

## **Statement on the continued lack of regard and consideration by the responsible bodies on international students' concerns**

The problems of the lack of communication, lack of information in English language, vague information, and unfair policies from the responsible bodies that plague the international student community in the TRNC, are not new, and have become exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

With the start of the new semester approaching, and plans of it being face-to-face, as well as the announcement of new decisions -- those regarding central quarantine and decisions regarding international students travelling from dark red and grey countries, these problems persist without a solution in sight.

For example, starting 5 days ago on the 12th of August, the Ministry of Health announced that a new vaccine certification system titled AdaPass will be used, and the certificate from it is needed to enter certain listed places such as cafes, bars, restaurants etc. This announcement alongside the website itself was released in the Turkish language only. The majority of international students here do not speak fluent Turkish even if many of them are learning, and they do not have the linguistic competence, with their medium of instruction in universities being English. Many are even studying English in preparatory schools as well, so how are they expected to understand and abide by such decisions? The relevant authorities have continued to hide behind vagueness, and universities are nonchalant, and no longer a source of reliable information anymore.

Eventually when some international students break those rules they will be blamed and prosecuted, despite it being firstly a problem of lack of information, and misinformation.

A new semester approaches, with statements being made for it to be face-to-face. VOIS asks:

What are the plans put in place to ensure the safety of students and faculty alike?

Will these plans be actually followed through and thoroughly?

Are the authorities waiting for a massive backlash and boycott by international students before they can be considered at the heart of decisions that affect them?

For instance, recently it has been announced that incoming new and old students from dark red and grey category countries have to quarantine in a “central quarantine”, and are to pay around 5,400 TL. Please note that we are not even sure of this price as it was not officially announced either.

Knowing that these students have to pay before they are allowed to continue their journey in Istanbul, but nothing is said about the fact that the costs are nearly as much as many pay for rent, adding to the rising costs of making residency permits, that are fast approaching for renewal, and also tuition and expenses. With the economic developments caused by the pandemic worldwide, expecting students to either pay this amount, or risk not coming back at all for studies, is inhumane.

To make matters worse, the announcement was put out terribly without any further explanation! Since then, VOIS' inbox has been flooded with concerned and worried students that need important answers that the responsible bodies clearly cannot or do not want to give. So many have missed flights and have spent so much, adjusting tickets and incurring avoidable costs. Would you accept this treatment of your children?

So, we need answers to what and where this central quarantine is. What happens to students who cannot afford it? And in regards to new students travelling from outside the dark red and grey countries, how can they home quarantine when they

have no home yet? Will their universities assist or provide temporary accommodation? The entire matter is beginning to come across as pure incompetence. Some universities are blatantly refusing to provide assistance to the new students at least. What a warm welcome and display of concern, after they have paid their tuition fees.

These are all pertinent questions that need to be answered by the responsible authorities. Here we also would like to add that despite continuing attempts to get answers for these questions, and almost exhausting all measures to do so, there been no results or answers.

We also advocate and call for the price of the quarantine system to be reconsidered and reasonably lowered. The COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone financially, international students being one of the most affected communities, many of them are finding it hard to pay for tuition, rent and expenses already, adding an exorbitant price of 5,400 TL for quarantine, will no doubt prohibit many of them from starting/continuing their higher education or returning to their life in the TRNC, and will prevent them from becoming prospective ambassadors for the TRNC.

We agree and believe that safety of the population is a first and foremost important matter and cannot be neglected. But when we look at current systems of operation in the country, we already see a large amount of negligence to health safety, and continued reports of subpar quarantine conditions and mistreatment at public hospitals, and we definitely believe that there can be better, more efficient and more humane manner to ensure safety of the population, while also allowing a large portion of international students to continue their higher education.

Another important issue to be highlighted is Turkish-only contracts signed by students when installing the Gvende Kal bracelet. When students are installing their bracelets at Ercan Airport, they have to sign a contract that is in Turkish only with no option of an English version or translation, we find this to be problematic.

You can only disregard people's sincere outcries for too long. We wonder when all these issues would cease to exist, and when will we see a recognition of the existence of international students in this society as an integral part of it not as a marginalized part, and not only as a way to make financial gains. We call once again for those responsible to improve and put efforts to communicate effectively, efficiently in a direct manner in English language as well, and for more organization to take place. Finally, we remind our fellow international students that it is a human right of ours to have adequate access to information and we thus request from them to continue on contacting their university and relevant governmental bodies to address their inquiries and communicate their concerns.