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Refugee and Migrant Rights to Education: A School Students Perspective

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Policy Paper

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6 The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) is the platform for cooperation
7 between the national school student unions active in general secondary and secondary vocational
8 education in Europe.

9 This policy paper is an outcome of a long process within OBESSU involving a survey on refugee and
10 migrant school students; young advocates for educational inclusion of students with refugee and migrant
11 background Policy Seminar (9-15th September 2018); and the contributions of OBESSU member,
12 candidate and affiliate Organisations.

13 Introduction

14 Education is a fundamental human right that *cannot* be denied to anyone. Migrants, refugees and
15 internally displaced people (IDP) often face the uncertainty of not having the opportunity to access
16 educational opportunities. It is especially important that local, regional and national governments provide
17 this universal right to every human being in their territory.

18 Access to Education

19 The need to have legal documents often hinders young people from seeking their education and
20 developing their own personal identity. This may leave them isolated in society. Migrants are often
21 institutionally discriminated - the unbearable amount of regulations, requirements, and bureaucracy
22 denies them their right to education. Educational institutions are often not equipped to provide the
23 services and resources required to welcome and support students into the local educational system, even
24 when required to do so by law. By granting learners access to educational services, by simplifying
25 administrative processes and providing them with support for administration, will in turn, direct
26 displaced learners towards a prosperous learning journey.

27 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 28 ● National legislation to fully recognise education as a human right at all levels, without distinction
- 29 of nationality, ethnic group, place of birth or residency status;
- 30 ● National legislation to clearly allocate adequate resources to educational institutions;
- 31 ● Governments to ensure free access to education also for asylum seekers and undocumented
- 32 "sans-papiers" learners.

33

34 Recognition of Prior Learning

35 Migrants and refugees may already have certifications, diplomas and degrees not recognised by the
36 educational system of the arrival country. Differences between curricula and the differing quality levels
37 of certification between countries must of course be recognised. and it's important for the system to help
38 the learner getting everything missing in its path to get the same skills of the locals. It is fundamental to
39 recognise everything already done and studied by the learner, with a full recognition of prior learning, to
40 avoid repetitions that could be a disadvantage for a complete educational path.

41 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 42 ● Implementation of accessible and quality services for the recognition of prior learning;
43 ● Effective tools for the learners to reach the same skills and knowledge of locals at the same
44 educational level.
45

46 **Economic barriers**

47 OBESSU is always in favour of strengthening the welfare system to lower and cancel the upfront and
48 hidden costs of Education. Of course, this also applies to migrant and refugee students and learners, and
49 it's crucial to eliminate economic barriers for those who may not be able to study otherwise. Migrants,
50 asylum seekers and refugees may also share the same obstacles as local learners from disadvantaged
51 areas or living far from educational institutions. In this last case free public transport and the opportunity
52 of allowances for closer accommodation are part of the right to education.

53 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 54 ● Financial support for all students with regard to material costs, transportation costs and all other
55 hidden costs (e.g. school trips, extra-curricular activities);
56 ● Provision of adequate accommodation for students to access quality schools and learning
57 opportunities;
58 ● Grants and services to be extended to non-local learners with the same progressive criteria.
59

60 **Language learning policies**

61 Language is a significant factor in learning and inclusion processes. Simply put, if a learner cannot speak
62 the local language, they cannot learn without significant difficulty. It is fundamental to have interpreters
63 and translators in all the education related public offices to allow learners and their families to understand
64 what is needed to access schools, courses, and welfare services.

65 Having gained access to the educational institution, it is then necessary to have all the instruments
66 available to learn the language(s) of the host country, and others that could be useful for inclusion in
67 society, e.g. international languages. Language should never be an excuse for discrimination and
68 apartheid, learning environments include everyone to create unique multilingual communities.

69 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 70 ● Procedures for access to education and welfare to be fully accessible to foreign-language-
71 speaking learners and their families;
72 ● The establishment of learning paths for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees to learn the
73 language(s) of the host country;
74 ● That migrant and refugee students are educated with local students, not disregarding the
75 different levels of fluency. Supplemental language support must be provided outside of these
76 classes;
77 ● A full development of a multilingual learning context, thanks to the presence of foreign mother
78 tongue learners, as an opportunity for the locals.
79

80 **Wellbeing and Welfare of Students**

81 The demands of OBESSU for school students regarding welfare and mental health are outlined in the
82 OBESSU policy paper on 'Student Welfare'¹ and the OBESSU policy paper on 'Mental Health in Schools'.
83 These, of course, apply to refugee and migrant school students too. There may be, however, a need to
84 focus and allocate extra resources to schools where these learners attend. When trauma has occurred

¹ https://obessu.org/site/assets/files/1299/2016_-_policy_paper_on_student_welfare.pdf

85 (resulting in the learner leaving their country, during their journey or during the resettlement phase in the
86 host country) appropriate psychological support must be made available. Teachers must be trained to
87 recognise the signs of trauma and act accordingly to aid the learner. Teachers must also be trained to
88 work with those of diverse cultural backgrounds and ensure inclusion in schools so as to avoid isolation
89 of school students.

