

**SOLIDAR Contribution to Consultation
Green Paper “Migration and Mobility:
Challenges and Opportunities for EU Education Systems”
COM (2008)423 final of 3 July 2008**

The SOLIDAR contribution builds on a position defining education as a fundamental human right which has the potential to empower people to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Ensuring equal opportunities to access formal and informal education for all members of society is therefore crucial.

As there is a close correlation between poverty, social exclusion and low levels of education, secondary and tertiary education, training and life-long learning are important tools in the fight to alleviate poverty and discriminations, and to build democracy and social cohesion, particularly in the developing world.

The SOLIDAR contribution to the consultation on the Green Paper “Migration and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities for EU Education Systems” is structured along selected questions suggested under paragraph 43 (p. 14), as listed below in bold italics (1.-4.).

1. What are the important policy challenges related to the provision of good education to children from a migrant background?

- a) Increased migration from third countries and intra-EU mobility flows present challenges for both migrants and their school-aged children as well as for education policies and systems.
 - Many of the migrant children face one or multiple **educational disadvantages**:
 - The fact that children of migrant background are less likely to attend **pre-school education** schemes or institutions of the social welfare sector with similar purpose, e.g. kindergarten, often as a result of insufficient information, or cultural and linguistic problems of understanding between immigrant parents and pre-school staff, constitutes a concrete challenge, as these children lack equal early start opportunities.
 - **In the education system**, in particular at secondary level, migrant children not infrequently **are facing segregation** within schools. This can be based on ability grouping/tracking, with disproportionately high shares of migrant pupils “ending up” in lower-ability streams. This can also take the form that children with a specific ethnic background or nationality are over-represented in special school types (in some countries in special schools for pupils with lower educational attainment or for pupils with disabilities). Such forms of segregation contribute to an on average lower school performance than measured for their host peers.

- SOLIDAR calls upon governments and public authorities **to allow every child access to the education system**. In some Member States children, as a rule of ethnic minorities, are denied access to education due to the fact that they are undocumented or to an unclear residence status, a situation in breach of their right to education.
- SOLIDAR calls for **better linking debates and policies on education and training to the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion** and in this context to give special attention to migrant children
 - **Schools can and should play a crucial role in building inclusive and cohesive societies**, by providing both high quality education for all pupils and the appropriate framework conditions for equitable learning outcomes.
 - Education disadvantages are very likely to have a repercussion on social inclusion and social cohesion in the mid- and long-term run, as the social divide due to a high level of early school drop out or a considerable number of pupils with leaving certificate – more likely not to have access to vocational training and not to find stable employment to make a living – may deepen over time
 - SOLIDAR demands an explicit recognition of the **fundamental right of access to education on the basis of equal rights and equal opportunities**.
- SOLIDAR refers to findings of the PISA study, showing how **different school systems can lower or amplify/fail to effectively reduce already existing disadvantages in terms of segregation of migrant children**. Whereas the gap between “privileged” and disadvantaged groups has widened in some countries with regard to educational attainment at the end of primary and/or secondary school, others countries could well advance in closing this gap.
 - SOLIDAR calls upon Member States to reduce or reconsider **institutional barriers** that can have a negative impact on access or educational attainment of migrant children, such as e.g. the need to take a decision on type of secondary education, at a rather early age. This implies a process of “regrouping” of pupils in schools and between school types of secondary education in more homogeneous groups according to past and expected performance and other criteria that not infrequently operates according to the existing social stratification and on assumed resources and expectations of parents, as evidence from Germany shows. These processes inside the school system also have repercussions on peer relations during leisure time.
- b) SOLIDAR highlights the consequences of the **financial crisis and evolving recession in the “real economy”** that is likely to put additional financial strain on education systems, too.

