



OBESSU
Organising Bureau of
European School Student Unions

Toolbox to fix a broken education system



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About OBESSU

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. It was founded in April 1975 in Dublin, Ireland and brings together Member, Candidate and Affiliate Organisations from all over Europe. All Member Organisations are independent, national, representative and democratic school student organisations.

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Introduction

We all know that fixing something requires the appropriate tools to fix that problem. Want to fix a broken arm? You need a cast. Want to fix a beautiful bookshelf to the wall? You need a drill. Do you want to fix a broken education system? Well. You need this toolbox!

In this toolbox you will find inspiration on how to protect and advance your rights as school students, whether you want to do it at school level, nationally or internationally. We will walk you through the concept of the Declaration of School Student Rights, how we redeveloped it with school students from all over Europe and how you can act individually and collectively to make it become a reality.

Take your student collective, friends or school student unions fellow activists and get ready to go on this journey!

School Student Rights Reloaded!

The Declaration of School Student Rights, also called DSSR, is our vision for school student rights in Europe. It was developed for the first time in 2006 by OBESSU and its Membership and it outlines the rights that school students should have in Europe. Around the year 2000s the European Union approved what is called the Lisbon Strategy. This strategy contained several actions to harmonise education and training systems in the Union but according to school student activist is lacked two components: **harmonisation of rights for school students and a larger vision of Europe as a wide and diverse continent**. And this is how the need for a Declaration of School Student Rights emerged.

17 years later, in 2022, we felt it was time to have a look at the Declaration and make sure it stays relevant and up-to-date. The financial crisis of 2008 and its impact on education systems, the rise of far-right movements in Europe and their backlash on civil rights, the Covid-19 pandemic were all factors that had strong negative effects on access to education and school student rights throughout the continent.

So as a European network of school student unions we realised it was time to kick off a consultation process to ensure a more rights-based approach to education.

The process was long and the road was bumpy but thanks to the support of the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe we created a Work Plan to engage our membership and co-create a revised Declaration of School Student Rights.

