

# Policy Paper on Linguistic and Ethnic Minorities Rights

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

The policy paper is the outcome of a thorough, in depth process between its member, candidate and affiliate organisations, as well as the result of the "Speak Together" event which took place in Cluj, Romania between 4th and 10th of October 2019.

## INTRODUCTION

No matter the background of one's person, education should be granted to everyone. Students coming from different linguistic minorities often face the barriers in their educational trajectory, chiefly caused by the lack of common solidarity and of a proper investment in education. It is of high importance for all levels of decision to recognize their rights, but also support and invest in their education. In achieving this desideratum, we propose a 5 strand approach to the matter.

1. Access to quality education
2. Representation & participation
3. Inclusiveness
4. Early education
5. Protection systems and frameworks
6. Call to diversity

## Access to Education

For someone who is part of a minority language community, it might be difficult to attend a school that adheres to your personal needs as a member of said community. There might only be a small number of schools that specifically cater to language minorities, or none at all. Additionally, not all students have access to proper support when it comes to preparing for national exams, which puts an unfair burden on schools in minority communities, that can result in lack of resourcing long term. Students with a native language other than the language

in which they receive their education might lack facilities to meet the same requirements for national language exams as native students.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- Offer transportation systems for the students that live far away from their minority schools and provide transportation tickets (in the case of public transportation) paid by the state.
- Better qualified teachers and proper resources to prepare for national exams.
- Adequate opportunities for every student to consult a teacher assistant in order to get proper support.
- Every student, regardless of the number of minority students in the surrounding area, has to be able to have equal opportunities to receive proper education.
- A proper amount of schools for minorities.

### Representation & Participation

As OBESSU we need to ensure that the rights of students that belong to ethnic groups are respected, both within the school environment, as well as in our societies in general.

It is crucial to note that when working on issues or topics related to minorities, learners within these communities must be at the core of decision-making processes. To make this a reality, we need to make our organisations more representative of minorities and cooperate with partners which are experts in this field.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- An increase of participation contexts for minority groups, when it comes to policy-making and improving the education system in general.
- Proper resources and funding to support youth and student organisers in developing more representative structures.

### Inclusiveness

Lack of integration of minorities in social groups is proven to be a huge problem for all parts of society. Across Europe there is a rise in racist tensions, including, and perhaps most worryingly, in our schools. To address this problem, we need coherent minority language legislation to build tolerant school communities and a symbiotic environment for all. Turning to a continuous integration of minorities, that starts at an early age and is facilitated by official institutions, will prevent these harmful and unnecessary consequences.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- Extra-curricular activities embracing Inclusion and talking about History of Minority Groups.
- All curricula to include general knowledge about local, national and international minorities throughout the learning objectives
- Observance of traditional festivals and days of celebration.

### Quality Teaching & Learning

To ensure that the quality of teaching will always be up to date, there should be compulsory teacher training, where awareness is raised on minority rights, but also on how to pass on the knowledge to all kinds of learners. One hardship, in transmitting education properly, lies in the material resources, for example schoolbooks. Often, there is a lack of textbooks in languages of different minorities. Minority language speaking students then may face the struggle of having to study even the most difficult subjects in a language that they can hardly comprehend.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- More qualified teachers on minority rights issues.
- State supported access to textbooks in minority languages.
- Access to official websites from the ministry of education in all official minority languages.
- Access to all the important documents that are necessary to graduate in all official minority languages as well as language support/translation when needed.
- The possibility to have a support teacher helping minority students with tasks, if teaching class in the minority language cannot be guaranteed.

### Early education

Education does not start in lower primary school, but in kindergartens and nurseries.

They represent the first step towards inclusion. Although these institutions are crucial for having equal access to education and are affecting society enormously, kindergartens often have limited access. This happens for very different but equally unjust reasons. Families often are forced to take their children to private institutes, which can be expensive and unaffordable.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- Equal access to kindergartens, with an aim to be inclusive for every child
- Education on minority rights for children regardless of their nationality

### Language protection

Minorities school students often face difficulties regarding access to education in their native language, in most of the cases due to bureaucracy and linguistic differences. In order for a minority to be preserved, European countries should adapt the whole educational system according to the linguistic realities of the country. The procurement and functioning of this service should be clear and effective. In this case, the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe, signed by 18 countries, has the aim of protecting and promoting languages used by traditional and/or historical minorities, also including the rights to quality education.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- National legislation to fully recognize education at all levels, without distinction of nationality, ethnic group, place of birth or residency status.
- Official recognition for all distinct language minorities
- The possibility for official minorities to study in their own language on all educational levels, from preschool to university.
- Clear and effective legislation for the procurement of education in the chosen language, aided by interpreters/translators.
- Nationwide promotion of the use of bi-/multilingual school books.

### Call to Diversity

The presence of micro-aggressions towards minorities is just as prominent in society as in its institutions. Dealing with racist and xenophobic attitudes on a daily basis affects one's mental health. It even has been linked to cause a Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Diversifying class teachers and school psychologists in order to ensure that no problems will be left misunderstood or not understood at all cannot fully prevent abovementioned struggles, yet this is a crucial coping strategy.

Therefore, OBESSU demands:

- Diversifying teachers, school therapists, mental health counsellors and supervisors who are tackling minority-related issues sensitively.
- Giving space where before mentioned struggles can be discussed by those affected.
- Addressing identity construction in school lessons.
- That diversities in background and language be appreciated as enrichment, instead of a burden.