



GLOBAL STUDENTS' DEMANDS

**on Refugees and Migrants'
Education**

Geneva

13-16 December 2019

Introduction and background

We are a Cross continental group of students coming from Africa, North and South America, Asia-Pacific, Middle-East and Europe who represent student unions at different levels, refugee-led projects and NGOs working in the sector of educational inclusion. We are united in diversity and in the belief that access to education is a human right that should be granted to all, regardless of origin, race, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and sex characteristics, class, religion, legal status, abilities and beliefs.

These demands were developed through a consensus-based process during the “Global Student Voices: education and migration” forum held in Geneva from the 13th to the 16th of December 2019. We have seen how students especially refugee and migrant students are being silenced, denied agency and left out of decision-making spaces. Despite not being included in the Global Refugee Forum organised by the UNHCR from the 16th to the 19th of December 2019 in Geneva, we deemed important to gather and present these demands to policymakers, international institutions and all the relevant stakeholders.

We live in an educational crisis. Accessing education globally has never been more out of reach. According to the “Stepping up: refugee education in crisis” report (UNHCR, 2019), only 24% of refugees enrol in secondary education and that figure drastically drops to 3% for enrollment in higher education. Access to education is a human right and as such it must be defended, promoted and enhanced. Students’ voices and interests need to be included in all decision-making and implementation of programs considering their best interests.

We live in a climate, humanitarian, democratic and systemic crisis. Our struggle for accessible, high quality, inclusive education must encompass the fight against the climate emergency, corruption, armed conflict, precarity and discrimination. We must support the fight for safer educational institutions, a more equitable world economy, the right to associate and demonstrate peacefully and the right to be included into the community.

The following demands serve as the first steps to address the challenges of access to quality education, legislation, living conditions and building solidarity and cohesion.

Access to education

Refugees and migrants encounter different barriers to access education in their host country. Examples of such barriers can be related to language learning, lack of inclusion, recognition of qualifications, and education not being affordable, among others. It is important that both governments and education institutions take responsibility and develop a proactive approach to give refugees and migrants a fair chance to access quality education.

Therefore we demand policymakers and educational institutions that:

- **All refugees and migrants including undocumented migrants and asylum seekers must have the real right to access and participate in education at any level and be recognised in the educational system.** Furthermore, all levels of education should be tuition-free regardless of residence status. While striving towards that goal, an important first step is equalizing the rights to education between migrants and locals. Education systems should strive towards the inclusion of refugees and migrants to end student segregation and provide support and appropriate transition periods tailored to the individual needs. Refugee and migrant students should have a right to choose the education path they want and be free from selection pressures and impositions based on, for instance, job market needs. Therefore, services that foster students' possibilities of making free and informed educational choices such as study guidance, should be provided.
- **Hidden educational expenses, such as the cost of mandatory education material, should be made affordable for refugee and migrant students.** Proactive initiatives such as special financial support or discounts must be made available.
- **Educational institutions should respond to the different needs of a diverse student population** including facilitating spaces to practice religion and culture. Institutions' staff and students should be trained on how to work with a student population of different backgrounds. The knowledge and backgrounds of refugee and migrant students should be an integrated path of the learning experience and study environments of educational institutions, in order to avoid having education systems that do not reflect the diversity of their student populations. It is fundamental that governments and educational institutions put a special focus on ensuring refugee and migrant students inclusion and well-being in the study environment and society as a whole.

- **Processes of recognition of acquired qualifications and prior learning should be made free, flexible, accessible and transparent**, regardless of differences in educational qualifications and systems so they do not become a barrier in accessing education. Initiatives to recognize the qualifications of refugees and migrants with missing or insufficient academic documentation must be implemented. An example of such initiatives is the UNESCO qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants.
- **Supplementary courses that provide necessary skills and knowledge for accessing an education including language courses, should be accessible and free of cost for all migrants.**
- **The knowledge production of higher education institutions should place focus on solving the current challenges existing in our societies related to migrants access to education and social inclusion. Institutional heads must have regular engagements with the refugee and migrant students to familiarize themselves with their challenges in order to develop appropriate solutions to address them.**

Legislation

The existing immigration legislation often times marginalize refugees and migrants and perpetuate discrimination and prejudice against these groups in educational institutions. Examples include, but are not limited to having cumbersome and lengthy immigration pathways, failing to provide financial resources for refugees and migrants inclusion in education, and having inadequate communication regarding immigration requirements. It is imperative that immigration legislation ensures effective and dignified inclusion of refugees and migrants in the education system.

Therefore, we demand States to:

- At a minimum level, **step up efforts to adopt the policies recommended by the UNHCR and UNESCO** for refugees and migrants as part of their national educational and social systems, thus contributing to **attaining the Sustainable Development Goals globally.**
- **Involve all relevant stakeholders** especially refugees, migrants and students' representatives in formulating policy.
- **Prioritise the social inclusion of refugees and migrants into the education system and other social systems.** States must take steps to ease the bureaucratic burden on refugees and migrants and reduce delays.