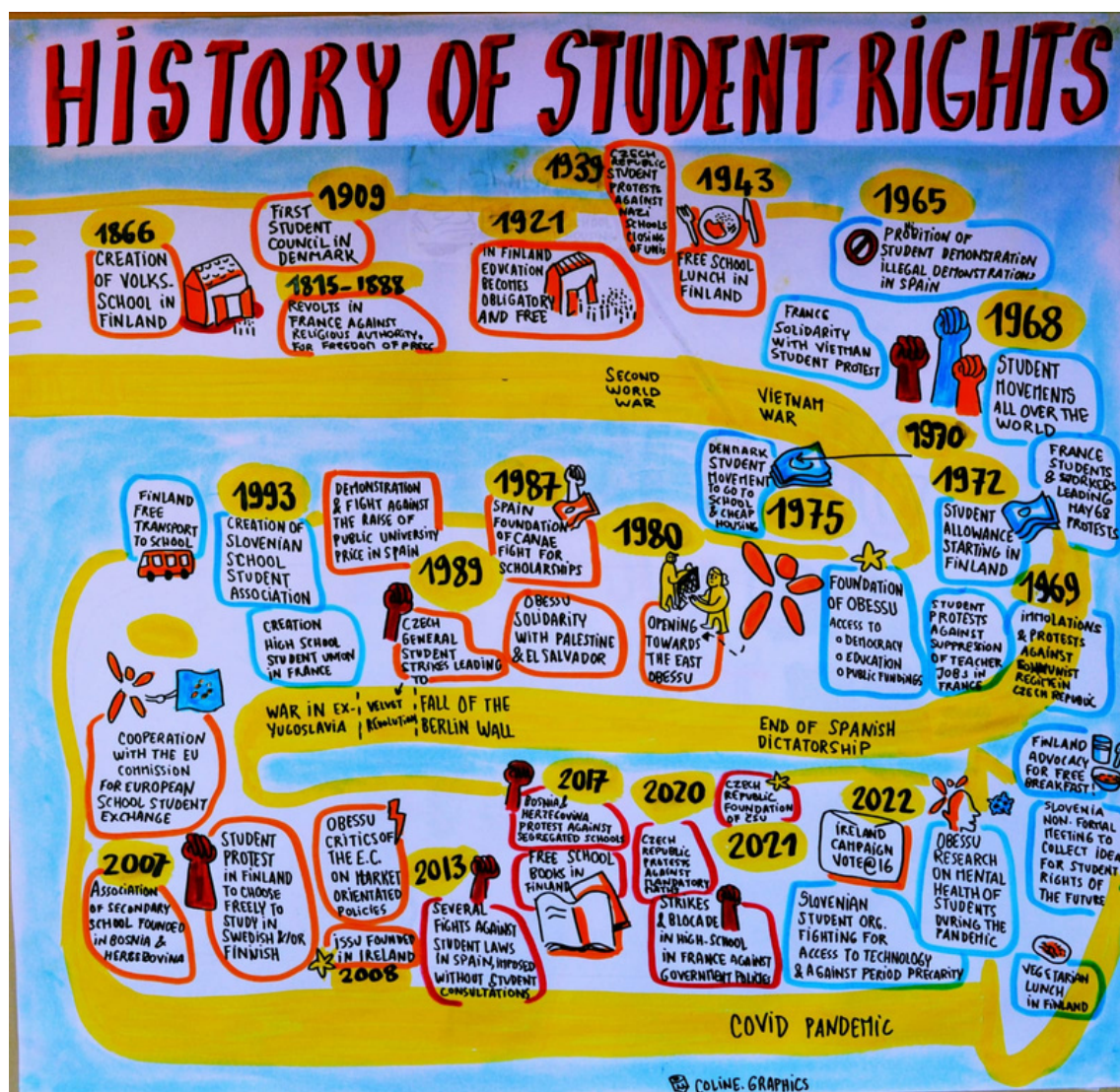
School Student Rights Reloaded (SSRR) ran throughout 2022 and was led by a Coordination Team composed of a Board Member and 4 different representatives from OBESSU Member Organisations. The activities were supported by the Pool of Trainers as well as from other OBESSU Bodies, including the Board and the Secretariat. What did we do, you might wonder? Well, we went on a similar journey to the one that we propose to you in this toolbox.

We kicked off the work of the SSRR Work Plan with a double activity called “ABC of School Student Rights: Coordination Team meeting and Training of Trainers”. During this activity we gathered the Coordination Team to plan their work ahead and propose a participatory and engaging methodology of revision while we also gathered our Pool of Trainers to build their capacity and to be able to pass on their knowledge to more activists throughout the year. **A strong action starts from a well-trained group of activists!**

After the first activity, we invited school students from all over Europe to organise local and national activities where they consulted school students about the Declaration and proposed changes and suggestions according to their needs and context. We had local and national activities in France, organised by MNL; Spain, organised by FEMAIE; Ireland, organised by ISSU; Romania, organised by CNE and Bosnia and Herzegovina, organised by ASUBiH. These national activities were very important to make sure that **the claims of the Declaration are relevant all over Europe**, as our continent is quite diverse in terms of access to rights.

What next? We met at the University on Youth and Development for our Summer School “Nothing about us without us”. Cool title, no? During the Summer School we explored the European Context and the history of school student rights and we debated outcomes of the national activities to create consensus with the members present.

During this activities, participants also realised that they would like to share more about their realities and the tools they use to advocate for their rights, and this is why we organised an additional Experience Exchange in Denmark, where participants had the chance to share their challenges and inspiring practices when it comes to advancing and protecting learners rights. .



Last, but not least, the Coordination Team met in Brussels with the Pool of Trainers to finalise the programme with an editorial meeting called “XYZ of School Student Rights”. During this meeting, the last revised version of the Declaration of School Student Rights was finalised and this toolkit was conceptualised to put it in practice.

