from the Norwegian government, from a report released in 2022, to further understand the context in which the StAR program exists within.

4.2.1 Academic Freedom in Norway

In 2022 the Norwegian government released a report on its stance in regard to academic freedom. In this report, they include a box titled *Declaration of Academic Freedom of Expression* (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022: 10). The definition that the Norwegian government, through the Ministry of Education and Research, refers to is very inclusive of different perspectives and angles of incidence. Students are particularly mentioned, as part of the theoretical context of academic freedom of expression, but sometimes forgotten in practical measures. Students are referred to as full members in the context of having and obtaining academic freedom, because of them being students, although they are not considered and referred to as experienced and qualified academics (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022). This is an important distinction to understand, as

this paper is looking at a Norwegian program based on academic freedom and students. Furthermore, as students are not considered full members of academia, the context of academic freedom should include them to obtain that in the form of opportunities to receive guidance in argumentation and thinking of scientific tone (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022).

The Norwegian government furthermore put a great emphasis on the responsibility the higher education institutions, such as universities, carry. The government positions free speech as a foundation to support and ensure academic freedom. Free speech is moreover very important in relation to the concept of academic freedom, as many ideas, thoughts, and perspectives that are protected under academic freedom are expressed through speech. As the government sees freedom of speech as a very important pillar in regard to academic freedom, they urge universities to protect this and therefore lists a few points which universities should include in their strategy to support students and researchers in regards to academic freedom:

- Higher education institutions need to protect and advocate for academic freedom, as well as scholars that are within it. Ethical principles as well as educational ones should be the foundation of teaching, conducting research, and academic and artistic development at higher education institutions.
- The law and jurisdictions of academic freedom should be the foundation on which academic institutions establish their own basis and framework in regard to the subject.
- Academic freedom should be educated to personnel within academic institutions so that they have the knowledge and opportunities to express themselves in accordance with freedom of expression and academic freedom.
- The content of research, as well as teaching, development work, dissemination, and individual appointments, should be decided on by the higher education institutions themselves.
- The teachers and professors themself also obtain an academic responsibility, in which they are responsible for the content in their teaching as long as it is within the framework provided by the institution they teach at.
- A person with duties of academic development work character must take the framework of the contract into consideration when choosing the topic and method for their research.

- A person affected by the last two points has the right and responsibility to perform dissemination.

- Higher education institutions must make certain transparency of the result of conducted research or work is present. Personnel within these institutions that are qualified to publish their research must ensure that publication occurs. The board of the institution of which this publication takes place can consent to rescheduled publication if needed due to certain reasons. Restrictions on the right to publish are established by statute or pursuant to statute, and can not be decided individually (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022).

4.2.2 Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH)

SAIH is important to the Norwegian Students at Risk program as they initiated the program together with NSO. SAIH was established in 1961 and is an organization independent of political influence[20]. It is furthermore an organization of solidarity of students and academics in Norway. The core value of SAIH is academic freedom, which they as an organization work to promote and support all over the world. Other core values that SAIH has is equality, solidarity, and non-discrimination. SAIH conducts advocacy work internationally as well as nationally, on the basis of academic freedom. The goal is to improve education conditions and global development. Other than advocacy work, SAIH supports 30 organizations spread over seven countries, which are located in Latin America, Asia, and Southern Africa. The work that SAIH is doing is furthermore supported by Norwegian Students, through something called the *SAIH tenners*[21]. The SAIH tenners are a financial contribution that is targeted at Norwegian students but completely voluntary. The tenners can be considered a tradition, as since the start of SAIH, in 1961, it has been optional for Norwegian students to pay alongside their fee of tuition at their university. When paying the tuition fees, students also get the opportunity to pay a fee to SAIH (a so-called tenner), to support their work for students and academics in Norway as well as globally. 90% of the tenner money goes towards the projects SAIH has directly, such as the Students at Risk program. This is the main funding mechanism for SAIH, but it also receives funding from some organizations, Norad (the

---

[20] SAIH .(2023). *Who we are.* https://saih.no/english/who-we-are
[21] SAIH .(2023). *SAIH Tenners.* https://saih.no/english/saih-tenners

Norwegian Directorate for Development Cooperation)[22], and LNU (The National Council for Norway's Children and Youth Organizations)[23]. More than 200,000 students at higher education institutions in Norway annually contribute to the work of SAIH through the SAIH tenners[24].

SAIH's work can be divided into four categories: Their presence and work in Norway, their presence and work internationally, through published reports, and through campaigns[25]. In regard to work in Norway, SAIH dedicates its work to changing narratives and attitudes within Norwegian society in order to make a change globally. SAIH furthermore targets politicians and politics in Norway in order to influence decision-making. When it comes to the work within Norway, the help of volunteers at higher education institutions, such as universities within Norway, is crucial for the success of SAIH. One main method that SAIH has to influence the attitude in Norway when it comes to education and development globally is by hosting events. It is furthermore very easy for students to get involved in SAIH, as there are chapters of SAIH at universities all over Norway. Furthermore, the work that SAIH does in Norway is based on a few core points. First of all, SAIH aims to make the opportunity for persecuted students and academics to study in Norway in order to complete their studies possible. SAIH works to make the Norwegian government focus more on education and aid for education by influencing them in this direction. SAIH works to make human rights part of universities' ethical guidelines in Norway. Lastly, SAIH's work within Norway includes making the discussion of aid communication and the media's portrayal of development in the Global South more of a critical debate[26].

SAIH's work internationally can be divided into four categories: Rights education, Documentation, New research, and Advocacy. These categories are meant to reflect the vision that SAIH has, which is to create opportunities for people all over the world to get access to education which is good and inclusive by fair distribution, and nonviolent in regards to breaching values of human rights and democracy. Internationally, SAIH furthermore targets youth and students who are between the ages of 15 and 35 years old. In addition,

[22] Norad .(2023). *Fagetaten Norad.* https://www.norad.no/om-norad/
[23] LNU .(2023). *Om LNU.* https://www.lnu.no/om-lnu/
[24] SAIH .(2023). *Q&A: SAIH Tenners.*
https://saih.no/english/article/2022/1/sp%C3%B8sm%C3%A5l-og-svar-om-saih-tierne
[25] SAIH .(2023). *Our Work.* https://saih.no/english/our-work
[26] SAIH .(2023). *SAIH in Norway.* https://saih.no/english/our-work/politikk

academics and teachers are also targeted. Indigenous people, women of a younger age, and youth that identify within the LGBTIQ+ community are furthermore centrally focused on. In regards to the four categories that act as the base for the international part of SAIH's work, they all have a certain purpose. The Rights education category is aimed at *training for marginalized groups, so that they know and can fight for their right*s [27]. The documentation category is meant to *gather evidence of violations against student rights[28]*. The new research category is focused on *strengthening the rights of marginalized groups through new knowledge[29]*. Lastly, the advocacy category is centered on *carrying out campaigns to mobilize support and improve the conditions for education and students' rights globally* [30].

The reports that have been published by SAIH include topics such as repression of student activism, human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, Radi-aid research, un/doing gender, commercialization in higher education globally, etc[31]. In regards to the last way that SAIH is working, which is campaigns. The campaigns are part of the advocacy work within Norway. SAIH runs at least one campaign every year, focusing on one or more aspects of academic freedom. In 2017, the Students at Risk program was campaigned for by SAIH[32].

4.2.2.1 Activism Under Attack

In 2023, SAIH released a report called *Activism Under Attack- Understanding the Repression of Student Activism,* written by Amy Kapit. This report is interesting to consider in this thesis as it is very current and discusses a topic that is very important to consider in addition to the aim and case study of this thesis. This report aims to provide an understanding of the repression of student activism contemporary as well as historical. The report further demonstrates how repression of student activism is present in every type of society. Repression of student activism is not dependent on the openness of the society, but rather on the context in which it exists. The repression of student activism in a society that is known as more open has a different meaning and execution than the repression of student activism within a society that is more closed. The main similarity between societies that are open and societies that are more closed, when it comes to repression of student activism- is the

---

[27] SAIH .(2023). *International.*https://saih.no/english/our-work/land, para. 6
[28] SAIH .(2023). *International.* https://saih.no/english/our-work/land, para. 6
[29] SAIH .(2023). *International.*https://saih.no/english/our-work/land, para. 8
[30] SAIH .(2023). *International.* https://saih.no/english/our-work/land, para. 7
[31] SAIH .(2023). *Reports.* https://saih.no/english/our-work/reports-1
[32] SAIH .(2023). *Campaigns.* https://saih.no/english/our-work/campaign

methods in which the repression is carried out. Rules and regulations in all of these societies play an important role in regard to repression. One might argue that physical violence or deprivation of liberty is more significant when it comes to methods of repression, but this report argues that rules and regulations are more, or the same amount of significant. Four mechanisms of repression are found and identified by Kapit, that can explain the repression of student activism across different societies and contexts. These mechanisms are; Lawfare, Delegitimization, Co-option, and Factionalization. Lawfare can be explained as lawmaking targeting student organizing, formulated against terrorism or public disturbance. Delegitimization is carried out by using certain rhetoric against student activists, in order to create an understanding of them as hooligans, terrorists, or criminals rather than activists. Co-option means that the government is trying to neutralize political opposition by students by creating government-controlled student organizations or encouraging support by students for government policies. Lastly, increased tensions within the student community, politically or socially, are further labeled as factionalization. These mechanisms can overlap with each other in different ways and in different contexts (Kapit, 2023).

Kapit discusses the meaning of student activism, in order to gain insight and understanding of what it means and is. Kapit identifies that there are many different factors and aspects that play a part in the meaning of student activism. Student activism can mean instances where students have been involved in one event or situation related to student activism, or more long-term involvement with a movement, organization, or campaign. Student activism is often considered connected to the word *claim-making,* and is further considered as an act of claim-making that is situated external to decision-making which is in a formal setting. The execution and methodology of student activism are further often connected to boycotts, campaigns, and protests, but are not limited to these. Actions that are meant to bring political and/or social change can be considered acts of student activism. There are two commonly considered types of student activism, or rather, two types of aims of student activism. The first one is in relation to wanting to change and/or influence university structure or policies, which is, therefore, more education-related. The second aim of student activism is rather a focus on broader political change, where the institutions of focus are the government and democracy as a whole. These different aims, and therefore methods of student activism can exist independently of each other or connected to each other. As structures and policies within higher education institutions often reflect those of society as a whole, these are often the different goals of student activism related and interconnected. The foundation and core of

student mobilization, and thus activism, is further utterly connected and related to the context and history in which it exists. Kapit explains that in countries and places which has a history connected to colonialism, anti-colonial struggles are reflected in the mobilization and activism of students. The history of student mobility and activism is much connected to the idea, and differences of the Global South and the Global North- as the history within and about them differs widely in many aspects. Kapit further explains that what separates student activism from student engagement, is first and foremost the difference between how they tend to be institutionalized or not, which student activism tends to be at a lower level than student engagement. Kapit further explains that student activism can be understood as somewhat part of education and should be perceived as educational, as a form of civic education. Not only can student activism itself be considered as education, but student activism as a whole also has its foundation in education, as issues that are raised and further activates the student activism in question are activated at higher education institutions (Kapit, 2023).

4.2.3 The National Union of Students in Norway (NSO)

NSO is relevant to the Norwegian Students at Risk program as they initiated the program together with SAIH. The National Union of Students in Norway (NSO) was created in 2010 and is the biggest student organization in Norway. NSO acts as an umbrella organization for student unions in Norway, which makes NSO include 30 student unions and 240 000 students. NSO is independent of political influence and focuses on student rights in regard to academia, society, and economics. NSO is centered around the belief that everyone should have equal rights to education. Everyone that is a student at a higher education institution should receive the highest quality education possible. To achieve this, NSO is working with a few different actors. NSO works with administrative officials, the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen in Norwegian) as well as politicians. NSO in addition also has a close relationship with the management and leadership of higher education institutions across Norway, in order to be there for the students as much as possible. The main goal of NSO is to be an actor to consider both in Norway and globally when it comes to higher education. In order to make this happen, NSO needs to include political lobbying of the government and others in important influential positions as a central factor of their work. There are further certain areas within the higher education sphere that NSO focuses on

especially, there is the quality of education, student finances, equality and student solidarity, and internationalization of higher education[33].

