



Position paper on the implementation of the Paris Declaration and the creation of inclusive schools

[Adopted at the General Assembly 2016 – Amsterdam]

1 What is the Paris Declaration

2 On the 17th of March 2015, in Paris, Ministers for education from EU Member States and the
3 Commissioner for education, culture, youth and sports met to discuss the role of education as a
4 response to the terrorist attacks happening in Denmark and France. The outcome of the meeting, so
5 called “Paris Declaration” is a declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of
6 freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education.

7 With this Declaration, Ministers call for the respect of the *“fundamental values that lie at the heart of*
8 *the European Union : respect for human dignity, freedom (including freedom of expression),*
9 *democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights”*. In order to foster these values
10 Ministers called for actions on the national, regional, local and European level. On the national,
11 regional and local level ministers agreed to strengthen their actions in the field of education in order
12 to build education systems that lead to personal development, social inclusion and participation; to
13 ensure inclusive education that promotes citizenship and to strengthen children’s ability to think
14 critically; to ensure dialogue and participation among all the education stakeholders and to empower
15 teachers. Meanwhile Ministers also identify a need to have a stronger cooperation to share
16 experiences and to ensure that the best ideas and practices are shared via the European Union on the
17 topics of social, civic and intercultural competences, media literacy and possibilities for disadvantaged
18 children to attend education paths that take care of their needs. Ministers identify the ET2020
19 strategic framework and the Erasmus+ programme as tools to achieve these experience exchange and
20 cross-boarder cooperation.

21 The Declaration with European school students’ eyes

22 The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions -OBESSU- welcomes the big step forward
23 taken with this Declaration, that show an increasing attention to the need to change and strengthen
24 education systems all over Europe. This Declaration, in fact, must be seen as an alarm bell and a



25 warning to EU Member States that for long, after the crisis, have moved their attention to the social
26 aspect of education to its merely financial aspect.

27 At these times of changes and dramatic war situation in neighbouring countries, when Europe is
28 subject to a worrying increase of racist and xenophobic movements, as well as to a radicalisation
29 process of youth, we need to open education up to changes and inclusiveness. Europe needs to invest
30 human and financial capital into building democratic and inclusive societies through its education
31 systems, balancing needs of society with the needs of the labour market.

32 As school students we are deeply concerned that, while the Declaration calls on Member States to
33 encourage dialogue and cooperation among all the education stakeholders it doesn't specifically
34 mention school students and their representatives as a key stakeholder in the debate. We believe this
35 is a fundamental action with the view to educating students to be active citizens and decision makers
36 in their own environment.

37 Also, OBESSU is concerned that, while on the European level some tools are identified, on the
38 national, regional and local level there is no general commitment on investing in tools to put the
39 identified actions in place. We believe it is now time to invert the trend that started in 2008 and led to
40 huge cuts on education, teacher training and also specifically on civic and citizenship education.
41 Europe needs to revert this trend if we really seek for change to happen, and here we call on Member
42 States to consult school students and school student organisations when discussing spending
43 priorities and investments in order to ensure that the objectives of the declaration are achieved.

44 **Inclusive school environments**

45 School is the best symbol to describe living together and stimulating analysis and critical thinking.
46 Schools are students' second homes and they belong there, as the biggest component of the
47 community, schools are the tool to pass on the message that education is the fundamental instrument
48 to fight radicalisation as much as students' participation is a key element to engage each and every
49 individual and to avoid social exclusion, which fosters extremist behaviours as the only alternative to
50 desperation and exclusion from the community.