We loved every minute of this journey, and we hope you do too.

Nothing about us without us.

The activities

ABC of School Student Rights:
Coordination Team meeting and
Training of Trainers

1

The Caravan of Right(s)

2

Summer School:
Nothing About Us
Without Us

3

Experience
Exchange
in Denmark

4

XY1 of School Student
Rights:
Editorial Meeting

5

The rights we want The rights we deserve

1. The right to association 
2. The right to participation 
3. The right to appeal 
4. Civil rights 
5. The right to Quality Education 
6. Vocational Education and Training (VET) 
7. The right to access Education 
8. The Right to Maintain Cultural and Personal Identity 
9. The right to gender equality 
10. The right to a flexible school system 
11. The right to a proper school environment 
12. The right to information and guidance 
13. Internal regulations 
14. The right to global and societal education 
15. The right to an environmental school 
16. The right to digital education 



Why and how to use the DSSR

The Declaration of School Student Rights is a powerful tool, not only for OBESSU and European level, but also at school, local and national levels. The reason why this Declaration is so important is due to the fact that it encompasses the basic student rights we so highly value and strive to achieve as school student activists everyday everywhere.

Advocating for the 16 articles of the DSSR means striving to **provide a fair and equal educational base so that no school student is left out**. This document collects and covers our needs as school students in the 21st century therefore transforming it into one of the pillars of student organising. Just imagine actions being done in schools all over Europe, then nationally, regionally and at European level. The Declaration of School Student Rights is relevant, and will remain relevant until all school students can truthfully claim that all of their rights are being met. **If we start the snowball effect we can envision a future where school student rights in Europe are homogenous.**

The Declaration can be applied anywhere and in many different ways and scales, it can be done by any student or local council and union. Through this toolkit OBESSU aims at offering initial help and inspiration, but we are also always happy to provide more information and guidance and you can always [reach out to us!](#)

So, where to start and how can you really advocate for the Declaration of School Student Rights to become a reality?

First of all, there's no need to start big. You can decide to start in your school by discussing a single right (e.g. the right to association) or you can choose to start a national campaign on a statutes for school students. The next chapters are small boxes in the toolbox that guide you through the process.

LET'S GO!

First of all, we recommend that you start from understanding what you can learn to achieve impact. How can you become a changemaker in your school or local community? Are you interested in learning more about empowering others through peer learning? Have a look at the following resources and remember that learning is an essential part of activism and that school student rights are important also outside of the classroom in local and regional communities and spaces.

Activism Inside-Out

This course developed by the European Youth Forum looks at personal development for activists starting from uncovering internal narratives and how individual stories can help you in activism. This tool can be important in helping you channel your inner desires for

Guidelines for Changemakers on Community Organising and Local empowerment

This course developed by the European Changemakers Academy provides you with the necessary knowledge and tools to develop your skills in terms of community organising in different aspects: coordinating a social project; policymaking; leadership; fundraising; PR and dissemination and human resources to promote community organising and social change in your community.

Toolbox for young campaigners in Vocational Education and Training

This document provides school student activists and staff supporting them, with an overview of what it takes to organise an activity related to peer education and an activity implementing peer education

European ChangeMakers Academy MOOC

This course developed by the European Changemakers Academy provides you with the necessary knowledge and tools to develop your skills in terms of community organising in different aspects: coordinating a social project; policymaking; leadership; fundraising; PR and dissemination and human resources to promote community organising and social change in your community.

#PeerPower - Guidelines for peer educators

This document provides school student activists and staff supporting them, with an overview of what it takes to organise an activity related to peer education and an activity implementing peer education

Have your say!

Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

This manual from the Council of Europe will guide you to learning more about youth participation, cooperation with different stakeholders, different youth participation projects and activities you can undertake to analyse youth participation at local and regional level, following the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional life.