As NSO represents 30 student unions across Norway, which also means 240 000 students, the voice of the students is utterly important in the work of NSO. The representatives of NSO, therefore, act as an important voice for students in the education sector. NSO exerts this voice by often meeting with the Ministry of Education as well as members of parliament. The representatives are also involved in national councils and public boards in order to influence decisions within higher education. NSO is strongly related to the European Students' Union (ESU) when it comes to the international work of NSO[34].

NSO's work can be divided into three different categories: Quality of education, Student welfare, and International politics. The first category, quality of education, furthermore includes different topics and aspects that are crucial for making the students' education the quality they deserve. This category, therefore, includes aspects such as, funding of higher education, working life relevance, learning environment, research and innovation, teaching and assessment, assessment and examination, and revision of the UV Act (comprehensive review and assessment of the regulations for universities, colleges, and student welfare)[35]. In regards to the second category, which is student welfare, NSO focuses on welfare arrangements for students. The aspects that NSO connects and works with in relation to this are further: student economics, student volunteering, student housing, student health, equality, inclusion and diversity, and students with children[36]. The last category which is international politics includes issues and topics connected to the globalization of higher education; internationalization. NSO is further focused on the educational policies within Europe, and students within Norway influence policies connected to education in the rest of Europe. NSO explains that the most important in regard to this topic is that the free principle is protected, for students in Norway but also for international students that come to Norway, or Norwegian students that go abroad. NSO sees the importance of securing students' interests and rights globally through international student cooperation. The specific areas of

---

[33] NSO .(2023). *English.* https://student.no/en
[34] NSO .(2023). *English.* https://student.no/en
[35] NSO .(2023). *Utdanningskvalitet.* https://student.no/studentpolitikk/utdanningskvalitet
[36] NSO .(2023). *Studentvelferd.* https://student.no/studentpolitikk/studentvelferd

interest that NSO lists within this category are further: Free education, student solidarity, exchange studies to and from Norway, and international education politics[37].

4.2.4 Scholars At Risk Norway

Scholars at Risk is a global network that aims to advocate for academic freedom and defend scholars. The network started in the United States in 1999 and has since evolved into an international network with universities around the world being part of it. The universities that have joined the network can then agree to host scholars that are at risk at their university, by opening up a temporary position in order to give the scholars the possibility to continue working. These temporary positions are meant to work as an escape for the scholar until it is safer in their home country and university- and they can return. By offering a safe space to continue working, ideas and knowledge are not lost[38].

The Scholars at Risk network was launched in Norway in 2011, creating the Norwegian Section of the global network. Many higher education institutions in Norway are today (2023) members of the network. These include various research institutions, all Norwegian universities as well as many private and public education institutions. SAIH, the Researchers Union, and the Norwegian Association of Higher Education serve as associated members. Since the start of the Norwegian Section in 2011, 60 to 70 scholars have been hosted in Norway as Scholars at risk, for a period of 1-2 years[39].

4.2.5 European Students' Union

In 1982 seven national student unions in Europe came together, and founded the precedent to the European Students´ Union: the West European Student Information Bureau (WESIB).
The unions involved back then were: NSU Norway, NUS-UK, SFS Sweden, SHÍ Iceland, UNEF-ID France, DSF Denmark, and ÖH Austria. Since then, the network has grown out of being exclusive including unions and thus countries considered West European. Due to political changes in Europe, WESIB became ESIB, European Student Information Bureau in 1990. In 2007, however, ESIB changed its name to ESU: European Students' Union- just as

[37] NSO .(2023). *Internasjonal Politikk.* https://student.no/studentpolitikk/internasjonal-politikk
[38] Scholars at Risk .(2023). *About* https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/about
[39] Scholars at Risk Norway Section .(2023). *Scholars at Risk Norway Section.*
https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/sections/sar-norway/

we know it today. The European Students' Union further works on questions and issues related to students in higher education. Not only does the organization focus on rights for students within Europe, as one could think based on their name, but for students everywhere. The European Students´ Union specifically mentions academic freedom in the statutes explaining their plan of work. Statue 5.3 titled *Developing ESU's capacity and advocacy for Academic Freedom* specifically states that:

5.3.1. ESU will work alongside the BFUG towards the monitoring and implementation of the EHEA definition of academic freedom, as well as the definition of other fundamental values of the EHEA.

5.3.2. ESU will work with its member unions and on the general European level to gather information on the level of understanding and engagement on the topic of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity, e.g. within the Task Force on Academic Freedom, which is working on an OSF (Open Society Foundation) ESU-project. Additionally, the Task Force on Academic Freedom in relation to the OSF-funded project will look into different support mechanisms (such as capacity-building activities and advocacy training) that students can access in order to promote students' rights at the level of their HEIs, with a special focus on the role of student ombudspersons.

5.3.3. ESU will support its member unions in advocating for national scholarship schemes for Students at risk of persecution in their countries of origin and will lobby at the European level to establish a similar framework programme at the EU level (ESU, 2022, p. 7).

The last paragraph furthermore specifically mentions the students at risk programs, just like the Norwegian one. The European Students' Union also states that an important pillar in their work is to support refugees, which they do by advocating for an increase in European programs that offer scholarships to refugees in order to give them the opportunity to continue their studies in a safer environment (ESU, 2022). The European Students' Union furthermore works with different methods in order to conduct their work, they have different policies, publications, and projects. In 2023, a 1.5-year project for academic freedom called the Academic Freedom Project, was launched by ESU. The project came about because of the increase in the repression of academic freedom in regard to students in Europe, ESU especially mentions countries such as Belarus, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Italy, and France. ESU has therefore identified the need for advocacy and support in regard to student movements in Europe, in order to work towards and for more academic freedom for students. This is the foundation of the project that ESU has launched. The aim of this project is to give

students as well as student activists the opportunity to affect the definition and implementation of fundamental values, such as academic freedom, in society. In order to achieve this, ESU aims to offer various instruments of training, networking, and action to students and student activists. There are two core objectives that lay the foundation for the program, these are:

- *Provide further legitimacy to ESU's contribution to policy discussions and decisions regarding fundamental values at the European level;*
- *Recognize the work of student activists on the local and national levels and enable future actions* [40].

These objectives are further backed up by specific aims that the ESU connects to the objectives. The first aim is to be able to advocate and build policy based on evidence of what students are involved in and their knowledge of fundamental values such as academic freedom. The second aim is to propose training opportunities for the students, with the purpose of making students more capable to advocate for academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and academic integrity by growing competence. Furthermore, by facilitating collaboration between actors, individuals, and institutions ESU hopes to bring together forces that have the same goals, in regard to these topics. Lastly, ESU believes that defending academic freedom is partly done through supporting organizations of student activists as well as recognizing that they exist and the work that they are doing. These aims are further planned for through various activities that ESU sees as suitable for the aims as well as objectives of the project. Firstly, ESU wants to create a task force on academic freedom within its own organization. Secondly, an easy-to-use survey should be conducted in order to understand the level at which academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and academic integrity are understood within the academic community focusing especially on the student population. Lastly, ESU proposes that training seminars should be organized together with partner organizations, such as SAR, SAIH, Amnesty, the Council of Europe, and the Global Student Forum[41].

Two activities within this project can be found by the time that this thesis is written. Two

---

[40] ESU .(2023). *Academic Freedom*, para. 4
https://esu-online.org/projects/academic-freedom/

[41] ESU .(2023). *Academic Freedom*
https://esu-online.org/projects/academic-freedom/

different calls for participation have been published as part of the Academic Freedom Project, targeting students. The first one is called *Call for participants: Academic freedom – Students At Risk track* (2023). This initiative is described as a sub-granting program that is targeted toward student unions, student associations, and groups of student representatives as well as certain student activists. The basis of the initiative is that the ESU will fund, with smaller grants, advocacy, and campaigning projects led by someone connected to the groups and networks mentioned previously. The people applying for this do not necessarily need to obtain an existing deep knowledge of academic freedom already when applying. The project that ESU further is looking to fund, needs to have a few set characteristics. The program can be transnational as well as national, and even only on a local level. The group applying needs to have at least three members. The project itself must aim at supporting students at risk, and further be executed through an educational, activistic, community-building, or research-oriented approach[42].

The other project that is currently published by ESU in regard to the Academic Freedom Project is called *Call for participants: Academic Freedom Awareness track* (2023). This sub-granting program is aimed specifically at academic freedom and calls on people with expertise knowledge on the topic. The people that are eligible for applying to this initiative are the same as the ones in the previously mentioned project. The project that ESU is looking to fund in this call is a project that is specifically focused on academic freedom in regard to any topic that the grant-receiving group sees as relevant. The underlying aim of this project needs to be based on how important academic freedom is in academia, and therefore how essential it is to keep academic freedom safe in the context of academia and the academic community[43]

Apart from these projects and initiatives, The European Students' Union can also be credited for actively working towards academic freedom and a European students-at-risk program by advocating and spreading awareness all over Europe.

---

[42] ESU .(2023). *Call for participants: Academic freedom – Students At Risk track.*
https://esu-online.org/call-for-participants-academic-freedom-students-at-risk-track/

[43] ESU .(2023). *Call for participants: Academic Freedom Awareness track.*
https://esu-online.org/call-for-participants-academic-freedom-awareness-track/

4.2.6 Hk Dir - The Directorate for Higher Education and Skill

Hk Dir, or *Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse* (The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills) acts as the directorial agency for the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, since its establishment in 2021. The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills came about through a merger of Skills Norway, the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku), parts of Unit and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), and Universell. The Directorate further influences and recommends the Ministry of Education and Research on cases related to higher education and implements national policies, as well as coordinating management instruments and incentive schemes. In addition, the directorate is also responsible for some tasks that the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) previously was responsible for. The aim of the work the Directorate for Higher Education and Skills is established to help increase the quality of education as well as competence, make international collaboration with other countries and universities stronger, as well as be a key player in strengthening the digital reconstruction of universities in Norway[44]. The directorate further works through different kinds of methods. They have different programs and funding opportunities that they publish every year, these programs and/or funding can be applied for by higher education institutions such as universities and colleges, as well as international collaborations[45]. Hk Dir also conducts different types of events, such as conferences, seminars, and web seminars on topics related to their work. The directorate also publishes reports as well as other publications[46], as well as offering services such as approval of foreign education, digitalization, and safety services[47].

The Directorate for Higher Education and Skills was the one that provided the information about the thesis to the students that are and have been participating in the Norwegian

---

[44] Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse .(2023). *Om Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse.*
https://hkdir.no/hkdir/om-oss
[45] Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse .(2023). *Program og tilskot.*
https://hkdir.no/hkdir/program-og-tilskot
[46] Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse .(2023). *Rapportar og publikasjonar.*
https://hkdir.no/hkdir/rapportar
[47] Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse .(2023). *Våre Tenester.*
https://hkdir.no/hkdir/vaare-tenester

Students at Risk program (StAR). As they are the ones with the contact information for the students.

4.3 Thematic Analysis of Student Interviews

In this chapter, the thematic analysis of the interview material of the participants of the study is presented in order to be part of the case study of this research, and ultimately answer the research questions. The thematic analysis is further organized by five overarching themes, which will act as a guide throughout this section of the analysis, the overarching themes are: the selection of participants, the application process, the challenges of the program, the benefits of the program, and ultimately the changes that should be made. Each of the overarching themes further has sub-themes that have been identified from the material of the interviews during transcription. The sub-themes represent the specific codes that have been prominent from the interviews, and that can be found overlapping between the interviews-creating common themes in the material.

