

Introducing the



# This summary document introduces the Global Student Forum,

a voluntary consortium of democratic and independent student organisations that has emerged in 2019 and 2020.

The Global Student Forum is the umbrella organisation of the world's major representative student federations and the only independent, democratic and representative student governance structure dedicated to promoting the rights and perspectives of student organisations and movements on the global level.

It was founded by the **All-Africa Students Union (AASU)**, **Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA)**, **European Students' Union (ESU)**, **Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)**, **Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes (OCLAE)** and other national student organisations and movements. Through its membership it currently represents



# 183

## Student Unions



# 118

## Countries



# Statement of Intent

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, student organisations and movements urgently needed an effective mechanism for global cooperation and solidarity. The pandemic has, in a single moment, distilled the shortcomings of our leaders and laid bare, with tragic consequences, the injustices of our societies. This crisis means we cannot wait any longer. Democratic governments have been criticised for perceived complacency and incompetence; authoritarian leaders, and those democratic governments with an increasingly authoritarian disposition, are exploiting the crisis to consolidate their power and crush dissent. Independent, democratic student structures have been under particular attack around the world of late and the present climate of surveillance and police brutality enhances that threat.

We live in an age in which democracy has become a radical principle. The spread of democratic governments over the past century was a contingent, and ultimately fragile, reality. As a result, the responsiveness and accountability of governments, and their capacity to guarantee the rights of the population are undermined. Our generation is watching as governments fail on the historic challenges of climate change, civil rights, disinformation, economic inequality, mass migration and public health. This has prompted a crisis of faith in democracy, which is only deepening. The risk is profound: that the younger generation becomes sceptical about the desirability of democratic government and sympathetic to authoritarian paths of development. We are acting urgently, through our unions, organisations and movements, to change that situation and build a fair and democratic future.

We believe that independent and democratic structures for student organising are key to democratic development. We are from movements with distinguished histories; we have been on the front lines of the struggles for civil rights, gender equality, peace and democracy and we are fighting again. Our heritage is an inspiration to us and a constant reminder that history progresses as the result of radical ideas. We are proud that our movements are democratic, independent and representative. What we are doing is the long, collective and difficult ground work which is the precondition and the catalyst for social change.

Today, the forces which shape our societies cross borders and the principle of solidarity demands a renewed urgency. Over the past year, we have been re-building political and technical relationships with regional and national student federations around the world. We have realised in doing so that we have much to learn from each other and much to build together.

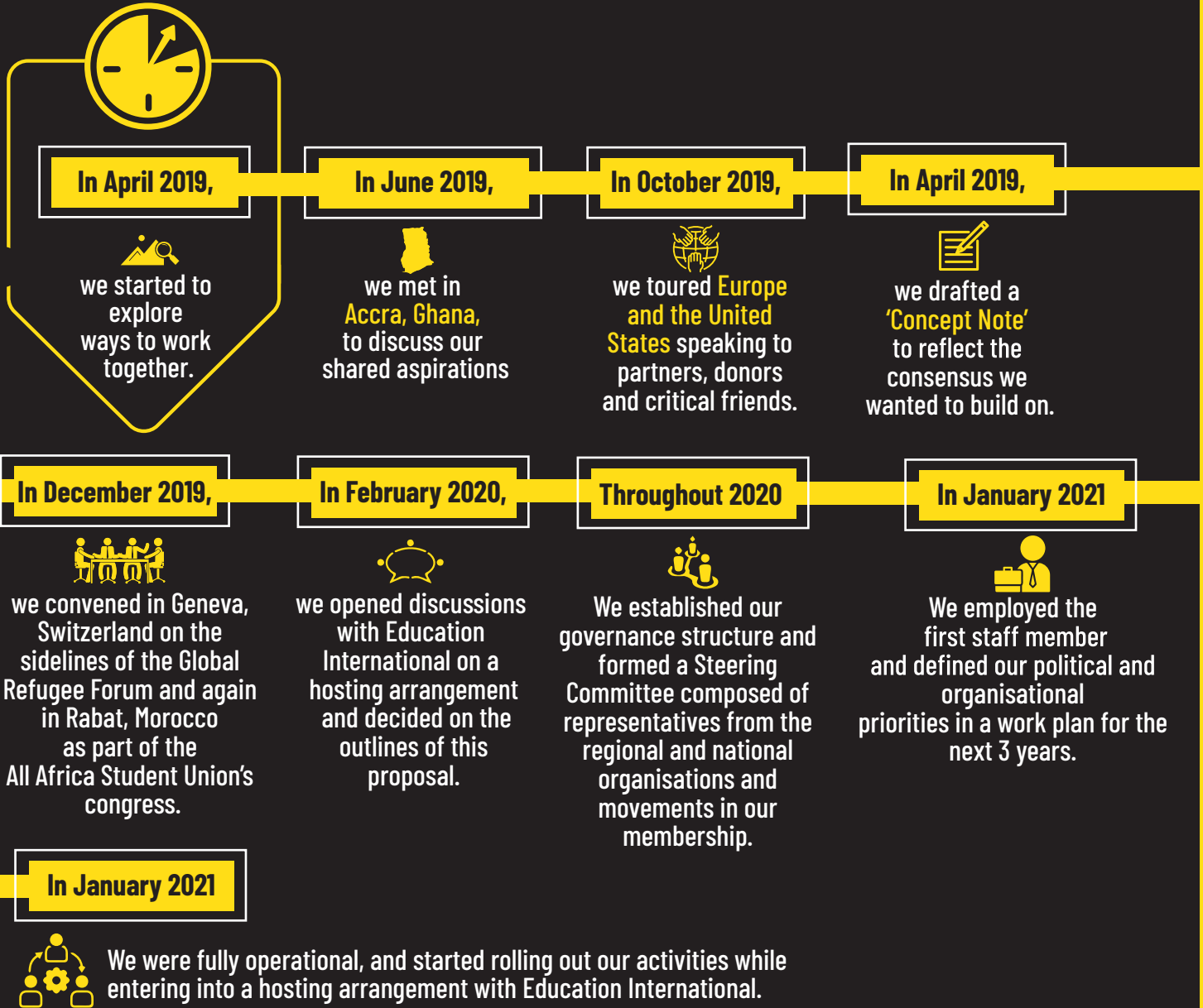
After extensive consultation, the concept which has emerged is the Global Student Forum (GSF), a trans-local platform to serve and strengthen independent, democratic and representative student organisations, unions and movements around the world.