What to do at local and school level

Implementing the DSSR at the local level is kind of the final objective of this declaration. Indeed, the final goal of the DSSR is to be applied and adapted to every country and every locality so that students of the world have all access to the same basis of rights ensuring an equal, democratic and accessible education system. Implementing the DSSR at schools level would start by getting it accessible to everyone.

TIPS

For example you could...

- Print the declaration and leave one copy in each classroom
- Spotlight one right per month and make it visible in the school hall and discuss them at your school assembly
- Engage with your teachers in discussions during citizenship/civic education on access to rights
- Discuss in history classes about the development of student rights in your country and globally

Manual for school students

This manual introduces you to the galaxy of student activism and walks you through different steps of activist recruitment, engagement and retention so that you can create sustainable impact in your school or local level. We of course invite you to engage with your local or national student union, but if there is none, this manual will help you step by step and provide you with some inspiration and examples. The manual is also available in German.

The Generation O-Liberation Methodology

Also available in French and Italian.
This methodology supports you in carrying out student assemblies on political matters that affect students in a structured and self-organised way, supporting a participatory way of coming up with political recommendations on the different topics.

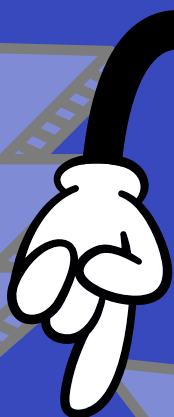
The school student guide to the universe of democratic participation

What's a European Parliament Election toolkit doing here? First of all, it can help you to get inspiration of past campaigns, and it can also give you some ideas on potential activities you might want to organise to promote the DSSR. For example, what about a mock parliament discussion where this issue is debated to better explore the potential resistance in your school? What about a mock election to see if the declaration would pass?

Manual on Communications and Networking for Community Organising

What to do at national level

In order for the Declaration to be implemented at the local level, school students unions, organisations and associations need to spread the DSSR as much as possible through the whole country, and advocate for institutions to do the same and to take steps to engage further for the declaration to become a politically binding document. !



If you are a member of national organisation, a good first step would be to discuss internally on the Declaration and align it with your political priorities and your advocacy goals. If you want to take some more inspirations and tips on advocacy and campaigning actions, you can have a look at the following tools in our box

The school student guide to the universe of democratic participation:

Planet European Parliament Elections

What's a European Parliament Election toolkit doing here? First of all, it can help you to get inspiration of past campaigns, and it can also give you some ideas on potential activities you might want to organise to promote the DSSR. For example, what about a mock parliament discussion where this issue is debated to better explore the potential resistance at national level?

Manual for school students

Using the Manual at national level might mean translating and making it accessible to more schools and more context specific. It could help your national organisation to be present in more schools or in more cities, and it's of course instrumental to make sure that the Declaration is widely dissemination. Also available in German.

OBESSU's Advocacy Toolkit

This basic toolkit will guide you through some basics of planning strategically an advocacy action. Maybe you know what you want to achieve but you need some structure? This Toolkit is what you are looking for. It goes from introduction to policy, to campaigning and action planning, to strategy setting.

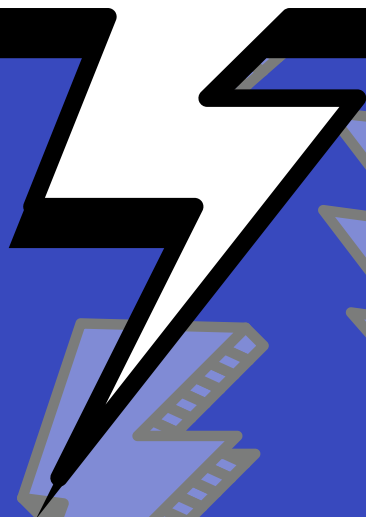
The Advocacy Handbook by the European Youth Forum

This extensive handbook was developed by young advocates for young advocates and it goes more in depth into the different steps of successful advocacy. It will help you identify your problems and solutions, craft powerful messages that are strategic, create partnership that are in line with the policy cycle and overall build strong actions.