4.3.1 The Selection of Participants

In this overarching theme is the criteria for the selection of participants discussed in regard to the material obtained during interviews with successful participants. The participants discussed how they found out about the Norwegian Students at Risk program as well as why they think they were selected- as these two topics often occurred to be interconnected, at least from the perceptions of the students themselves. This discussion resulted in one sub-theme identified: Networking

4.3.1.1 Networking

In conversation about how the students found out about the program as well as how they got chosen, the theme of Networking became prominent in the discussions. Several participants mentioned that their contact with certain NGOs and other organizations is the basis for how they got to know about the program as well as became nominated. Lisa was clear that she

found out about the program from the organization Scholars at Risk, which also continued to nominate her for the Norwegian Students at Risk program.

Lisa explains that she both found out about the program due to her contacts, but also that she was successful in applying and being chosen because of it. Lisa spoke about how the program is hard to find, which she saw as a good thing- as she means it is a way for eligible students to find it and be considered for the program, rather than anyone who would like to apply to study in Norway.

> *Scholars at Risk was the organization who made me candidate. They referred me, or they were a reference for me to apply to students at risk. So they actually helped me.*
>
> *It's coming to an e-mail group and I think it's good that it's not so public because I felt like it's a program that they don't announce it so loudly, which is quite good and normal because then you will find people who really need it and it was network-based. I mean with network based it needs references so not a random person can easily apply. Like even you apply personally or individually you need to find some references. So I like that the process was conducted with some NGOs and especially human rights NGOs via these NGOs. So it was, I think it was one of the good things about application process and other than that it was, for me it was a little hard, because I needed a few references for scholars at risk. Not for students at risk, but for scholars at risk, for them to nominate me to students at risk. You know the process, I guess.*
>
> *Yeah, I think because I was one of the secondaries of this petition. So and it was widely known, especially among the Scholars at Risk community. And this network was aware of this situation. So it was for me, it was easy to prove that I really need it and I'm really at risk. To apply for this program. So I think that helped me and yeah.*

<div align="right">Lisa</div>

The interviewee Clara also made it clear that she found out about the Norwegian Students at Risk program from an organization in the country that she had to flee to while being at risk in her own country. She furthermore got told about the program from this organization rather than finding it herself. Clara continued on to explain how her networking with the NGO that

went on to nominate her and help her with the process is the reason that she got chosen, from her own experience. As well as the Norwegian organizations' interest in the country which she came from at risk. Clara explains that she found out about the program due to an organization that operated where she was staying after she had to flee her country.

> *And then in .... there was this .... community that was helping exiled people and they share about the student-at-risk program. And then I was like, ok, I'm going to apply.*

> *I think it was because I had the NGO, it's one of the institutions that at the beginning you can contact to ask them, "Hey, can you nominate me for a scholarship?" I knew about them because the .... person in the community shared an e-mail. So I contacted a guy called ...., I think. I don't remember his last name and we never met in person. And I sent him photos of me protesting in .... I sent him a press note. I sent him everything. So he said okay. And when I came to Norway, I realized that SAIH has like many relationships with .... NGOs. And for them it was like a topic of interest to be like what's going on in .... And when I was like when I came here, one of the advisors of SAIH told me that in the past that they have had like. Scholarship holders from .... So yeah, I think it's because they have interest in .... regarding the location, socio, political actions and all these things that they work with.*

<div align="right">Clara</div>

Yousef also mentioned that the reason he found out about the Norwegian Students at Risk program was an email from his colleague, which is the reason he ended up going to Norway as a student at risk.

> *One day I got an e-mail from my colleague at service and he told me, like, there is this program, do you want to finish your education? And I was like, yeah, sure, because like I was expelled in my 3rd year, so. Before graduation, just like just a few months before.*

<div align="right">Yousef</div>

4.3.2 The Application Process.

This overarching theme will present material relevant to the application process of the Norwegian Students at Risk program. This overarching theme will thus present information that surfaced during conversations about the application process with the participants. Two different sub-themes were further identified on the basis of this type of discussion and information: Matters of Privilege and Money as well as Flexibility.

4.3.2.1 Matters of Privilege and Money

A recurring theme on the topic of the application process is the importance of paperwork, which many times is not easy to obtain by the applying students who are situated at risk as they can be expensive as well as hard to obtain. The interviewee Clara spoke about how she was not able to obtain all the paperwork needed to apply for her own funding and financial situation while at risk. She needed to rely on friends and family to help her with money and translation of the documents in order to have the opportunity to apply to the Norwegian Students at Risk program.

Clara identifies that a student that is eligible for the students at risk program, for being at risk such as herself, might not have all the resources that are necessary for the application processes of the StAR program.

> *Well, for me it was extremely difficult because I was basically a homeless person*
> *living in complete poverty and depending on people that took care of me like an*
> *Economic Community. I see them as a family. And I didn't have money to translate*
> *so much like paperwork. So what I did was like, I had to ask for help and I had a*
> *North American friend that helped me a lot with that. And also some people from*
> *home sent me money.*

Clara

Yousef also stated that money and privilege are the keys to a successful application process. He could not stress enough how important these terms are in order to be considered as an

applicant to the Norwegian Students at Risk program. Yousef spoke about how the reason that he was chosen for the program is because he was lucky and privileged. In Yousef's opinion, there are a lot of factors about the application process that are not fair and make being selected as a participant based on aspects of privilege- such as contacts, money, and background.

> *I am so privileged in so many ways. All the students that whom I know and who deserves this scholarship way more than me would not be able to access it.*

> *I was privileged. Yeah. And in the privileged positions in a privileged circle in ..... that is like has to do with human rights and stuff like that and. That was it. I was privileged for being able to speak English. I was privileged for my connection back then and for the fact that I worked in a prestigious NGO.*

> *"Can you take the IELTS again? Because your IELTS is a little bit old, like three years old". I was again, I was super privileged that I managed to get some papers about like my education and what credentials have I obtained up till now.*

<div align="right">Yousef</div>

4.3.2.2 Flexibility

Another prominent theme was one of flexibility. Various interviews showed that the perception of the application process from multiple perspectives is that it is flexible.

In John's experience, the application process was very easy as the program itself and the people who are a part of it are very helpful in assisting with the whole application process- which makes it very easy.

> *I feel like it's an easy application process and I think the most important thing that they because you know when you are applying, there are so many people, students that were applying. I think what is important is through the application they want to know: Which risk are you facing? Are you at risk? Can you explain the reasons why you feel like you are at risk? (....) I think that's one of the most important thing is that application it's very assisting. They take you through the whole process and they'll tell you everything you know.*

Adam compared the application process of the Norwegian Students at Risk program to the German program. He calls the process of application to the Norwegian program flexible as they, in this opinion, take individual factors that might affect one's application into account. Adam also spoke specifically about how the Norwegian nomination process is carried out, by institutions rather than by investors. This makes the process easier which he appreciated.

I would say it's quite flexible and it's very nice because I can compare it to the German students at Risk program because they also have this and the original one is more flexible in terms of documents because they mentioned that if you don't have any documents or for example, you don't have the official translation of the documents, it's fine for now, you can manage it later because yeah, there are some deadlines and you need to send all the documents on time and this point is very important. When I applied first, I didn't have all the translations of the documents and it was very helpful for me, as well as the Language Certificate of IELTS in English because at the time I was preparing for passing to pass the the exam, but at the moment of applying first I didn't have it and again it was fine.

And I would say that German system is quite complicated and bureaucratic in this way because all these investors, they have different systems. And in Norway everything is done by institutions. So you just need to prepare all your documents, write your motivation letter and then you're just waiting for responses for some interviews if necessary with universities and so on. And I think it's that's that makes everything easier because for foreigners when they come to a new system. It it quite complicated to get through all these absolutely new procedures.

<div align="right">Adam</div>

Eric touched on almost exactly the same aspects of the flexibility of the program as Adam did. He spoke about the flexibility of the application process as it can be catered to individual needs, for example, if someone is missing a document at the time of the recruitment process - it can be overlooked for the time being so the person can have more time to collect the document in question when it is possible for that person to do so.

It is structured in such a way that student are able to then apply begin the process of applying. Before they even get to have their diplomas and then they are allowed to send their diplomas or their certificate later if they are succeeding in the process.

I think it's good on that aspect and also it is also good because where we are coming from and application involve a lot of application fees. I don't know whether it's happening in Italy or somewhere or anywhere in the world. So that's burden of making the payments of application fee and other financial applications that are related to application. They are not a burden of the applicant. I think that is one way which is actually enabling a number of students or a number of applicants to actually be able to apply, especially those who are coming from spaces where they might not have the necessary resources for making those payments. I think it's it's, it's correct, it's proper in that way

Eric

4.3.3 The Challenges of the Program

The third overarching theme that was identified in the interview material is the Challenges of the Program. One of the main discussions in many of the interviews can be connected to which challenges that occur when applied and being selected for the Norwegian Students at Risk program. Three sub-themes were furthermore identified from codes in the material on this topic: Loneliness, Racism and Discrimination, and the Visa Process.

4.3.3.1 Loneliness

A recurring topic of concern in the interviews is the culture shock that the students experience when they come to Norway through the Norwegian Students at Risk program.

Clara, Eric, and Anna all mentioned that feeling lonely is a big part of being a participant in the Norwegian StAR program. Clara mentions how she experienced a culture shock when she came to Norway. She further explains that the program itself provides you with all the necessities to survive, but not really any sense of belonging or tools to cope with the change of culture that comes with moving to another part of the world. And at the same time dealing with trauma from being at risk from your country, and might not have the possibility to go back- as in Clara's case being an asylum seeker.

Yeah, for me, for example, as the Latin American, coming to Norway was a huge full culture shock. It was like, my God. So I met other Latinos that were like " I love it since the first time", but for me it was like- I came in extremely vulnerable conditions. I didn't have anybody. I didn't have no place to go back, basically. Actually, I applied for asylum because I cannot go back to my country. Yeah. So I told one of the advisors in Norway that I felt like this, like parents that are very absent, but they give you everything. They give you all the money, the best school, the best opportunities. But they're never with you. Yeah. So I felt extremely lonely.

Clara

Eric states that the most challenging part of the program is the geographical distance from friends and family. He mentions that the program itself offers some types of emotional support, such as counseling. But nonetheless, it is not the same as being around the people you love, and want to share your experiences and news with.

Obviously, the program is actually taking you away from your loved ones. You get to spend some years away from your family, away from the society where all the people that are close to you are, so. That alone is actually a much more challenging thing, but other than that, they are able to provide the necessary support, counseling and all the likes that keep us going while we are away. But nonetheless, it doesn't take away the big that you're away from home and all those anxieties and times. You receive some very big news while you are here and can't do anything, you can't help the situation. So that's it.

Eric

Anna talks about the challenges of the changing climate that many students participating in the program experience. As the weather conditions in Norway are very different from many countries that the students in the StAR program might come from, it can be a difficult thing to adapt to. This might result in students experiencing depression and anxiety if they are forced to deal with it alone without proper support from the program they've been accepted to and are a part of.

Yeah, normally the start program starts in August. So in September, that's when we do the annual meeting. Or I feel like maybe if we can have that one in September, then another one probably during the winter when it's very, very cold.

John was also on the same track. He spoke about the difficulties that students experience with the change of weather. Which can lead to depression and anxiety.

> *Yeah, it would be nice in the winter. Because most of the guys that come with the students at risk, they are you know, they're not used to this weather. The most will be end up being depressed and some with anxiety and you know.*

<div align="right">John</div>

4.3.3.2 Racism and Discrimination

Another sub-theme that emerged under the overarching theme of challenges within the program is racism and discrimination. More than one participant discussed difficulties they have experienced based on how they look and where they are from.