51 Schools are presidiums of democracy, culture and inclusiveness and because of this we believe that in
52 order for the Paris Declaration to be implemented there are some tools to put in place to guarantee
53 that schools are an example for society in general when it comes to intercultural understanding and
54 mutual respect:



- 55 ● Schools should implement mentoring services and peer guidance to avoid Early School
56 Leaving and social exclusion, as well as to make sure that individuals - and in particular
57 disadvantaged students - are followed and considered when taking educational choices.
- 58 ● Mentoring and peer-guidance should be a tool to implement a more learner centred approach
59 to education, which takes in consideration the needs of the individual and aims and leading
60 the student community to reach the same overall mastery, with no regards to the social,
61 economic or citizenship status.
- 62 ● Student-led initiatives should be fostered and financed because students' participation is at
63 the core of an educational approach that aims at personal development, and at combating
64 racism and discrimination through dialogue, acceptance of diversity and responsibility. Also,
65 student-led initiatives promote the creation of a group that includes and is based on equality
66 and respect, leading to a compact and cohesive school community.
- 67 ● Schools should respect the principle of freedom of expression of each person's culture, and
68 there should be no discriminations on the grounds of culture and religious beliefs. Public
69 schools' facilities should be secular and should not promote a religion on the other, unless
70 there is space for each religion to be practiced, giving space to inter-religious dialogue.

71 **Citizenship and global education**

72 In times where phenomena are easily globalised and conflicts are usually spread on a wide scale it is
73 fundamental that the citizenship we promote take into account each person's culture, language,
74 religion, gender, sexual orientation and expression but also that it promotes a global vision and global
75 values, created on the basis of dialogue and never through the imposition of a culture on the other.
76 For this reason we believe that:

- 77 ● Students, and in particular migrant and refugee students, should be given the opportunity to
78 understand their new education system through proper information and support.
- 79 ● Governments should cooperate and exchange ideas towards the recognition of prior learning
80 for students moving in the European Union from outside it. In a global world, in fact, skills,
81 competences and knowledge should be recognised and valued cross-boarderly and they
82 should not represent a barrier to the access in the education system.
- 83 ● Intercultural education, as a fundamental part of citizenship education, should be properly
84 practiced in the classes. This includes giving a chance for proper communication through
85 language support in learning the new language for migrants and refugees as well as in creating



- 86 patterns for plurilingualism to be actually implemented throughout Europe, as also called
87 upon by the Council of Europe in the article 2 of the European Cultural Convention
- 88 ● Human Rights Education should be considered as a relevant tool for practicing citizenship
89 education, because it allows to keep the transversal approach to the subject and to discuss
90 theory while also learning by doing, experiencing and reflecting, adapting to the needs of the
91 group and bringing the learning on a different level than the one that students usually follow
92 in the formal classrooms.
 - 93 ● Schools should be organised in diverse classrooms that include people from different cultural,
94 social, economic and religious backgrounds in order to avoid segregation, to actively practice
95 active intercultural citizenship and to promote a new united vision of the school community.
 - 96 ● Teacher training should be put in place and properly financed, in order to also ensure
97 plurality and diversity in the teaching staff, which is always an example for students.
 - 98 ● Active citizenship programmes and projects, linguistic and cultural mediation support should
99 be properly financed by governments.

100 **Welfare**

101 OBESSU strongly believes that social autonomy is a key element to the personal development of
102 students. Welfare measures put responsibility of students, make them feel ownership of their
103 education but also help them disfranchising from their families and to self-determine. In the current
104 raising migration wave we strongly call on Governments to put in place additional welfare measures
105 that:

- 106 ● Ensure free and equal access to public schools for migrant and refugee students, because
107 social inclusion must be achieved starting from here and giving concrete guidance and
108 support throughout the education path and towards the labour market.
- 109 ● Financial aid should be guaranteed to migrant and refugee students, as well as they should
110 benefit from health care, social support and material supply.
- 111 ● Governments should find paths to ensure that students have access to education while waiting
112 for their papers or their refugee status to be approved. It is only so that we include, create
113 diversity and avoid radicalisation processes through mutual understanding and education.
- 114 ● In these current times of hate crimes and hate speech, governments as well as local authorities
115 and schools should put in place ad-hoc policies to ensure the security and safety of everyone,
116 regardless of their background, and should foresee measures for those perpetrating hate and
117 discrimination.