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POLICY PAPER ON INCLUSION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN SCHOOLS

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Introduction

The Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) provides a platform for cooperation between relevant student representative structures active in general secondary and vocational secondary education across Europe.

This policy paper addresses the inclusion of ethnic minorities in schools, recognising it as a critical aspect of achieving educational equality and equity. It aims to explore the barriers faced by ethnic minority students, such as discrimination, underrepresentation, and a lack of culturally responsive curricula. Furthermore, it provides recommendations for promoting an inclusive school environment, teacher competence on interculturality, and support for minority students.

The importance of this policy paper is significant, as the inclusion of ethnic minorities has long been a pressing issue across European schools. OBESSU has a vital role to play in supporting its member organisations in developing and implementing effective strategies for the integration of ethnic minority students within their national education systems.

The Problem of Ethnic Minorities' Integration in Schools

Over recent decades, Europe has become increasingly ethnically diverse, due to socio-demographic phenomena such as migration, asylum-seeking, and refugee flows. By this, we do not necessarily exclusively refer to extra-European ethnic groups: a large part of today's ethnic minorities in Europe are citizens of European nations living abroad, but still in European territory. This is most often observed in Western European states, where many Eastern and Southern Europeans tend to migrate, bringing their families along with them. We must also take into account those minority communities that have lived in their area of residence for hundreds of years, from generation to generation, such as the Hungarian community in Romania and the Catalonian and Basque communities in France and Spain.

Generally, European legislature tends to have protections and exceptions set up to help the integration and support of these ethnic minorities, especially those that have been integral parts of their countries for a long time. In the wake of recent migration to European territory, however, concerns have to be raised as to what European countries are doing to support said communities in continuing their studies and adapting to life in a drastically different culture.

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Immigrant children face a few key difficulties when they arrive in their new host country. First and foremost, there are language barriers and cultural differences that make it very difficult for them to ever adapt from a social point of view. Students who are not part of the ethnic minority are rarely ever instructed on tolerance, acceptance of other cultures and trying to reach out and form meaningful connections, despite apparent differences. Minority students may also face subtle biases or overt racism from teachers, staff and peers alike. A prevalent issue is the eurocentric curricula that often gloss over the histories and cultures of ethnic minorities – this can, in turn, lead to these pupils' feeling underrepresented and their losing their sense of belonging to their people.
Finally, we can also refer to teachers, who often lack training in intercultural pedagogy and managing diverse classrooms. It is then obvious that they would not be able to create equitable, safe, and inclusive learning environments for these students.

Objectives

- **Improving the implementation of national policies regarding the integration of ethnic minorities in the education system**

  Many European countries have policies to support ethnic minority students, but these are often not fully implemented at the local or school level. As a result, many minority students still face discrimination, a lack of support, and exclusion.

  This is often because schools don't receive enough support or resources to apply these policies properly. Teachers may lack training in working with diverse students, and schools may not offer the services needed, such as language support or cultural activities.

  To improve this, OBESSU urges governments to ensure every school has a clear plan for including ethnic minority students and the necessary funding to carry it out. Schools should also provide regular training for staff to create welcoming and respectful environments for all students.

  Another goal we want to achieve would be the recognition of student organizations representing ethnic minorities in educational legislation. Referring to them in official documents would give them a more stable ground to stand on.

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- **Supporting the reform of European curricula to eliminate eurocentrism and include broad information on a wide array of cultures**

  A key step in creating inclusive education is reforming curricula to reflect the diverse backgrounds of all students better. Many European curricula still focus mainly on European history and culture, often misrepresenting or overlooking other parts of the world and their people.
  This narrow focus can make ethnic minority students feel undervalued and disconnected from their education. OBESSU supports broad curriculum reform that includes diverse cultures, histories, and worldviews, recognising the experiences of colonised people, migrants, and minorities in Europe. Such reform should also challenge stereotypes and highlight the global nature of knowledge and human rights.

- **Implementing clear and objective codes of conduct to eliminate racism and discrimination from scholarly contexts, while facilitating school boards' capacity to sanction those who violate them**

  Most cases of racism in scholarly contexts go unpunished, as current codes of conduct across many European educational institutions only have vague provisions against this sort of behaviour, leading to them going unpunished. The vast majority of discrimination is subtle and comes in the form of biases and exclusionary treatment – acts that would not necessarily come under said interdictions.

  OBESSU demands that governments adopt legislative codes of conduct applicable to all teachers and staff nationwide, with clear provisions against racist and discriminatory behaviour. There shall also be a clear procedure for reporting these acts, anonymous if need be, and clear instructions on what actions school administration needs to take to ensure no discrimination goes unpunished.

Conclusion

The inclusion of ethnic minorities in schools is essential to achieving real equality in education. While many European countries have adopted policies to support this, they are often poorly implemented at the local level. As a result, ethnic minority students still face exclusion, discrimination, and a lack of representation.

OBESSU calls for urgent action to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Education systems must reflect the diversity of Europe's student population and ensure equal opportunities for all.

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Key priorities include:

- Fully apply inclusion policies in every school.
- Reforming curricula to reflect diverse cultures and histories.
- Training teachers in intercultural education.
- Enforce clear rules against racism and discrimination.
- Creating safe and inclusive school environments for all students.
- Including student organizations representing ethnic minority groups in official legislation.

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