A recurring theme between the interviews was the mention of racism and discrimination. It was often connected to the knowledge, from what the participants have been told, to Norwegian culture itself. Lisa explained that the racial discrimination she experienced during her time in the Students at Risk program is something she was not comfortable talking about when she was in the program- as she thought it would have made her look ungrateful for the opportunity she had been given. She connects the racism and discrimination she experienced to Norwegian culture and explained that that was the most challenging part of the program for her. Lisa also mentioned how she thinks Norwegian anti-immigration laws actually affect the program in regard to legal regulations that the program has to follow.

> *It's Norwegian culture. Yeah, I can say because it's to be honest, it is. I think, as I said, it's been three years since I left this program, so I'm really more open about it. Because in the previous times because I was getting paid from this program and I didn't want to be seen as like I don't know the words but like non grateful. So I didn't want to seem like this. So my criticisms were really milder. But now, and of course I enjoyed this program very much. But if I say anything challenging it would be like little cultural. I don't want to say cultural racism in Norway, but. If there is any other milder words you can help me, yeah. No, I like discrimination, but like*

towards race, I guess. Like cultural discrimination. Because it's not like, oh, you you Arab or you African we hate you. It's not so direct.

But I think the other problem is a bigger problem because this one. It's harder to solve because really from Norway to all around the world you get candidates and most of the times you cannot be sure who really needs this program but this Norwegian anti immigrant perception or anti immigrant institutions? Laws, regulations actually was one of the problems and of course it is beyond this program. So I also I talk about these problems and they told that it is it is not in their control and in their how to say in their power, yeah. So it's not possible for them to regulate it directly, but I think from the top higher positions or from the authorities, this can be done better.

<div align="right">Lisa</div>

Clara gave a few examples of her experience as a Student at Risk in the Norwegian program. The discrimination she explained she experienced comes in different forms. First of all, she explained that as a Latin American woman, people, in general, had a prejudice against her, which made her not able to act in certain ways without being judged by that stereotype and perception people had/have of her just of where she is from. Second of all, Clara had a bad experience at an event connected to the program, in which she felt like a serious event was mishandled by the staff of the program itself, with the excuse of Norwegian culture.

Coming from like a violent environment and then coming to this apparently peaceful land and then the cultural shock, Not understanding how things work here, What to say? Being called angry Latina but then me wondering why I cannot get angry people when is disrespecting me

Oh, I remember once in a meeting. That was in Utoya. Like a guy, a guy passed close to me and he basically rub his dick against my hip. And I got mad and I told one of the advisors and then they just talk with him in private. Didn't tell me anything during the trip and then she'll say it's because you're Latina, he thinks he can do whatever he wants with you and I'm like. What the fuck? What kind of comment is that? And this person was surprised me the most after a while, was that she has to work with Latin America, she speaks Spanish, and I don't think that's like a comment you should do to a person. But at the same time, I understand that some Europeans tell you those things not because they want to to offend you. Like I have a friend that explained me. It's just like here in Europe with the xenophobia and

<div align="center">88</div>

stuff. Some people think that they can offend the immigrants and they're just not going to do anything because they get scared. And I told her, okay, I understand like that happens here, but something I'm not used to it. So I'm going to react because I'm tired of just like, swallowing everything, you know. But because I had my scholarship, I was like, oh, so that's just problematic. I was like just avoiding everybody for two years. And then Corona was during my studies, actually, but when I started. So it was perfect for me, like I can hide it in my bedroom and it's socially acceptable and I won't be in problems anymore. Yay.

<div align="right">Clara</div>

Yousef spoke specifically about an event he experienced advocating for the Students at Risk program in Norway, to a parliament member. He explained that the parliament member that they (himself and other students in the program) spoke to was only interested in if and when Yousef and his colleagues were returning to their countries, instead of showing interest in other aspects of the program and appreciating Yousef and the others being there. This made Yousef feel like the government and parliament themselves did not welcome him, and the other students coming as part of the Norwegian Students at Risk Program.

So I met with a Parliament member. I think I have talked about student at risk in every single Norwegian university. I don't think there is a new university that I didn't visit promoting the program and I have seen how politicians are treating this program and on what basis they are extending it into a pilot program again and again and again. When he met us we were I think 12 students and he asked each one of us, when are you going to return to your country each one of us. So, and that was his only concern we were meeting him to advocate for making the scholarship permanent while he was concerned about. Ah, what's your name? Where are you from? Are you, are you returning or not? And when are you returning everyone of us? And he, and he is supposed to be the, I don't know, the minority representative in the right wing Parliament. But yeah, so I think that was my worst experience with it. Like this mental problem, yeah.

<div align="right">Yousef</div>

Anna spoke specifically about an event that happened when she first arrived in Norway. When she landed at the airport in Norway, she was mistreated by the immigration staff working there on the basis that she did not have all the material things the Norwegian staff considered a matter of course.

Systems are actually different from here in Europe and in Africa, so they don't give you that small orientation of what you expect to you know, to see when you arrive in, Norway, for example, myself. I really struggled to, you know, to look up my school. Of course, there was Google, but it's not everyone who's privileged to have maybe a laptop or a smartphone, like in my case, I had this small funny phone. Even at the airport, the immigration guys, wanted to see my e-mail, whether I have the correct visa, the correct place of to stay and I had this funny phone. They started laughing. They didn't even check all my details because they were laughing at my phone and they just say okay, it's okay you can just take your passport to customs because I was not that privileged to have the smartphone.

Anna

4.3.3.3 Visa Process

Another challenge that became prominent while transcribing the interviews was the visa process. The mentioning of the visa process as something difficult was recurring in many of the interviews and therefore created this identified theme. Adam spoke about his own situation and experience with the visa application. He spoke about the huge risks and limitations that the current methods of obtaining visas are to the students of the StAR program. As the program itself does not give visa guarantees to the students that are accepted to the program, the difficulties of getting the visa can be crucial for the future of a student coming to Norway as a StAR student or not. The implications that are added to the visa procedure by the Norwegian state and embassies also affect some students more than others, based on which country they come from. The visa process is therefore a great limitation to the Norwegian Students at Risk program.

Yeah, I would say at that stage to apply for a residence committee, you need to collect a lot of documents. I think it was maybe 50 or 60 pages of different documents. It was, it was a lot, yes. And yeah. And I think maybe it's also a kind of limitation because not all of people can again, students at risk who have a lot of money, do such journeys. And it was also mentioned that okay if you're accepted to the university you're accepted to the students at risk program. But if you don't get a visa because you're rejected for one reason or another we can't do anything. So you won't be able to come and from what I know for example in some Asian countries. Like Bangladesh, as far as I remember, Norway states that people from Bangladesh cannot get residents permit to study at the bachelor level. I don't know why and

that's also a limitation. So for example, there is a student from Bangladesh who applied for resident permit to study at the bachelor. They won't be accepted and they won't be able to come. So even if they were accepted to the risk program. If they don't get approved for a visa, they can't come and the students at risk won't do anything about it. And this is what they mentioned even in the list. We provide you with all the necessary documents to apply, but if you're rejected, we can't do anything. That's a big limitation. And that was very risky. So I applied and I'm already accepted, but I was still thinking of that process of visas because yeah, it might be. It could be problematic afterward.

<div align="right">Adam</div>

Lisa also criticized the way the visa application works, as the program does not have a visa guarantee. You can thus be accepted to the program but denied a visa. This is also a problem as different embassies and visa offices have shown to be more and less strict and thus more or less likely to accept or deny students.

> *The student at risk program is lacking the visa guarantee. Yeah that was a real problem because in one site they accept you to the program, but in other sites region rules for visa is really really strict. So this one might be my criticism for this application process.*

<div align="right">Lisa</div>

Clara spoke about her own experience with getting the visa, and how difficult it was for her. Not only did it take money and energy it also took a lot of traveling for her to get her visa- which she is critical against. She is also critical of the lack of information and knowledge that you are given about this process, as for her it was shown that she did not have to go through all the effort they told her in the first place to obtain her visa.

> *When I was going to play for the visa, that was a pain, they asked to because I was in the Netherlands with the other play about political prisoners and I asked them, but in the Netherlands, can I apply here? No, you have to go to the country where you are resident. And I'm like, I can, I cannot do that. Well, in because of the Central America we have like a thing called CF4 that means that you can move around Central America with just with your national ID corps. So that's why I could go back to ....., submit everything, go back to the Netherlands to finish the data and go back to .... And when I was back in the Netherlands they replied to me saying*

like oh you're a high skilled immigrant so you can apply for the visa directly in
Norway. And I'm like, what the fuck?

<div align="right">Clara</div>

4.3.4 The Benefits of the Program

In conversations about the main benefits that the students experience with the program, it became apparent that two main themes emerged from similarities between the different interviews. Several of the students reflected on the academic and higher education benefits that come with the program, as well as the financial benefits that the program offers.

4.3.4.1 Academic and Higher Education Benefits

Lisa talks about how both academic and social benefits have been the core of success for her in regard to the aim of the program, and her need for it. She mentioned that not only did these benefits work in her favor while being in Norway as a student at risk, but also these benefits open up opportunities for the future, even abroad

> *In terms of benefits, yeah, I think it might have quite good academical benefits, but bigger than that actually. It has quite good social benefits, especially if you're really at risk. And as I said before these 2-3 years like for your bachelor's or for your master can be quite critical and this program helps you to spend this critical time. Especially in my case it was the situation in Norway and it also opens some doors abroad, so I think I think the most important benefit is this covering this very critical time.*

<div align="right">Lisa</div>

Clara spoke about the way the higher education system works in Norway has given her opportunities. The way you yourself obtain the freedom to decide over your own studies and plan your time as it suits you helped her finish her degree. She sees the way leadership is carried out in Norway as a benefit as well, as it is the core of these academic freedoms that she experienced in Norway. This freedom also translates into the school organizations and extracurricular activities that were offered, which also helped her academically and benefitted her and her degree.

Here in Norway things are more like horizontal leadership. So I really enjoyed that and I also like that you can administrate your time the way you decide, not how they tell you you should do. There is sort of the freedom a lot of student organizations and clubs to the sports, which is amazing like you can improve your mental health and physical with that, and also that helps if you're traumatized of course. And it's very peaceful, so you don't get scared in the street life. For example, as a woman in my city it was very dangerous to work at night and here I have been outside and nothing happens. Yeah, Yeah. So I feel it's like the best is my degree. For me, that was the best outcome.

Clara

Adam, similar to Clara, spoke about the leadership methods in Norway and how that translate into academic benefits. The way things are taught, in Adam's opinion, gives room for different perspectives and pieces of knowledge. This opens up a more relaxed discussion about various opinions, which for him coming from a place where this is not obvious, has resulted in great benefits academically. Adam also mentioned the benefits that he has received from the higher education institutions themselves, not just academically but also the kind and understanding treatment he has received from the university that he is studying at, and the benefits that come with the help and support he knows he has from them.

I think it's also about the just general system of education in Norway. But it's very neutralistic in a way that there are so many perspectives of a lot of things. And I think that's wonderful that you can study here, you can study here with no stress of of being persecuted for your opinion.

Like generally, education in Norway is quite chilling and quite liberal and is very, very convenient to study here. But also when I came to the university to get the student information or something, they already knew about me that I'm a student at risk. And we had the kind of private conversation on that and they said if you need anything, if you need any kind of support, you come to us, we will solve everything. So they were friendly and very helpful. Hopefully, there was no need for me to come to them quite early on any kind of issues, but it was just very pleasant to realize that there is such an opportunity, so if I have problems I know where I can come and who I can ask for some support.

Adam

4.3.4.2 Feeling of hope

One theme that emerged within the overarching theme of the benefits of the program is the feeling of hope. Yousef mentioned that one of the biggest benefits of the StAR program in his opinion is the hope that it gives, not only to the student being accepted into the program but also to other students that are in similar situations as Yousef was.