- Together with institutions, **maintain a comprehensive, up to date data on the demographics and living conditions of refugees and migrants**, to monitor and adopt measures to improve their situation and access to different social systems.
- **Create, improve and communicate the availability of legal aid to refugees and migrants.** States should ensure this information, preferably in their local language, is communicated in a manner which is accessible to refugees and migrants as soon as possible after they have arrived.
- Make a commitment to **provide the necessary funds for refugee and migrant issues** and create a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure that the funds are properly distributed and utilized.
- **Ensure visa procedures are effective, less bureaucratic and free of cost.**

Living conditions

Precarious living conditions hinder access and inclusion of refugees and migrants in the education system. For example, not having safe and secure housing can lead to a decline of mental health and academic performance which can be exacerbated by the fact that some migrants are denied the right to work. Therefore, it is crucial that stakeholders take concrete steps to provide affordable, safe and secure housing, thus ensuring access to quality education for all refugees and migrants.

Therefore, we demand:

- **Governments at all levels, educational institutions and the private sector (where relevant) must collaborate to ensure that migrants have access to affordable, safe and secure housing.** Support mechanisms for students to access housing during the length of their studies should be present, including clear information provision and legal support. In order to achieve so, inclusive social housing strategies and legislation must be implemented.
- **Public transparency must be ensured in social housing strategies** and in negotiation with the private sector as it fundamental to guarantee fairness and prevention of corruption and exploitation.
- Refugee and migrant students must have **access to affordable and progressively free mental health support, and sexual reproductive healthcare.**

- **All refugees and migrants, including asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, must have the same rights and the same labour guarantees as local citizens to work.**
- Refugees and migrants students must have **equal rights to access student support mechanisms offered to local students.** Furthermore, scholarships and grants offered to migrant and refugees students must be made appropriately tailored to sustain the costs of living.

Role of students unions and relevant advocacy organizations

To address the educational crisis it is extremely relevant to recognise the role of refugee and migrant students, and students in general as key stakeholders in students' unions and advocacy organizations' structures.

It is important to have student representation that is more diverse, inclusive and open to the demands of marginalised students. This incorporates building solidarity through a structured cooperation with already existing associations of young refugees and migrants, and the concrete inclusion of refugees and migrants in the student unions from grassroot to the highest levels of representation and leadership.

By building solidarity across students unions and advocacy organizations that centres the voices of refugees and migrant students we can inspire a common agenda that strengthens the fight for student and human rights as a whole.

Therefore, we believe that:

- **Student unions, movements and organisations must mobilise by creating the space for discussion and taking concrete actions that focus on refugee and migrant conditions,** even when the institutions are inactive on the topic or when decisions are made from the top without including refugees, migrants and students.
- **Solidarity among students from different backgrounds** must be fostered to make the consciousness of the points in common stronger than the fear of difference.

- It is necessary to **agree on a common agenda that puts together and represents the claims of refugee and migrant students** with a strategy to reach cohesion and focus the action of different allied stakeholders.
- Student unions and organisations must follow an **intersectional approach and give refugee and migrant students the floor to represent themselves inside the existing structures** whilst considering new organisational models that can support more effectively their political self determination.

This recommendation have been drafted based on policy and practice by the following individuals and organisations: Bismark Amefianu Kudoafor (All-Africa Students Union), Novel Folabit Lena (All-Africa Students Union), Angel Warira Mbutia (All-Africa Students Union), James Kodjie (All-Africa Students Union), Rudi Osman (Union des Etudiants Exilés - France), Abdulkhabeer Safi (Union des Etudiants Exilés - France), Fares Jamal Eddin (Internation Students' Organisation - Romania), Maryam Taher (Student Action for Refugees - UK), Christopher Smart (Student Action for Refugees - UK), Sofia Descalzi Davalos (Canadian Federation of Students), Rosalia Concepcion Bohorquez Palacios (Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes), Beatriz Araújo Lopes Durval (Organización Continental Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes), Marcelo Correa (Fundación RED - Chile), Kalis Vaecece Biaukula (Femlink Pacific - Fiji), Minnlee Tagwirei (Zimbabwe National Student Union), Winnie Nyandiga (Commonwealth Student Association), Giuseppe Lipari (Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions), Hung Ly, Natalia Sierra, Martina Darmanin (European Students Union), Alexandra Seybal (Aktion Kritischer Scüler_innen - Austria), Fabian Camenisch (Union der Schülerorganisationen - Switzerland and Liechtenstein). A special thanks for the facilitation of the process is extended to Amal Hamich (No Hate Speech Movement), Fanchon Lefèvre, Mariam Barhandi and Giuseppina Tucci.