

OBESSU Reaction to the Global Education Monitoring Report 2019

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has recently published its [2019 Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) Report which focuses on Migration, displacement and education](#).

OBESSU welcomes the analysis on how education can build bridges and not walls, as well as the call of the report for more international solidarity.

OBESSU sees this report as a powerful tool that highlights the possibilities and the role of education when it comes to the inclusion of displaced young people in the 21st century.

In the practice of our everyday work, as School Student Unions over the European continent, we do not see what in the GEM report executive summary is mentioned as “*increasingly bold steps to assume education responsibilities*” of all learners. Rather, we see a worrying increase in the negative narratives towards migrations and their educational inclusion at every level (pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary) and type of education (general, professional, vocational, non-formal).

The data provided on the access to education of migrant children in Europe is still very worrying: in countries like Greece, only 29% of 6 to 17 years old migrants attend formal education; in Bulgaria only 1 out of 10 refugees in the usual schooling age goes to school and in countries like Germany and Italy this data is unknown, hence targeted tailor-made solutions remain impossible in policy making.

Internal migration effects

The effects of new school concentrations caused by the moving internal population are analysed, explaining some positive cases of cooperation between the Ministries, local authorities and stakeholders, to improve connections between the communities and the new further schools in rural and remote areas. However, when recognising the good practices identified in Northern Europe, we can't avoid also looking at the situation in other countries in the European continent who suffered deeper educational cuts, penalising the schools located in less populated and rural areas.

Discrimination in Education

One of the fundamental human rights we strive for is Education. OBESSU believes that schools should fight any kind of discrimination and should be free of discrimination and segregation of any kind. Migrants and refugees are often the subjects of discrimination. It is therefore natural for us to raise the question: **How is it possible that non-discrimination guarantees the right to education in theory, but not in practice?** One of the responses we give ourselves and policy makers is that schools, and in general educational providers, should promote global citizenship and Intercultural Education for learners, as one of the steps we need to take to abolish discrimination in educational institutions as well as in society.

Migrants and refugees going to school have the full Human Right to be considered learners, with the same rights as others, as stated in the [Universal Human Rights Declaration, article 26](#). The importance of tailoring education for people living in disadvantaged contexts should

be considered as an opportunity for natives too, considering that economic migrants are often living in the areas of the most exploited natives.

We can't ignore that in many European countries, especially border countries, like Italy, France and Greece, the percentage of young migrants in education is still far from reaching a positive level of participation. Not only we want to stress the problems that migrant and refugees have, but also, we wish to highlight that all the problems that undocumented learners have to face, represents a barrier for their learning process, which becomes unnecessarily challenging, inaccessible and excludes a specific target, which is already at high risk of social exclusion, from access to education, and therefore prevents them from enjoying their full Human Rights. Creating barriers to education, as highlighted also in this report, and creating social exclusion is a disgrace that countries in Europe need to face.

Alternatively, we stress the need for sustainable integration. Quality education must remain a top priority, therefore, displaced learners should have the right to study also in their native language. We believe that the approach in which the language of the arrival country is taught is a crucial factor in the successful integration of displaced learners. Therefore, we strive for a language learning policy that should accompany the use of the mother tongue together with complimentary learning of the L2 taught through innovative methods and interdisciplinary approach. This would lead to a more sustainable learning journey, promoting what we strive for: lifelong learning.

European Perspective

When it comes to discussing migration and displacement in education, we believe that looking at it from a broader point of view is positive. However, we want to underline the importance of bringing every regional perspective into the discourse. The European perspective would have been an added value in the context of the report, considering the increasing cooperation between the member States of the European Union about education and the **growing role of migrations in EU politics**.

Europe is an example of structured cooperation between different States, and including the perspective in the sense of provided data and current situation overview would complement the already mentioned initiatives and programmes of other continents.

Surely, when speaking of the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) in the European region, we can't ignore the uncertainty produced from the decision of some Member States of Europe to not participate in the Marrakech Conference.