> *Like for instance, I would think it give hope to other students who even who lost their educations. Maybe, maybe a very big hope, maybe not a very big hope. But some hope like this guy who was expelled like me, he's now in Europe after studying and doing stuff. So maybe I can also like it's not that bad for me. In prison, maybe one day I'll get out of prison like him and I'll go to study.*
>
> Yousef

Anna also spoke on how the program has given her, and her fellow students that are part of the program, hope for the future. The hope that the program gives also reflects hope for future possibilities. From being faced with expulsion and suspension to applying and looking at Ph.D. opportunities around the world based on the hope that the Students at Risk program brought her

> *Like as we mentioned, both of us that we have been facing expulsion, suspension, blacklisted in our home country. So it actually gives us hope to say okay, I've been suspended or expelled from my home university, okay I now have another chance to finish my studies as a stat student. Of course, if you. Are eager enough you can advance your studies. Maybe you can go for a PhD, start looking for another opportunities. Maybe in the UK, in Canada, USA. Like it carves a way from you know. The journey you start, where you started, where you are coming from and where you are going. (...) you can actually say the students at risk actually paved a way for for me to look into another opportunities ahead of me.*
>
> Anna

This theme was also identified in the interview with Eric. He spoke about how the Student at Risk program gives hope to many students that are facing situations of denied education or risky and critical situations connected to academic freedom.

So the programs actually give hope to those students, to these members of who are coming from societies where they are taken as outcasts. So it's really a hope giver to many of us.

<div align="right">Eric</div>

4.3.4.3 Financial support

The other very prominent theme that was identified while talking about the benefits of the program with the students was the financial support that being part of the program gives you. Eric mentioned that the procedures of the programs, such as connection to the application, the visa, or the program itself- the program can fund it for you if you are not able to do it yourself. Which is a huge help.

Whenever you need some visa you need or anything, the program is able to commit itself to undertake any costs that are related to that and it makes the transition to be very easy.

<div align="right">Eric</div>

Anna spoke about the opportunities the programs give you because of the monthly stipend that you are able to receive because of the funding of the program. She spoke about how she is not only able to pay rent, food, etc. But she has also been able to buy a smartphone and a laptop thanks to the money she has received from being a student of the Norwegian Students at Risk program.

Those little little benefits like the monthly stipend. Of course you have to pay your rent, you have to buy your bus card, but you have a little something to yourself you can. Like I was telling you, I wasn't lying. I didn't have a smartphone. I didn't have a laptop. The one that I'm using, I bought them when I came here through the first stipend. So personally for me it was really good for me. I wouldn't know about the next person if maybe the next person was to hear about my experience. They will say, how can you be bragging about your laptop and the so forth. But for me it was something that was huge that was built and I managed to achieve it because of the of the STAR program.

<div align="right">Anna</div>

Adam mentioned how he thinks his mental health has improved due to the financial support he has received from being part of the program. Having a stable income has helped Adam feel at peace, and more stable- which has made great efforts for his mental health.

> *And yeah, I think that's a feeling of peacefulness. It was very, it was very nice that just for mental health, for feeling very, yeah, very calm here. I think. I think it's very important because I was struggling getting some kind of stable place, with a stable income for two years. So it was afterwards, it was very, it was very nice for me.*

Adam

John spoke about his appreciation for the thought that has gone into planning the funding that the students of the program receive. Not only is the money itself a great contribution and gives way for opportunities for the students, but the efforts and consideration of the program itself are a huge benefit from John's perspective.

> *So I also feel like that one that's one of also the important things and also I want also to reiterate that the the way they treat the students to actually calculate like how much do you need to spend for basic things it is also important because when you don't have certain things and especially we are moving the new environment. So that consideration that also they put you into consideration that we need to actually provide these students with a financial support that will actually help them to finish the month or so on.*

John

4.3.5 The Changes that should be made

All of the themes that have emerged from the interviews give important characteristics of the program. The last theme that became apparent was changes that the students see could be made to the program in order to improve it further. This overarching theme has two sub-themes: Emotional Support and Extension of the program.

4.3.5.1 Emotional Support

A characteristic that was recurrent between the interviews, in connection with the main characteristics of the program was the one about emotional support. As mentioned above,

financial support was often mentioned in regard to the main benefits, but the need/existence of support on an emotional level was very prominent as a criticism of the practical implementation and experience of the program.

Lisa spoke about how the emotional and social support that she received as a Student at Risk was not by professionals, which is something that she believes it should have been. As mentioned earlier, loneliness was a prominent theme identified in the transcription of the interviews. Lisa mentions here that adapting to Norwegian culture and conditions without professional emotional support was very hard, and affected her mental health. She furthermore spoke on how a lot of focus is on the academic integration of the students but that the focus should instead shift to social integration.

> *Yeah. I totally don't think that we got enough emotional support in the program. And of course, I know people were very, very kind and like the. How to say the organizers or the staff, the personnel in the program were really nice, but they were not professionals. So when it comes to mental support, yeah. So I think this program might need better mental support team when it comes to Norway's very different climates and culture and lifestyle and everything. So like when you go to the Norway, I come from ……., it's not so far from Europe, but still I know other people also. For me it was something where was very, very, very hard and. I think they were quite understanding these mental issues there that we might face because of this weather conditions, darkness and everything and special for people living up north like me, I was in ...... So I think they are aware of these risks and problems and they always try to help, but I think it needs to be more professional.*
>
> *I would be more active on social integration of the students rather than on the academic integration.*
>
> Lisa

Clara gave specific examples of situations that showed her experience with the lack of emotional support that she believes is needed in such a program. She specifically told a story about arriving in Norway at the airport and not being met with a warm welcome to the program. Clara had spoken about the lack of emotional support with a responsible person for the program, but is under the perception that making this change into more focus on emotional support of the StAR students is not possible for them due to them having more focus on other responsibilities.

Norwegians won't go to the airport to give you a warm welcome like in Latin
America. And I say to her "But maybe you should have like a person that will do
those things in every city because it's like extremely intimidating to come here and
be all by by yourself and somehow you do have like you know advice or sort of the
the secretary in university or stuff" But they are busy with like all the all
responsibilities they have and they cannot or focus on the the StAR students.

<div align="right">Clara</div>

Anna is on the same track as Clara. She spoke about how emotional support was missing from the beginning. Anna talked about the feeling of being dumped in Norway without any support right from the start when arriving in Norway. She furthermore suggested that more efforts should be made to bring the students at risk in Norway together than they are doing now. Anna explains that connecting with the other students gives a sense of belonging, which acts as emotional support.

But upon arrival I feel like the program is like. I don't want to use this word, but
allow me to use it anyway. They, like, dump us. No, you don't know anything.

That emotional and social support, you know to say we are all students at risk, we
have different, you know, backgrounds and we faced different situation from our
home countries. So that sense of belonging that okay, these are my people, we are
here because of the same cause. I think once a year is not enough.

<div align="right">Anna</div>

The main assumption to make from these emerging themes from the interviews is a certain criticism of the emotional support system that the students experience as students at risk through the StAR program. However, not all students felt like this. One of the interviewees, Eric, spoke about how he has experienced a great support system in relation to the psychological stress that the students being part of the program are subjected to experiencing. He spoke about how the program takes it upon itself to provide professional support to deal with these emotions that the students might feel.

The consideration that while we are here, we are away from home and we are going
to be subjected to a lot of psychological stress strains, so they are able then to take

care of that by providing counseling and ensuring that we keep track with our
academic pace.

<div align="right">Eric</div>

4.3.5.2 Extension of the program

In regards to changes that should be made to the program, a second theme appeared from the transcriptions: the possibility of an extension of the program. Eric spoke about how he would like to see broader coordination of the Students at Risk program around Europe- in order to create more opportunities for students. According to Eric, he believes that broader coordination of the program would create more academic opportunities for students, and create a broader pool of degrees that the students could choose from instead of having fewer options.

> *I think if the program can be internationally coordinated, perhaps only the countries that are actually having the program could have one Coordination Center for purposes of proper placement, it will broaden the choices or the available options that the student or the applicant will want to pursue academic area. I think that's where they will have to make some, some consideration so that student don't get to be conditioned to choose the programs and that they have much more options.*
>
> *I think I can emphasize on that a much more broader coordination of the program need to be taken into account and to emphasized.*

<div align="right">Eric</div>

John is on the same track as Eric, he believes that an expanded program that includes more countries and universities would ease the application process as well as the program as a whole. John also spoke about the importance of a broader program in regard to the current political context. He talked about how the rise of populism affects the production of knowledge, and the existence of academic freedom. He believes that by making the program broader and existent in more countries, the production of critical thinkers that will defend academic freedom from this populist threat will increase.

And actually expand it. It can also actually ease the application not only but if we include more countries that also share the same passion of helping students that way at Risk can actually ease the, the, the application of the student at risk program.

And recently we have populist populism which is opened rising and it is both of that. So we need students to be thinkers. We need students to be very intellectual and very critical. So this is a very good program and a very good opportunity for certain that risk. So I believe and I wish that this program will actually evolve into other countries as well. It will grow bigger so that the ideas of academic freedom can flourish everywhere in the world.

<div align="right">John</div>

Adam did also speak about an extension of a part of the program. Rather than broaden the location of the program and extend the program to more countries- Adam spoke about the possibilities more English programs would bring. In Adam's experience- the possibilities for bachelor students to be accepted to the program are less than the ones for master's students, as the number of bachelor's programs in English is less. He continued by saying that he understands that this is not a decision made by the StAR program itself, but rather the education system in Norway- but it is affecting the program.

First English speaking programs. But I think it's just the system of education or that they just don't have a lot of bachelors in English. So it's not specifically the problem, the problem of students at risk, but the just the system of education, but for masters the list is so huge. For example, not so long ago some other students from ..... were accepted to the students at risk. So from the next year they're going to study here and and they received quite a lot of offers, but they were kind of applying for masters and when I was accepted there was only one offer from one university. Because yeah, the list is quite small for bachelors, so I think for masters it's wonderful, but for bachelors, yeah, it might be problematic depending on your previous academic background.

<div align="right">Adam</div>

5. Discussion of the Results and Findings

This chapter will present the result of the findings in connection with the theoretical framework earlier presented. To summarize the findings in the previous chapter: The findings chapter consisted of three different sections that are the basis of the case study on the Norwegian Students at Risk program, the first one introduced background on the Norwegian Student at Risk program through information from two evaluation reports done about the program. This section provides us with background information about the program as well as the specific characteristics of the program that have been discussed in previous reports. As these reports were conducted in 2017 and 2020, additional information of relevance was added through a discussion with two key actors and people involved in the students at risk program as well as those somewhat responsible for the implementation of the program in Norway.

The second section introduced the Norwegian stance on academic freedom as well as an introduction to relevant organizations to the Norwegian Students at Risk program. This section provides further information about the context in which the phenomenon, the Students at Risk program, exists.

The third section provides information through a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with seven participants of the program. This section provides personal perspectives of the program by presenting codes in the interview material from similarities between the interviews in order to answer the research questions.

This section where the results are presented and discussed is divided into subheadings that act as a guide for the discussion of how the findings connect with each other as well as to the theoretical frameworks. The key findings from the earlier chapter can be summarized and divided into the headings: Tuition fees and funding, contradictions between the government and the program, the program as development aid, connection to decolonial and anti-oppressive internationalization approach, political challenges, and finally, recommendations to other programs.

