
Recommendation on poverty and precarity amongst students in Europe

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Context:

Although poverty and precarity are increasingly prevalent among students in numerous European countries, this issue does not seem to be receiving the attention of national governments. And yet a lack of commitment to improving the situation of students, and to providing them with access to quality education in dignified conditions, runs counter to the ambitions we expect of European society.

Considering that Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the United Nations (December 1966) recognises *'the right of everyone to education' and that 'education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms'*;

Recalling that in September 2015 the 193 Member States of the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda, which includes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the three principal aims of which are to fight against inequalities, exclusion and injustices, to tackle climate change, and to end extreme poverty;

Believing that access to a quality education is a universal right, reaffirmed by the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations in its Sustainable Development Goal 4, which states that *'quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development. (...) This goal (...) also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education'*;

Recalling that outcome target 4.3 aims to *'[b]y 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university'*;

Considering that outcome target 4.4 aims *'[b]y 2030, [to] substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship'*;

Given that outcome target 4.5 aims *'[b]y 2030, [to] eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations'*;

Recalling that the European Social Charter (Revised in 1996) states that *'[e]veryone has the right to appropriate facilities for vocational guidance with a view to helping him choose an occupation suited to his personal aptitude and interests' and that '[e]veryone has the right to appropriate facilities for vocational training'*. Furthermore, the European Social Charter sets

out rights, such as the right to vocational guidance, the right to vocational training and the right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance for everyone living in the territory of Council of Europe Member States;

Affirming that social vulnerability refers to an individual's, organisation's or society's material or psychological fragility, and that this fragility can result in social exclusion;

Considering that tackling poverty amongst young people, particularly students, should be our foremost priority in terms of providing optimal guidance to future generations;

Believing that European college and university students will experience environmental precarity in the future if more significant, concrete actions are not taken to tackle climate change effectively, and that students have the right to protest against older generations' disregard of their duty to leave future generations with the resources to live decently;

Recalling that necessary and urgent solutions to eradicate the poverty and precarity of students can only be found by involving, at every level of activity and decision-making, the whole of civil society, all INGOs and all stakeholders;

Emphasising the urgent need to better protect all students, be they European or non-European, against the risks of poverty and precarity;

The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe:

- 1. Requests that** Member States devise national strategies aiming to reduce poverty and ensure equality of opportunity for all, in particular for destitute populations such as socially precarious students. To this end, political leaders must take urgent measures to address the basic needs of the poorest students, namely transport, housing and food. The INGOs also call on Member States to provide all students with access to financial aid for healthcare and other life expenses, as well as to schemes to reduce the insecurity of students' jobs and internships;
- 2. Invites** Member States to introduce measures to broaden and simplify access to scholarships and to ensure that students and teachers always have access to clear and up-to-date information on funding available to finance their studies. To ensure students' access to affordable transport, culture and sports facilities, Member States should also systematically offer subsidised and 'scholarship' prices for students. Existing scholarship systems are not sufficiently effective and should be less contingent on the income of students' families, since over two-thirds of students do not receive any funding to finance their studies and living costs and must instead rely exclusively on the help of family members or on paid work. Additionally, the less advantageous learning conditions of students who work to fund their studies should be better taken into account in order to ensure a level playing field and to prevent, where possible, students' dropping out of university or becoming financially insolvent;
- 3. Encourages** all organisations to offer professional assignments to educational institutions in order to familiarise students with employment law and to ease their transition from education to the labour market;
- 4. Invites** Member States to increase apprenticeship training and to give greater recognition to vocational education, which is often a means for poorer students to access higher education; this can be achieved, in particular, by increasing bridges between technical (non-university-level) studies and higher education, and by greater and non-discriminatory harmonisation of European higher and vocational education, both public and private;

5. **Requests** that Member States take measures to understand student prostitution so as to identify the most vulnerable and to help those liable to turn to prostitution in the context of today's digital environment;
6. **Calls on** Member States to take adequate measures to enable foreign students, refugees and migrants to study in dignified conditions and to benefit from the same treatment and tuition fees as national students;
7. **Invites** civil society and INGOs to support and promote innovative initiatives in order to offer support to students and to raise public awareness of their vulnerability;
8. **Encourages** all directorates of the Council of Europe, particularly the European Committee of Social Rights, the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice and the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg, to address the poverty and precarity of students;
9. **Recommends** that Member States and regional institutions introduce fair and appropriate regulatory measures and financial initiatives to reduce the poverty and precarity of students. Indeed, a key aim is to provide access to education and dignified living for all, without the need for students to reimburse the funding they receive, and this by continuing to offer, or by introducing, reduced enrolment fees for public higher and vocational educational institutions and by significantly increasing year-round financial aid for students. Moreover, all students should have easier access to micro-loans; this can be achieved by, in particular, offering zero-interest loans and public insurance;
10. **Encourages** Member States to support socially-engaged organisms and agents and to promote global networking between social actors and NGOs providing real and material assistance to students, thereby strengthening Europe's network of social actors;
11. **Calls on** Member States to develop effective national strategies to improve psychological support for students and better address their mental health needs by offering one-off consultations with mental health professionals, supportive psychotherapy, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and a personalised social support service (contact people, short-term help, advice/referrals and assistance);
12. **Invites** the European Union to facilitate access to the Erasmus programme for students in Europe who are subject to poverty and precarity.