90 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 91 ● That educational institutions comply with the OBESSU policy papers on 'Student welfare' and
92 'Mental health in schools';
- 93 ● That additional, specialised support be made available to schools where learners who have
94 experienced severe trauma attend;
- 95 ● Teachers to be trained to work with learners from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs;
- 96 ● That Inclusion at school to be treated as a priority by school management.

97

98 **Choice of the educational path**

99 Coming from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds may hinder migrant students' opportunities of
100 deciding what to study and do in their lives. Migrants and refugees could often choose faster educational
101 paths or look directly for a job. Factors which may lead to this are the urgency of finding a job to support
102 families, the years that may have been lost during the emigration time and the racist stigma and
103 prejudices. Public authorities should be clear in supporting the importance of migrant's presence in the
104 classrooms, stopping damaging prejudices that can equate young migrants as cheap workers to be
105 exploited.

106 Second-level education should give the instruments to all learners, without any distinction, to decide
107 between general education and VET, considering both paths as a good opportunity for personal growth
108 and future employment.

109 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 110 ● Public authorities to fight clearly the social and racist stigma that links migrants to some jobs
111 and to exploitation;
- 112 ● School institutions to support learners' choice about the educational path to be taken, without
113 discouraging neither VET or general education;
- 114 ● That governments take action against early school leaving, from the early years of primary school.

115

116 **Community engagement policies**

117 A key aspect of inclusion of migrants and refugees is engagement with the host communities.
118 Engagement with local-level groups, both organised and unorganised, can be the answer to tackle racism,
119 xenophobia and new nationalism supported by a growing part of the political establishment. There are no
120 concrete reasons to the feeling of hate between people living in the same place and sharing the same
121 problems. Of course, there are differences between cultures, but the will of living together in a better place
122 can reinforce a sense of unity on the ground. Learners and communities should have the opportunity to
123 start initiatives, both inclusion-related or just focused on improving the living conditions of their own place
124 (e.g. environmental projects). Funding should be made available for this, and seen as both a tool for civic
125 engagement and integration within communities, global citizenship education (GCE) is essential to
126 ensure open-mindedness and integration amongst communities

127 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 128 ● That governments and local authorities make funding accessible for migrant and refugee school
129 students and their peers;

- 130 ● Local media and institutions to give visibility to school student initiatives
131 ● That schools combat xenophobia and racism;
132 ● That the curriculum has a focus on multicultural education and global citizenship education
133 (GCE).
134

135 **Participation in policy making**

136 The inclusion of migrants and refugees in decision making processes is their right, and absolutely
137 imperative to producing policies which respect their interests and rights. Refugees and migrants may face
138 obstacles when trying to express themselves, including a status quo of lack of engagement of foreigners
139 within the political process, or the migrant's lack of experience of engagement from their own culture. It
140 is necessary to change this trend, starting from school decision making, to support migrants and refugees'
141 participation in the already existing institutions and stakeholders (e.g. student councils, youth
142 associations), and the creation of new ones for special needs.

143 Refugees and migrants have the right to take the floor to express themselves and make their voices heard.
144 Student representatives should support these processes connecting more school student issues with the
145 ones from the local community groups, including migrant and refugee communities and representative
146 organisations.

147 It is particularly important considering that many young migrants and refugees are excluded from
148 education, so traditional stakeholding channels could not work to include them. The role of local
149 administrations (e.g mayor, city council) and school bodies is central to give strength to inclusive
150 decision-making processes, involving also non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society.

151 Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- 152 ● That authorities and students fight against racist stigma about foreigners' participation in policy
153 making, at all levels;
154 ● School student unions to include migrant and refugee students, and reduce barriers for
155 participation;
156 ● School institutions to include migrant and refugee students and their organisations in decision
157 making;
158 ● School student communities to work together with local migrant and refugee communities to
159 support non-student young migrant activism and participation;
160 ● Local administrations to include civil society and non-governmental organisations in decision-
161 making processes.
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