# Background

Over the past years, as student unions, organisations and movements from around the world, we have been discussing how to cooperate in a more structured and strategic way.



The exploratory discussions, supported by the Open Society Foundations, have been essential for building the relationships and identifying the shared values that form the foundations for our cooperation. From them has emerged the Global Student Forum. Its purpose is coordinating the people and ideas that animate the struggles that students are facing around the world. It is anchored to the grassroots, working in a democratic and horizontal way, to address our local challenges and build a shared vision. It promises to be an essential structure which can operate below the radar to support activists building on the ground, facilitating trans-local exchanges that inspire and strengthen them. Whilst enabling the development of a genuinely autonomous student-led agenda.

# Values

Our cooperation is based on shared values which direct the way we work and what we want to achieve. As student movements, we share a common fight for meaningful participation in the decisions that shape our lives, the future of the societies we live in and the planet we live on.



We have discovered that we are organising around similar issues across the world: high fees for education and student debt; the quality and relevance of education; climate change; inequalities; and violence in our institutions whether in the form of sexual harassment, racism, gender violence, mass shootings, police brutality or war.

As democratic and representative movements, we face de-legitimation and repression by authoritarian governments, apathy from those who believe that education is a commodity and violence from reactionary and xenophobic youth organisations organising in our schools and campuses. So we come together to urgently develop solidarity and collaboration, in order to achieve educational justice and as allies in a wider struggle for democracy, social justice and human rights. We do so by building a platform that practices democratic values itself, energising our collective action and building the idea and practice of democracy through our own structures.

We are united by the beliefs that democratic, representative and independent student movements are essential and that they should be able to operate without repression. We are fighting for free, public, accountable education that guarantees equal opportunity for everyone without discrimination.

We campaign against segregation and defend the rights of the marginalised. We are against war as a means of resolving conflict and are using solidarity as a way to build peace; and we stand for the human rights of the displaced, migrants and people forced to live under occupation. As ecologists, we are fighting the destruction of the planet and working towards a safe and dignified life for our species in the future. As feminists, we are fighting for political, economic, personal, and social equality. We stand together because we recognise the interconnectedness of our struggles.



# Functions

## Networking:

The Global Student Forum is a platform for student movements to exchange ideas, practices and organising strategies. It allows us as student organisations and movements from around the world to build relationships and networks with our counterparts abroad. This provides a chance to gain experience and ideas which we can use to strengthen our work at home as well as building the common understanding that is the foundation for deeper cooperation. Through coordination with civil society movements on a global scale, it enables us to build stronger coalitions with teachers, academics, workers and other allies in these fights.