What can be done at European and global level

OBESSU will continue to be a promoter and a supporter of the widespread dissemination of the Declaration of School Student Rights. What can you do to make this more effective?

- Share your activities connected to the DSSR with us, so that we can create a buzz around them and share your inspirational actions with others
- Let us know about your policy wins so that we can promote them in the political debates at European level and at global level through the Global Student Forum
- Let us know about your challenges and we will see if and how we can help you. With our Pool of Trainers and our Membership we might have the solution in our pocket!
- Bring your organisation in OBESSU if you are not a member yet!
- Engage with the European Parliament Elections: we need European policy makers to push in European fora and at national level to be able to see the Declaration become a reality in Europe!



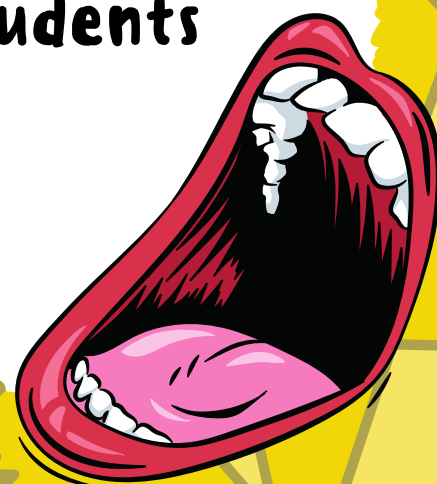
FINAL WORDS

Students are the biggest stakeholder in the education system and it is rooted in our beliefs that students should be at the centre of policy making, policy design, implementation and evaluation. The DSSR represents not only the needs but also the aspirations of students and students unions who wish to improve their educational pathway for themselves and their peers.

Our schools, training centres and universities are not isolated institutions and are not always preserved and protected as what they are, a public good. Since the beginning of the 2000s but especially after the economic crisis, our education systems suffered financial cuts and the implementation of policies that did not aim to improve the public service but rather to reduce costs. The outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic, made clear that those prior cuts had dismantled the infrastructure, the rights of teachers and specially, the living and studying condition of students.

OBESSU represents the need for free, quality, and inclusive education for school students in Europe. Since 1975, we have fought for students rights and strive for more and better inclusion of students in decision making. We believe it's always the time to defend education and learners. This toolbox aims at providing students and students unions the capacity to keep advocating for their rights and to keep advancing solutions based on the need of improvement and progress.

**Don't think about making
students fit the education
system, think about making the
education system fit students**



Acknowledgements

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- The OBESSU Board for their indispensable contributions and engagement, especially Nadine, Caridad and Rares for your incredible support.
- The OBESSU Pool of Trainers for their organising of pedagogy support during the SSRR Workplan.
- OBESSU Member Organisations for the organising of National Events and engagement with the revision process

Glossary

DSSR - The Declaration of School Student Rights is a document which outlines the conditions that must be met in order for school students to succeed in an educational setting.

IO - International Officers are the democratically elected members from the MO's whose responsibility is to communicate with OBESSU on projects and initiatives, and implement these in their home organisation, this can also be the person(s) inside an OBESSU MO who has been chosen to work on international work.

MO - "Member Organisations" are the national representative organisations from Europe that make OBESSU.

NGO - Non Governmental Organisation is a non-profit organisation that operates independently, without any governmental influence.

OBESSU - the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions. OBESSU provides training and facilitates events for the benefit of their members. All members of OBESSU are independent, national, representative and democratic school student organisations.

SSRR - School Student Rights Reloaded is a process started by OBESSU, to consult with students and OBESSU members with the aim of creating the DSSR.

SU - Student Unions are the official representatives of students in a country or region.

PoT - The Pool of Trainers is a group of young people selected for their experience in activism and delivering trainings, who take the role of sharing their knowledge through training and programmes for OBESSU MO's.

VET - Vocational Education and Training prepares school students for professional/ practical jobs and is usually aimed towards a specific trade.