5.1 Tuition Fees and Funding

In the first section of the findings, it was made visible by the interview held with the program responsible that the future of the program is a bit unclear, as the Norwegian government is planning to possibly start asking for tuition fees for international students attending Norwegian universities, as it up until now has been free. This would change the base of the program massively, as it would no longer be clear how the Students at Risk students would be funded to attend the Norwegian universities. The answer to the question of what would happen if this were to happen is not yet known. What was made prominent, however, is that it might become like a competition between different actors and programs that would want universities to keep a certain percentage or a quota of free university places open for their specific students. This specific situation presented in the findings can be connected to what Hans de Wit (2019) discusses about the change in internationalization- from cooperation to competition. If the Norwegian system changes and starts charging international students tuition fees, it will almost act as a metaphor for what de Wit is referring to. The different organizations and or programs that exist under the umbrella of internationalization providers will have to start competing with each other in order to keep providing the programs within internationalization that they earlier could provide without competition (de Wit, 2019)- this will also result in fewer programs within the internationalization process and context connected to Norway. Another aspect of this possibility is that international students who have money will be able to pay their own tuition fees and thus compete with these programs that are providing places at universities for international students who can not afford to pay. Varvus and Pekol talk about how the Global North has been reproducing an unequal distribution of funds through having tuition fees at universities that are appealing to students with money, introducing this system therefore, could result in a continuance of this challenge and aspect of internationalization (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

This aspect is connected to Varvu's and Pekol's political-economic dimension within critical internationalization. It is important to note that when it comes to the Norwegian Students at Risk program, one can not only take the program itself, the organizations, or the higher education institutions involved into consideration. As the program has been built with such close cooperation with the state, through the methods of funding and so on, one must also discuss the stance, involvement, and manner of the Norwegian government. The

political-economic dimension involves how the quality of education is globally unequal, due to the processes of globalization. Therefore, by introducing tuition fees without a solid plan for programs such as these, it might do just exactly this. All of this is also connected to a theme identified in the third section of the findings chapter - the financial benefits of the program. This was one of the themes that were most prominent in the student interviews and would also be affected by the change of the funding, as another system of accepting and funding international students could also affect the funding of international students' monthly stipend. This possibility was also mentioned by a Norwegian StAR representative in the first section of the findings.

5.2 Contradiction Between the Program and the Government

In the findings a theme identified from the student interviews was the one of racism and discrimination. In this theme, Yousef mentioned a specific situation where he met with a member of parliament to advocate for the program. This situation stood out to Yousef as he felt like the parliament member did not view them as students at risk which is an asset to Norway, but rather as a problem that needs to go back home when their time in the program is up. This particular situation can be connected to the idea of the term international from what was presented in the internationalization section by Buckner and Stein (2019). Buckner and Stein discussed how the term international is based on assumptions from a colonial, Western, and Eurocentric perspective, which makes the idea of the term international be divided into two identities within the term- local/national and abroad/foreign. The situation that Yousef described can be understood from this understanding of international. The parliamentary politician that met with the Students at Risk students seemed to obtain this understanding of international and labeled the students with the second identity within the understanding- abroad/foreign. As Yousef mentioned, the politician had no individual questions for the students and was neither interested in obtaining an individual understanding of each of the student's identities. This situation is furthermore a good example of this kind of mindset and understanding of the term international, as it shows the creation of a very non-diverse understanding of these students, which further acts to continue structural inequalities within the internationalization context (Buckner & Stein, 2019).

The situation that Yousef spoke about can also be understood from Stein's connection between neoliberal views and the current internationalization theory. Stein discusses and criticizes how the system of internationalization is based on the needs and wants of the Western world, which can be closely connected to this situation. The politician showed that the needs and wants for him, and possibly his political party, were to make sure that the students returned to their home country as soon as they finished their studies. This assumption about this politician's wants can easily be made as Yousef explained that that was the only question that he was concerned about when it came to speaking to the students at risk that was there to advocate. This can also be connected to the challenge of return that was mentioned in the findings section in regard to the evaluation reports. It showed how the program criterion of being at risk goes against the criterion the students have to meet to be able to obtain a residence permit in Norway. This criterion is to show that you will be able to return to your home country after finishing your studies within the Norwegian StAR program. This is a clear example of this mentality and understanding of internationalization as something that is merely based on the wants and needs of the Western world, from the Norwegian government's standpoint- you can come here on this at-risk program but you can not be so much at risk that there is a possibility that you can not return home once the program is finished. This understanding of internationalization can be understood as Western societies and institutions are promoting internationalization in such a way that is benefiting them and nobody else, outside of this Western Eurocentric context. This can also be referred to and discussed within the term of symbolic capital as a dimension of critical internationalization presented by Varvus and Pekol. The situation that Yousef mentioned connects to the symbolic capital dimension as the image of the program existing is being portrayed as more important than caring about the actual students within the program (Varvus & Pekol, 2015).

The issue of racism within the context of internationalization was further mentioned by Stein and Oliveira de Andreotti in the theoretical framework in regard to critical internationalization. The process in which they explain the dominant global imaginary is applicable to this situation. The way in which institutions within the Global North act in regards to internationalization concerning the Global South- as the StAR students, is related to the perception of the Global North being superior, or claiming itself as superior to the Global South. This belief also translates into all narratives within society- the feeling of Western individuals being superior to others are thus a product of this system which produces

racism and discrimination (Stein & Oliveira de Andreotti, 2015). This can be seen in the way the immigration officers acted toward Anna when they laughed about her not having a smartphone.

One of the Norwegian StAR representatives also mentioned, in regards to benefits, that the program is a great image for Norway as a whole- which he said could even be taken advantage of more by the Norwegian government as from his perspective- they do not market their image enough in regards to this program. The image that the Norwegian government would market, furthermore, would be the one of being an aid giver, as the StAR program is a development aid program, as seen from where the funding from the Norwegian state budget is allocated from (SIU, 2027). At the same time, it could be viewed as somewhat problematic if the only reason the program exists and is supported, from the Norwegian governmental perspective, is because of the image - and thus not at all about the actual students attending the program (which Yousef's example was a situation of). This can be connected to the representational dimension of internationalization as seen by Varvus and Pekol. This dimension of internationalization lives on due to marketing, and the need for the Global North to use marketing in the context of internationalization to gain capital in the higher education market (Varvus & Pekol, 2015). The Norwegian government could play into this dimension by using the StAR program to market itself in the global arena, with the hope of gaining capital of some sort. However, the Students at Risk program can also be viewed as a means to make this challenging part of internationalization change as it would work against the capitalizing drive within the context of internationalization. De Wit (2019) problematizes the belief of internationalization to gain a certain group of people and oppress others- which this program is actively working against. Therefore, the Norwegian government marketing itself and its image in regard to this specific program can instead be viewed as rather good in making a change towards a type of internationalization that this specific program stands for.

Another contradiction between the program itself and the Norwegian government is the view on academic freedom. In the second section of the findings, a report on academic freedom from the Norwegian government was presented. This report states that students are not part of academia in the same way professors and researchers are (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2022). This contradicts the base of the Student at Risk program- as it is based on academic freedom for students. So far, this has not seemed to affect the program, but once again is there one aspect and belief which differs greatly between the government and the

StAR program. This can further be connected to the view of academic freedom as from a traditional view or a socially engaged view (Scholars at Risk, 2020). The view of the Norwegian government and academic freedom seems more limited to the one that the program has, which is more intersectional and based on individual experience. This does not mean, however, that the program always bases its decisions on the basis of a socially engaged view of academic freedom. Both during the interviews with the students as well with the representatives it appeared that the assessment for the at-risk criteria does not have any clear guidelines. The StAR representative mentioned that it is assessed based on the country and other factors. The student Yousef however mentioned that people that he knows that are at greater risk than he is were not able to make it into the program. Although, rather than this being based on the meaning of academic freedom alone, it is most definitely based on other factors as well- such as the other criteria being met or not, and how each nominating actor chooses to assess this. As it was discovered during the interviews with the students, it is also based on the privilege of money and contacts.

5.3 The Program as Development Aid

The funding that is keeping the program going is from the development aid part of the budget, which is very interesting. This specific aspect can be problematized with the decolonial approach of internationalization that Helata and Chasi (2023) present. The idea behind the decolonial approach to internationalization is that internationalization as we know it today, is based on values from a Western perspective with a basis of colonial history (Helata & Chasi, 2023). Labeling the Norwegian StAR program as a development aid program as that is where the funding is coming from, is enforcing the understanding of the countries and individuals taking part in the program as very segregated and not very intersectional and diverse. The perception and understanding of the Global North and Global South from the Global North's perspective are reproduced by using terms and concepts like this in relation to programs directly related to internationalization. The history of colonialism and empires, as described by Helata and Chasi, is repeating itself through this kind of approach to internationalization. Helata and Chasi describe how universities themselves have to be on the front line of the change to internationalization (Helata & Chasi, 2023), but as earlier described, this needs to also apply to the Norwegian government when discussing this

particular program as they are the ones providing funding and other necessities that make the program go around and universities able to accept these students.

The term knowledge economy in regard to internationalization was also mentioned in the theoretical chapter. This term is used to describe when countries and institutions of education have a certain precedent and power in regard to research and development within the higher education sphere and use this for capitalistic purposes. The Norwegian government, in this case, through not being careful in relation to their approach to internationalization- can be understood as existing in and being a knowledge economy (Varvus & Pekol, 2015). In order to develop a more fair and equal type of internationalization, the terminology used and how it is used in regard to programs within the context need to change and develop through a more decolonial approach (Helata & Chasi, 2023).

One of the biggest benefits that were mentioned and identified during the interview with the StAR students, is the academic benefits and future opportunities because of this. Anna spoke on how the program has given her opportunities in other parts of the world because of the Students at Risk and the education in Norway. This can also be connected to the symbolic capital as discussed by Varvus and Pekol. The understanding of internationalization that exists, has this perception that the Western education system is valued higher than any other in terms of symbolic capital. The diploma from a Western university is according to this understanding, worth more than any other diploma just because it is Western (Varvus & Pekol, 2015). Being presented with many new academic opportunities after graduating from the program in Norway can thus be understood as possibly connected to the idea of symbolic capital value. This is however not to say that Anna herself exists in this understanding, but rather that the opportunities that present themselves due to her Norwegian education does.

The symbolic capital includes the idea of using Western education to create a global system, as this is viewed as the best. The system created shall thus be followed by others, but the system by institutions and individuals existing outside of the West should not be followed by the West. One prominent theme that emerged from the interviews with the students was loneliness. Clara specifically mentioned how the system in which students are being physically welcomed to the program in Norway is not very warm and welcoming. She compared it to the welcome that would have happened if she was back in her home country, which would have been much more warm and welcoming. This situation is a great example

of the dominance of these Eurocentric and Western views. This system makes it seem that the Western way of life is the only way to consider. This shows that this is not always the case, systems within the Global North could, and should, learn from systems in the Global South.

5.4 Connection to the Anti-Oppressive Internationalization Approach

The decolonial approach has been mentioned as a way in which institutions related to the internationalization context must consider and adapt in order to create a more equal, fair, and truthful context. Another approach that was brought to light in the theoretical approach chapter is what Sharon Stein calls the approach of anti-oppressive character, or global solidarity. This approach to internationalization is specifically, in her article, connected to the work of the Scholars at Risk network. It can also be connected to the Norwegian Students at Risk network based on that the aim of the program is lining up with the anti-oppressive approach- as the base of the program is to empower individuals that are situated in a marginalized position due to their activism (Stein, 2019). One aspect that emerged during the interviews with the students of the program, was the problems of the visa application process. Adam specifically discussed that from his experience, students from certain countries can not partake in the StAR program due to the impossibility of being accepted for a residence permit. Once again, the approach of the program itself and the approach and values of the Norwegian government are opposing each other. There are certain limitations in the program as anti-oppressive when actions that are enforced by the Norwegian government directly affect the StAR program. Some of the specific experiences that emerged in the student interviews connected to racism and discrimination can also be connected to this issue. One issue that has been identified in the results and keeps coming back is the involvement and actions of other actors, as the program is not only limited to the academics themselves but also to actors and institutions connected to Norwegian society. The themes emerging from the student interviews include lack of emotional support, loneliness, and racism and discrimination. Even if the StAR program itself is not at fault for some of the experiences that are described by the students, the characteristics of the program go beyond academic participation to social integration and cultural understanding. The explanation of the decolonial approach to internationalization includes having the higher education institutions be on the front line of making the change in the approach (Helata & Chasi). As this particular

program exists within the context of internationalization but involves so many different actors and situations, it is challenging to pinpoint exactly who is at fault for what.