## Solidarity:

The Global Student Forum amplifies the struggles of student organisations and movements around the world, whether campaigns against rising costs for education or violence in our institutions, drawing attention to student organisations and movements where they face political repression, discrimination and police brutality. It enables us, as student activists and leaders, to connect with our counterparts, across all geographical regions, lessening our sense of isolation, building solidarity and mobilization. In this way, it is mutually empowering and acts as a beacon in the darkness for students facing social injustice and rights abuses.

## Capacity building

The Global Student Forum builds the capacity of student organisations and movements where they lack institutional resources, are weak or nascent. It organises training sessions and exchanges through which we can learn from each other and strengthen our work. The overarching objective is to establish a culture that ensures the sustainable transfer of knowledge and preservation of organisational memory within student movements, so we can bridge the gaps caused by a high turnover of activists and leaders.

## Cooperation

The Global Student Forum is a platform for student organisations and movements to work together on issues of common concern. It facilitates the engagement of genuine, representative and legitimate student organisations and movements with the institutional framework of the United Nations and UNESCO specifically. Specific attention is being paid to the ongoing discourse on sustainable development, financing of education as well as the democratisation and accountability of governance structures.

## Analysis and strategy

The Global Student Forum provides a space for student organisations and movements to engage with experts on issues such as social and economic inequalities, political repression, democratic recession, closing spaces for civil society, disinformation and the changing public sphere, to build a stronger analysis of the political economy that is shaping our societies and education systems, identify strategies by which we can respond effectively and build alliances and partnerships to better reach our objectives.

## Advocacy

The Global Student Forum strengthens and amplifies the voice of student organisations and movements on the global level by engaging in advocacy issues and lobby work on behalf of its membership. With a strong emphasis on formal and informal international decision making spaces, it combats practises of tokenism and cherry picking to ensure fair and legitimate representation of students on the global level. Informed by the first hand experience of its constituency, it provides space for genuine dialogue with the overarching aim to influence policy outcomes.

# Membership

## Categories of Membership

The membership of the Global Student Forum is structured alongside three categories; full membership, consociate membership and associate membership. The membership structure of the GSF aims to recognise the aspirations, needs and challenges of the diverse student representative bodies and collaborates with allies and networks that can help the Global Student Forum to advance its objectives.

The detailed criteria for membership and all related procedures are outlined in the membership guidelines of the GSF.

## Full Membership

Full members of the Global Student Forum lie at the base of the organisation. Full membership was granted to the regional federations of national unions that started the initiative.

**Full members of the Global Student Forum include;**

All-Africa Students Union (AASU), European Students Union (ESU), Commonwealth Students Association (CSA), Organizing Bureau of School Students Unions (OBESSU), Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes (OCLAE).

**Full members have the following rights:**

Full members have the right to nominate one member each into the Steering Committee of the Global Student Forum.

Full members and their membership have the right to participate in training and events, as well as subcommittees and working groups according to the respective rules of selection established by the Steering Committee.

## Consociate Membership

Consociate members of the Global Student Forum are national unions of students or national platforms that are not part of, or not represented by the full members of the GSF.

**Consociate members have the following rights:**

One position in the Steering Committee is reserved for the consociate member caucus. Representatives of consociate member organisations can stand for democratic caucus election into the Steering Committee every 2 years.

Consociate members have the right to participate in training and events, as well as subcommittees and working groups according to the respective rules of selection established by the Steering Committee.

## Associate Membership

Associate Members are the international, regional, national or local student-led organisations and movements which do not meet the criteria for neither full nor consociate membership.

**Associate members have the following rights:**

One position in the Steering Committee is reserved for the associate member caucus. Representatives of associate member organisations can stand for democratic caucus election into the Steering Committee every 2 years.

Associate members have the right to participate in training and events, as well as subcommittees and working groups according to the respective rules of selection established by the Steering Committee.

# Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is responsible for the political leadership of the organisation and is composed of five representatives from the major regional platforms of the GSF as well as one additional member elected by the caucus of associate members and one additional member elected by the caucus of associate members. The Steering Committee members are elected for a mandate of 2 years.



**Bianca Borges dos Santos**

is a 21 year old law student at the University of São Paulo, where she is a member of the academic center and the central directory of students. She currently holds the office of Director at the national union of students in Brazil and is a member of the executive secretariat of the Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes (OCLAE).