Mobility and Recognition of prior learning

All the examples given by the Report on Third-Level education exchange programmes are relevant to understand how, also out of the EU and the Erasmus programme, these policies are being developed. As school student representatives, we underline that also for Secondary Education, both General and Vocational, exchanges should be a core point to develop knowledge, competencies (e.g. awareness, participation, empathy, resilience) and skills. About that, we must say that without a clear and fair recognition of prior learning global exchanges for learners seem a target far to reach.

Considering **learners are all different but all equal** and with the same rights, we feel the necessity of making it easier to recognise degrees and performances done in another country. In many of our countries, the recognition of a primary school degree could take years, destroying the educational journey of displaced young people and forcing learners to waste a lot of time and motivation to further learn. A faster recognition should however not

impact negatively the overall quality of education and it should be linked to an efficient system that is able to include learners who need to acquire some specific skills (e.g. language of the country of arrival) in the classroom setting, guaranteeing welfare measures that make this possible and combating segregation for the newcomers.

Non-formal Education

We believe that Non-Formal Education experiences are crucial to an individual's learning process. Rather than swallowing readymade facts and opinions without evaluation, **NFE provides learners with skills, values and knowledge through active participation**. With the world changing, we need our educational institutions to enable learners to gain these competencies.

We welcome the reflections about non-formal education in the GEM report. It is right to point out that one of the main problems within NFE is that it is seen insignificant in comparison to academic education - we believe that NFE should be an additional pedagogical approach to formal education for learners. We agree that there is a lack of systematic information available from governments, but we would also like to flag the many initiatives that are carried out by Non-Formal Education providers, including youth and school student organisations, that for example provide humanitarian help, language courses or legal support. For this reason, we believe that non-formal education providers, solidarity workers and youth workers should be welcomed in school communities and academic communities, because active communities are not only based on academic knowledge, but also on forms of peer support, learning and community building which are fundamental in promoting a culture of solidarity and inclusive school environments.

The Learners perspective

Learners are the main stakeholder when it comes to education and it is crucial to look at all aspects and structures when it comes to discussing them. **We regret to see almost no space for the learners' perspective in the GEM Report 2019**, although we are grateful to UNESCO for trying to involve us in the latter stages of the report dissemination.

When it comes to creating a culture of building bridges, and not walls, **all players need to be more conscious in building bridges even within the school community**, and not leave any crucial player behind. Students, in fact, are the main stakeholders in their own education, and their view is still too poorly included in the many reports and policy-making efforts done globally for the implementation of a fairer school system.

Conclusions: towards a participatory implementation of SDG 4 in Europe

Welcoming the Global Education Monitoring Report 2019 is for us an act of commitment towards the implementation of SDG 4 in the European region. As we wrote in our joint publication with Education International and the European Students Unions "[A joint vision for Secondary and Higher Education for All in Europe](#)", we see some priority areas that need appropriate policy investment in order for the full implementation of the SDG. Some of these are strictly linked also to the participation of displaced **school students in the democratic life of schools, thus in the democratic life of society**. We believe that, given the global context and good practices, the main policy focus areas for reaching the targets by 2030 in a sustainable way are:

- **Governance of Education Institutions:** a representation of all key stakeholders, including learners and teachers, should be ensured and should entail that learners,

hold the majority of votes in governance as education is their main domain of experience and expertise.

- **Appropriate funding for Education:** adequate public funding for education, training and research should be secured. Governments, therefore, must meet the target of spending 6% of GDP or 20% of the total public expenditure. This is fundamental to reverse the worrying trend of disinvestment in public education and its commodification.
- **Accessible and diverse education:** Institutions need to develop policies, strategies and action plans (e.g. National Access Plans) to ensure safe learning environments that promote a culture of diversity and peace. Schools and educational providers in general, should be aware of the importance of fighting educational segregation and implement policies of inclusions from the very beginning of the learning journey of the individual.
- **Flexible learning pathways:** Current migrations patterns call for special attention to be paid to the learning integration including, as also highlighted in the report, easier recognition and validation of prior learning and access to higher education, TVET, CVET and any other form of learning. Specific attention should be paid unaccompanied minors at high risk of Early School Leaving or to whom the right to education is not guaranteed.