The basis of the anti-oppressive approach, according to Stein, is the problematizing of capitalism, racism, nationalism, and sexism. The basic aim of the StAR program can therefore be identified within this approach of internationalization, however, the practical outcome of the program, from the perspective of students, can not always be. In order for the program to be completely considered within the anti-oppressive approach, it can not be experienced by its participants as having traits of these terms within the program. Even if some of the situations mentioned are situations out of the program organizers' control, such as Anna's experience when arriving at the airport. They should be addressed and further worked towards. The interviews, and especially the themes of emotional support, racism, and discrimination identify that measures to prepare and support the students in situations such as these are missing- which could be a way to address these situations and limitations that would make them a lesser part of the program experience. And ultimately more in line with the anti-oppressive approach as this approach includes making resources available and mobilizing strategically in order to make a systematic change (Stein, 2019).

5.5 Political Challenges

In the last overarching theme that was identified from the student interviews, one of the sub-headings talked about the want for an extension of the program. John specifically spoke on the importance of the program in relation to the growing populist ideas and narratives in the world. Thus, programs such as the Norwegian Student at Risk programs are crucial to set an example for the protection of academic freedom as well as protecting those who will fight and stand up against breaches of academic freedom. The rise of populism in regard to the threat of academic freedom is brought up more than one time in the theoretical framework chapter, as both the European Commission, as well as the United Nations, have discussed the implications affecting the state of academic freedom due to the rise of populist views (European Commission, 2022b & United Nations, 2020b). More than one student brought up the wish for a broader program collaboration within Europe. This suggestion, based on the documents providing information on the increase of populism and thus the decrease in academic freedom in Europe, can be understood as a good one. Not only would this act as a

means to fight against the threat to academic freedom but also to provide more opportunities and choices for students. However, the focus should not only be on broadening the locations in which students can come but also on where they can come from. Karran (2009) discusses how the threat to academic freedom is similar to the threat of terror to society (Karran, 2009). Burakovsky further made the comparison between the dismissal of academic opportunities that many Muslim people were subject to in the United States after September 11, 2001. And how Russian students and researchers have been subject to the dismissal of academic opportunities in Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Burakovsky, 2023). As John spoke about, people who have been denied access to academic freedom in their own countries need the opportunity to access it somewhere else in order to make a change. Therefore, it should not only be an extension of the program within Europe, but the debate should also target a possible extension of countries where students can come from in order to take part in the StAR program. The rise of populism and threats to academic freedom has resulted in different documents, declarations, and reports as seen in the literature review chapter. One of these statements by the European Commission focuses on promoting a *European way of life* aimed at universities. The European Commission further describes that the universities should not only promote this in academia but also when it comes to diversity, equality, and big societal challenges, as connected to a bigger political agenda (European Commission, 2022a).

This terminology can be problematic as it creates segregation between a European way of life and another way of life, just like the distinction between local/national and abroad/foreign. It is also dangerous as it can be a way to excuse certain behavior. This is something that Clara mentioned in the interviews for example. She was treated a certain way which made her feel bad, and it was excused on the basis that she was from somewhere else and that the responsible person thought he could treat her like that because of this reason. The use of this type of language in order to enforce certain values contributes to the ongoing Eurocentric approach that exists in higher education in Europe. The lack of emotional support that was identified in the interviews with the students can also be connected to this, as this use of terminology has a Eurocentric focus. It continues the segregation between *us* and *them*. And possibly enforces a view that the European way of life is better- and thus should not be hard to adapt to.

5.6 Recommendations to Other Programs

First and foremost, starting from the application process. If a similar program is looking to introduce a nomination system to handle their recruitment process, it is of crucial importance to involve embassies as well as the process of visas is a key pillar of the whole program- no visas, no students. The visa process should also be more spoken about and discussed with the students, as more than one student that was interviewed for this thesis struggled with the process as well as with the information about the process. The information that nominating actors receive about the process needs to be more similar. A few of the students interviewed reported that they had a flexible experience of the recruitment process, where they could send in documents that they did not have at that moment later. One of the students, however, reported that he was privileged to get chosen as he had all the right documents as well as access to them- while others he knew did not and could not continue their application therefore. The recommendation for this would thus be to strictly enforce rules for the nominating entities that should be applied everywhere, for fairness to the students.

Many of the students that were interviewed reported that they have struggled with loneliness as well as the feeling of no available emotional support while being a Student at Risk in Norway, a few of them also suggested how this should be tackled to make them feel less lonely. Based on the suggestion and thoughts that the students expressed connected to these themes- a great recommendation would be to make sure to include stronger social and emotional support for the incoming students, rather than focusing strictly on academic support. Meeting with the other students at risk was especially mentioned as being important for the sense of belonging, which is an important aspect to consider in such a program like this. A stronger and emotional support system, amongst each other as well as other instances could also help to deal with the experiences of racism and discrimination the incoming students possibly will experience. A further recommendation would be to educate the involved actors in these topics as this study has shown them to be a huge part of the students' experiences as students at risk in Norway. Educating the involved actors on this will hopefully contribute to a safer environment within the framework of the program. A recommendation that was made aware by the representatives was further the importance of advocacy. This is important in order to be able to find support and funding for future programs in order to implement them.

6. Conclusion

This chapter will present the conclusion to this research which has been a case study on the Norwegian Students at Risk program. The aim of this research was to conduct a case study with this program to focus the case, as it is based on academic freedom and targets students. The theoretical interest in the study was internationalization, critical internationalization, and academic freedom. In order to conduct this case study, the findings from the sample of the material were divided into three sections, the first one presented background on the Students at Risk program as the phenomenon researched in the case study. The material included in this section came from two evaluation reports made specifically on this program, as well as an interview with two Students at Risk representatives. The second section brought even more background information as well as context to the case study, as it consists of information about the crucial surroundings of the program-involved organizations as well as the Norwegian official stance on academic freedom. The third section consists of a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with students participating in the Norwegian Students at Risk program.

To link back to the first research question:
How and why were the Norwegian Students at Risk program created?

The Norwegian Students at Risk program was created due to the non-existent protection for students who are victims of breaches of academic freedom. It started based on a statement that NSO and SAIH together provided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012. This statement led to the question being brought to the Norwegian parliament where the possibility of such a program was further discussed. In 2013 NSO and SAIH provided a draft of the StAR program to the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education, after promoting and advocating for the program in 2012. The Students at Risk program was announced by the Norwegian ministers of foreign affairs at a press conference in 2013. This announcement led to the initiation of a four-year pilot program targeting students dismissed from their studies due to their political activism (SIU, 2017).

Who are the key stakeholders?

The key stakeholders of the program can on the basis of this case study be identified as Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH), The National Union of Students in Norway (NSO), Scholars At Risk, European Students' Union, Hk Dir - The Directorate for Higher Education and Skill, Norwegian Embassies, the Higher Educational institutions within Norway, the Norwegian government as well as the students that are participating in the program.

SAIH as well as NSO are of course key stakeholders as they are the reason that the Norwegian Student at Risk program was created. Not only did they advocate, promote and write up the draft of the program that led to the implementation of it as a pilot program, but they are also still very connected to the program in many ways[48]. SAIH collects money or as they call it- tenners, from students at higher education institutions in Norway every year. The money received through these tenners goes towards projects that SAIH is involved in, the Students at Risk program is one of these[49]. SAIH works nationally, such work includes for example campaigning for the Students at Risk program[50]. SAIH also works internationally, which is how some of the students participating in the program got informed and involved in the Norwegian StAR program. NSO is the biggest student organization in Norway and works with different actors in order to promote and achieve equal rights to education, and their work extends globally. NSO works closely with the topic of internationalization and influences policies in Norway as well as the rest of Europe[51]

Scholars at Risk are a further key stakeholder in the Norwegian Students at Risk program as it somewhat acts like an older sibling. The Scholars at Risk network is based on somewhat the same foundations as the Students at Risk program, where the right to academic freedom is crucial in the program pillars and they are both existing within the context of internationalization. The Scholars at Risk network also acts as a nominating actor to the StAR

---

[48] NSO .(2023). *English.* https://student.no/en.
SAIH .(2023). *Who we are* .https://saih.no/english/who-we-are

[49] SAIH .(2023). *Q&A: SAIH Tenners.*
https://saih.no/english/article/2022/1/sp%C3%B8rsm%C3%A5l-og-svar-om-saih-tierne
[50] SAIH .(2023). *Campaigns.* https://saih.no/english/our-work/campaign
[51] NSO .(2023). *Utdanningskvalitet.* https://student.no/studentpolitikk/utdanningskvalitet

program, as told by one of the students being interviewed. Many members of the Scholars at Risk network are starting to implement programs that are aimed at students.

The European Students' Union are furthermore also a key stakeholder in the Norwegian Students at Risk Program as a core pillar in their work is academic freedom. ESU has launched a project for academic freedom called Academic Freedom Project and has been clear about its support and work for students at risk programs. In a document explaining their plan of work, the mentioning of national scholarship schemes for students at risk is stated, as well as a program on a European level (ESU, 2022).

Hk Dir is an important key stakeholder in the program as they are directly connected to the students that are participating in the program. The directorate coordinates management instruments and inventive schemes connected to higher education[52]. Hk Dir has direct contact with the students and was the one with the opportunity to reach out to students and ask them to participate in this study.

The Norwegian embassies are important stakeholders in the Norwegian Students at Risk program. Both during the interviews with the representatives of the program as well as the students themselves, the embassies came up in discussions. The embassies have an important role as they are the ones who have to be willing to approve the visas for students that are accepted to the program. Having a good relationship with them has proven to be crucial for this reason, as stated in the interview with the StAR representatives.

The higher education institutions in Norway that are taking part in the StAR program are crucial key stakeholders, as they are the ones hosting the students and providing them with academic support as well as a lot of the social support that the students need. These institutions are also important key stakeholders as they are the ones providing the students with the academic freedom that these students were denied in their home country, and came to Norway to be able to have.

The Norwegian government has throughout the findings shown to be a crucial key stakeholder in the Norwegian StAR program. As the program is so closely connected with the

---

[52] Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse .(2023). *Om Direktoratet for høgare utdanning og kompetanse.*

government when it comes to funding and other necessities, such as the approval of residence permits. It has shown to be challenging to some of the core beliefs and goals of the program, as it does not always align with the interests of the Norwegian government. The government is thus, at this point, a key stakeholder to receive funding to keep the program going, as well as to be supportive of the immigration of the students who are coming to Norway with the Students at Risk program.

Finally, the students are of course key stakeholders in the Norwegian Students at Risk program. As mentioned in the first evaluation report from 2017, one challenge had been to fill the places available for eligible students. They had at this point more available places than applicants (SIU, 2017). This shows that the students are the most crucial part of the program. There is no discussion that there are students out there but rather to market the program to the nominating institutions as well as to the students so they are aware of the program.

What are the characteristics of the Norwegian Students at Risk program?

From this case study, the characteristics can be based on different kinds of material. Looking at the evaluation reports that have been analyzed as well as the interview with the Student at Risk representative- the characteristics of the Norwegian Students at Risk program can be identified as broader. The characteristics identified from the interviews with the students are more personal.

The first characteristic from the evaluation reports as well as from the StAR representatives is the *creation of the program*. This is very important as it involves crucial information on why the program was created and to what extent and purpose. The next characteristic as identified from the evaluation reports as well as discussion with the StAR representatives is the *recruitment process*. This is crucial to the program as it acts as somewhat the foundation for the program as a whole. The recruitment process involves including different stakeholders and actors such as nominating institutions as well as embassies. It involves the nomination process as well as the process of applying for and obtaining a visa to come to Norway. *Funding* is furthermore a significant factor and characteristic of the program, as it not only funds the program and makes it continue, but also creates a crucial relationship between the program and the Norwegian government. It makes the existence and foundation of the program directly connected to the Norwegian government, and thus to some extent also its

interests. Funding furthermore also involves the sustainability of the everyday life of the students in the program. *Benefits* are another characteristic of the Norwegian Students at Risk program. This is important as the findings have shown that the program does not only benefit one actor, but multiple actors in different ways. It also has shown how the different benefits can be very contradicting to each other, as the benefits of the Norwegian government sometimes seem to come at the expense of the students. And other times, actions that benefit the government also benefit the students- however maybe in different ways. *Advocacy and marketin*g are furthermore the last characteristics identified from this part of the findings. Advocacy and marketing are utterly important in order for the program to exist, as well as continue. Without advocacy, there would be no program. The Norwegian government can furthermore gain more recognition globally for their participation in the program by marketing, which hopefully would keep them interested in being involved.