Within GSF she is working on:

- Gender Justice



**Marcelo Correa**

is currently serving as part of the Education Department in Fundación RED and as a Steering Committee member of the Global Student Forum. He has been a member of the national Chilean students' movement (Secondary and high level) for years, holding various positions on the local and the national level. Marcelo has a long background in practical public policy, principal in education and economy. He is studying business, administration and economy at Diego Portales University and holds a Diploma in "Students Rights, Education and leadership" from UNESCO.

Within GSF he is working on:

- Public Policy
- Finance



**Giuseppe Lipari**

is a student activist from Sicily, Italy. He started his activism at primary school, joining Legambiente (League for the Environment) in Palermo, and being part of many actions and events on the environment across Sicily. Some years later he joined Arci (the Italian Cultural Association) focusing mainly on anti-mafia activism. In high school, Giuseppe joined Rete degli Studenti Medi - RSM, (Italian School Student Union). He founded the local section of his school, and was part of the provincial and regional executives of the organisation. As International Officer of RSM, he led the entrance of the organisation in the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions - OBESSU,

and in 2018 the General Assembly of OBESSU elected him as Board Member. In that two-year mandate, he focused on many topics including gender equality, vocational education and training, and cooperation at the global level. Giuseppe has a Bachelor's degree in Political Sciences from the University of Palermo, and currently is a student of International Relations at the University of Bologna.

Within GSF he is working on:

- Finance
- Organisational Development and Capacity Building
- Membership
- Relations with Middle East and Eastern Asia



**Folabiti Lena Novel**

is a student leader currently serving as the All- African Student Union's Vice President for the Central African Region. For the past four years, she has worked effortlessly to defend students' rights. She has contributed immensely to promoting quality education, gender equality, defending the rights of marginalized students and refugees and promoting quality TVET education. She mobilizes and motivates students to uphold entrepreneurial mindset to fight against unemployment in Africa, especially in her home country Cameroon. She holds both a Bachelor's Degree in Curriculum Studies and Teaching History from the University of Buea, Cameroon, and Masters in University Governance and the Development of Local Institutions from the University of Yaounde II-Soa, Cameroon. She is currently a Ph.D. student in Higher Education at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa.

Within GSF she is working on:

- Education for All
- Membership



**Carmen Romero**

got involved with the students movement in Spain for the first time in high school. Since then she held multiple leadership positions on the local, national and European level. She is the former president of the student council at Complutense University of Madrid and former president of the national unions of students in Spain, CREUP as well as the current membership coordinator of the European Students Union. Carmen holds a Bachelor degree in Political Science and Public Administration and currently follows a master programme in the field of international politics at Université libre de Bruxelles. She is passionate about organisational development and the role of civil society in Europe and strives towards building a positive and inclusive culture within student organisations and movements worldwide.

Within GSF she is working on:

- Communication
- Finance
- Human Resource
- Equality



**Amilcar Sanatan**

is a writer and activist with a focus on youth and student development in the Caribbean and Americas region. Currently, he is pursuing a PhD. in Cultural Studies at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago. He represents the Commonwealth Students Association and coordinates the UWI Socialist Student Conference.

Within GSF he is working on:

- Democracy, Human Rights & Solidarity
- Racial Justice
- COVID-19



**Ankit Tripathi**

Is a student organiser and serves as the International Student Representative for the Canadian Federation of Students. He organises students and lobbies administrators as well as politicians in Canada for publicly funded post-secondary education and inclusion of international students in public services. He is graduating with a B.Sc in Environmental Science and Business Administration from Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario.

Within GSF he is working on:

- Environmental Justice
- Education for All
- COVID-19

# Secretariat

The Secretariat is responsible for the administrative leadership of the organisation, including the operative day to day business linked to finances, projects, communication and human resources.



**Sebastian Berger**

is serving as the Executive Director of the Global Student Forum. He previously held the office of Vice President in the European Students' Union and was a founding member of the GSF Steering Committee before taking on the administrative leadership of the organisation. Sebastian has been an active member of the international students' movement for years, holding various leading positions on the local, national and international level. He has a strong background in the green youth and student's movement and is an education policy expert in the field of public responsibility, financing and governance of higher education. As a founding member of the 100 Million campaign board of trustees he focuses on global wealth inequalities, education for all and the global fight against child labour alongside his engagement within the GSF. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Vienna and started a master degree programme in European studies at KU Leuven's Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence on the European Union, Foreign Policy & Global Governance, which he paused to build up the Secretariat of the Global Student Forum.