The characteristics identified by the interviews with the students from the Norwegian Students at Risk program are *networking*, as the main reason for finding the program and being nominated. *Matters of privilege and money,* in regards to the process of nomination. *Flexibility,* when it comes to the application process. *Loneliness*, as many students reported feeling lonely as StAR students in Norway. The experience of *racism and discrimination* is further prominent in the experience of many StAR students. *The visa process*, in terms of being a challenging aspect of the program. *Academic and higher education benefits. The feeling of hope* that being part of the program gives you and the people around you. *Financial support* is also an important characteristic of the program from the students' point of view. Finally, *emotional support* - or more often, the lack of it, is an important characteristic in the personal experience of the program for many of the students.

These are all themes that emerged from transcribing each of the interviews and comparing them to each other. Therefore it is safe to say that these are the most prominent characteristics of the Norwegian StAR program from the view of the student participants.

What are the critical issues that have emerged as seen from the key actors?
  ● *From the creator's perspective?*

The representatives of the Norwegian Students at Risk program presented a few aspects that can be referred to as critical issues. The visa process was first of all mentioned as a critical

issue in the program. The relationship between the program and the embassies that issue the visas is considered crucial, as it becomes a tough situation if the embassies are not willing to process visas. Another critical issue that has emerged is the future of the funding for the Norwegian Students at Risk program. As the Norwegian government is possibly changing the rules about tuition fees for international students, the funding of the Students at Risk program is currently unknown, if this were to happen. The issue that the program is facing in this case, is to ensure that the Students at Risk program participants will be able to attend Norwegian universities tuition-free. Through possibly fighting for a certain quota or building relationships with universities for this purpose. Another critical issue that emerged from the view of the StAR representatives is the need for broader advocacy to ensure a broader network of student at risk programs. According to them, a broader advocacy strategy from other actors than just students need to take place in order to make it happen.

- *From the students' perspective?*

There were some critical issues that emerged from the interviews with the students. One issue that became apparent was the problem of loneliness that some of the participants are experiencing as part of the program. The students speaking about this issue explained that there is not enough social support within the program, but more academic. The lack of emotional support leads the students to feel lonely and not supported enough when it comes to integration into Norwegian society and culture. Another prominent critical issue that emerged from the interviews with the students is the experience of racism and discrimination. Many of the students discussed being subject to actions of racism and discrimination since coming to Norway, both within and outside of the program. In some of the interviews, this was the main topic of discussion when discussing the challenges that they have experienced and are facing as participants of the StAR program. The visa process can also be identified as a critical issue in the program. More than one student had a problem with the visa process which cost them a lot of money, time, and traveling. Not only did the students themselves experience issues, but also spoke about how they know that other applicants have had problems as well. These issues would therefore need to be addressed and considered in future similar programs.

6.1 Future Research

There are a few ways in which this research could be built on in future studies. The most giving part of this case study was the interviews with the student participants, as they could provide personal perspectives that can not be found anywhere else. It, therefore, would be of interest to broaden the sample size and include even more students, if possible, which was a limitation for this case study. The findings as well as the result of this study showed that the Norwegian Government plays an important role in the context of this program, and is the foundation of a lot of criticism given. It would therefore be important to collect more information and material from this source, in order to gain a better understanding of this side of the discourse as well as possible answers to the criticism that has been given. It would be especially helpful to conduct interviews with actors that are responsible for the funding or supervision of this program in order to obtain more information as well as perspectives. It would also be beneficial to conduct interviews or surveys with nominating actors of the StAR program. The nomination of the students is a very important characteristic of the program, and it would be helpful, in order to completely understand the processes of the program, to obtain these perspectives as well.

In addition, it would be helpful to conduct research on some of the other similar programs that exist, for example, the German Hilde Domin Program in order to obtain a wider knowledge of the context of such programs on a broader level. Future research on this study, such as on other similar programs could be very useful in order to obtain and produce knowledge that would act as a foundation for future programs that protect academic freedom for students.

Bibliography

All European Academies (ALLEA), European University Association (EUA), Science Europe .(2019). *Academic freedom and institutional autonomy: Commitments must be followed by action.* Science Europe

https://scienceeurope.org/media/xq1l511l/20190410_academic_freedom_joint_statement-1.pdf

Bonn Declaration .(2020). *Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research*
https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/_drp-efr-bonner_erklaerung_en_with-signatures_maerz_2021.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

Bryman, A .(2012). *Social Research Methods*. 4th edition. Oxford university press.

Bryman, A .(2018). *Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder.* Upplaga 3 Stockholm: Liber

Burakovsky, A .(2023). *The war in Ukraine ruins Russia's academic ties with the West.* The Conversation.
https://theconversation.com/the-war-in-ukraine-ruins-russias-academic-ties-with-the-west-180006

Corbetta, P .(2020). *SOCIAL RESEARCH- Theory, Methods and Techniques.* SAGE Publications

de Wit, H. .(2019). I*nternationalization in Higher Education, a Critical Review.* SFU Educational Review, *12*(3), 9–17. https://doi.org/10.21810/sfuer.v12i3.1036

Docherty, T .(2016). *On Academic and Other Freedoms. in: Why Academic Freedom Matters: A Response to Current Challenges*. Civitas London

Economic and Social Council .(1999). I*mplementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.* United Nations

https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G99/462/16/PDF/G9946216.pdf?OpenElement

ESU .(2022). *BM82 – Plan of Work 2022-2023*. European Students' Union
https://esu-online.org/policies/bm82-plan-of-work-2022-2023/

ESU .(2023). *Survey on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy, and Academic Integrity from a Student Perspective*. European Students Union

European Commission .(2022a). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities.* European Commission

European Commission .(2022b). *Tackling R&I foreign interference.* Publications Office of the European Union.
https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eu-law-and-publications/publication-detail/-/publication/3faf52e8-79a2-11ec-9136-01aa75ed71a1

European Parliament .(2018). *Defence of academic freedom in the EU's external action.*
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0483_EN.pdf?redirect

European Parliamentary Research Service Scientific Foresight Unit (STOA) .(2023). *The State of play of academic freedom in the EU Member States Overview of de facto trends and developments.* European Parliament
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740231/EPRS_STU(2023)740231_EN.pdf

Heleta, Sa,. & Chasi, S .(2023). *Rethinking and redefining internationalisation of higher education in South Africa using a decolonial lens, Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 45:3, 261-275, DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2022.2146566

Italian BFUG Secretariat., European Higher Education Area., Bologna Process .(2020). *Academic Freedom.* Council of Europe

https://rm.coe.int/bfug-annex-i-communique-statement-academic-freedom-19-11-2020/1680a07858

Jones, H,. Nordhagen, I C,. Dahle, M, .(2020). *Supporting future change agents An evaluation of the Students at Risk programme 2014-2020.* Ideas2Evidence- Bygger Kunskap http://ideas2evidence.com/sites/default/files/Evaluation%20of%20the%20StAR%20%20programme%2030.04.20.pdf

Karlsson, M .(2020). *"Gå eller rulla – Alla vill knulla!": Funktionsrättsaktivism i nyliberala landskap* ', Doktor, Genusvetenskapliga institutionen, Lund. https://doi.org/10.13068/9789179243470

Kapit, A .(2023). *Activism Under Attack.* SAIH - the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund. https://saih.no/assets/docs/SAIH-rapport_170323_v3.pdf

Karran, T .(2009). *Academic Freedom: A Research Bibliography.* University of Lincoln thttp://eprints.lincoln.ac.uk/1763/2/AcademicFreedomResearchBibliography.pdf

Knight, J. (2003). *Updated Definition of Internationalization.* International Higher Education, (33). https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2003.33.7391

Knight, J .(2008). *An Internationalization Model: Meaning, Rationales, Approaches, and Strategies.* .Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087905224_003.

Kováts, G,. &. Rónay, Z. (2023). *How academic freedom is monitored- Overview of methods and procedures* Panel for the Future of Science and Technology. European Parliamentary Research Service. European Parliament https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740228/EPRS_STU(2023)740228_EN.pdf

Munusamy, M., & Hashim, A .(2020). The *internationalisation of higher education: a networking based conceptual framework.* AEI Insights: An International journal of Asia-Europe relations. 6. 35-53. 10.37353/aei-insights.vol6.issue1.3.

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research .(2022). *Academic freedom of expression.* Regjeringen
https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/ec388f0a1dcc4a628fda2fe95e5ddba7/en-gb/pdfs/nou202220220002000engpdfs.pdf

Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum .(2020). *Magna Charta Universitatum 2020.* Magna Charta Universitatum
https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/mcu2020

Scholars at Risk .(2015). *Free to Think Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.* Scholars at Risk
https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SAR-Free-to-Think.pdf

Scholars at Risk .(2022). *Free to Think Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project.* Scholars at Risk
https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2022/

Scholars at Risk .(2020). *Promoting Higher Education Values - A Guide for Discussion.* Scholars at Risk
https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SAR_PHV_DiscussionGuide_v20_ONLINE.pdf

SIU .(2017). *Providing a safe haven for student activists - a midway evaluation of the Students at Risk programme.* Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education (SIU)
https://kudos.dfo.no/dokument/30094/providing-a-safe-haven-for-student-activists-a-midway-evaluation-of-the-students-at-risk-programme-rapportserie-022017

Stein, S., de Andreotti, V.O. (2016). *Cash, competition, or charity: international students and the global imaginary*. *High Educ* 72, 225–239 . https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9949-8

Stein, S .(2019). C*ritical internationalization studies at an impasse: making space for complexity, uncertainty, and complicity in a time of global challenges.* Studies in Higher Education, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2019.1704722

Stipendium Hungaricum., & Tempus Public Foundation .(2023). C*all for Applications Students at Risk Subprogramme of the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship Programme for Ukrainian citizens 2023/2024.* Stipendium Hungaricum
https://stipendiumhungaricum.hu/uploads/2020/03/Students_at_Risk_Call_for_Application_2023_2024.pdf?v=may22

Sveriges Universitets & Högskoleförbund .(1999). *Universitetens Magna Charta Bologna 1988.* Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum

The French Presidency of the Council of the European Union .(2022). *Marseille Declaration on International Cooperation in Research and Innovation (R&I).* France2022
https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/xi1khxzg/marseille-declaration.pdf

UNESCO .(1998). *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-education Teaching Personnel, adopted by the General Conference at its twenty-ninth session, Paris, 21 October - 12 November 1997.* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000113234.page=2

United Nations .(2020a). *Promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression.* United Nations
https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/197/86/PDF/N2019786.pdf?OpenElement

United Nations .(2020b). *Situation of human rights in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and in its aftermath.* United Nations
https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G20/232/31/PDF/G2023231.pdf?OpenElement

Vavrus, F., & Pekol, A .(2015). *Critical Internationalization: Moving from Theory to Practice.* FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education, 2(2). http://preserve.lehigh.edu/fire/vol2/iss2/2

Vrielink, J., Lemmens, P,. & Parmentier, S .(2010). *Academic Freedom as a Fundamental Right*. League of European Research Universities. https://www.leru.org/files/Academic-Freedom-as-a-Fundamental-Right-Full-paper.pdf

VSS. UNES. USU .(2023). *Students at Risk – Dossier* VSS. UNES. USU https://vss-unes.ch/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2023-02-02_StAR_Dossiere.pdf

Yin, R. K .(2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods (Sixth edition). SAGE*