- In many Member States public funding of education is expected to go through severe budget constraints. Budget cuts might in particular endanger programmes dedicated to migrants and their specific needs
 - Civil society organisations can play – and already in many countries do play – an important role when it comes to **measures closely linked to and accompanying school-based activities** (e.g. homework support; language courses or training; organised leisure time activities ranging from sports to culture) and in the field of informal learning. In both cases migrant children are one important target group. Given their strong financial dependency on public money, economic recession is likely to have repercussions on their ability, too, to run or even start new activities of the kind sketched out above.
 - SOLIDAR therefore calls on Member States to take into account these **complementary activities of civil society organisations, often also involving an element of active citizenship** as part of the tasks are done by volunteers, and their beneficial effects in view of a more effective realisation of social inclusion and social cohesion objectives when deciding about shifting or cutting public support.
- c) SOLIDAR would like to highlight the impact that immigration control policies, such as stipulations of the **Return Directive**, have on the **rights of undocumented children**.
- SOLIDAR denounces how an immigration control approach has been switching policy-makers attention from the **need to protect young immigrants as children or adolescents**, towards control and repression of their irregular situation. Children should not be used as “tools” to arrive at objectives of immigration and asylum policies.
 - With some thousand minors still detained every year in Europe because of their irregular residence status, SOLIDAR would like to recall again the **triple vulnerability** of undocumented children, first as children, second as migrants and third as undocumented persons.
 - SOLIDAR calls on the competent public authorities in the Member States to ensure that **instruments protecting separated children and youth** are fully implemented in accordance with stipulations of the UN Convention of the Right of the Child, e.g. concerning access to basic services.

2. What are the appropriate policy responses to these challenges?

- a) Within the (primary and secondary) education systems
 - Tackle **special needs** of children with migrant background

- When evaluating the effectiveness of school system or when designing school system reforms, **equity in education** as the best means of responding to migrant pupils' needs should be prioritised
- SOLIDAR calls for capitalising on migrant children's general motivation and enthusiasm towards education, by focusing the educational institutions efforts' on overcoming the linguistic and cultural barriers of immigrant pupils
- Migrant children should have the possibility to learn their heritage language and culture, but without undermining the attainment of the current curriculum (e.g. offering extra curricular activities or language courses as an option)
- Strengthening and supporting the role of parents to address misunderstandings or prejudices towards educational systems and to increase the appreciation of the importance of encouraging their children to complete their education
- **Foster access of migrant children to early and pre-school education**, by reaching their parents to inform about the importance of early education through:
 - Parents' organisations and community-based institutions
 - Training nursery and pre-school staff on intercultural skills
- SOLIDAR calls upon Member States to **set up or enforce regulations preventing from or fighting against school segregation** more forcefully
 - **Public funding** to schools should be made **conditional to applying rules of non-discriminatory access** (e.g. there is evidence that some "*colegios concertados*" in Spain, "state-subsidised" private schools, do not accept or indirectly hinder the access of migrant children)
 - Political decisions are necessary to prevent from, stop or reverse segregation with regard to schooling (i.e. need to fight so-called "white flight"). **De-segregation can also be fostered via housing and urban regeneration policies** aiming at upholding or developing **socially mixed neighbourhoods**
- SOLIDAR calls for **promoting the role of intercultural education and dialogue**
 - **Develop inter-cultural skills** amongst teachers and students across all levels of the formal education system, in order constructively build on the diversity brought by children with different backgrounds
 - Develop awareness raising programmes to fight one source of social conflict, the general assumption that migrant children risk attaining lower educational levels

- b) Outside the (primary and secondary) education systems
- SOLIDAR strongly calls for a **recognition and promotion of the crucial role played by civil society organisations in providing services for vulnerable persons and groups**, also supporting a smooth functioning of education systems in view of attaining general interest objectives
 - SOLIDAR advocates for a **differentiation** of personal social services according to different needs within the migrant population. SOLIDAR can refer to **models of “interculturally sensitive services”** successfully implemented e.g. by German SOLIDAR member AWO.
 - Promote effective **partnership and cooperation** between institutions of the education system and education professionals on the one hand and civil society organisations working on the field of education (comprising representatives of migrants) on the other hand, **based on an approach of complementarity of actions**
 - NGOs can provide support to formal educational systems in the acquisition of important aspects of the current curriculum, such as **education on values, anti-discrimination or inter-cultural education** (as done e.g. in Spain). Good practices in the area of informal education can feed into the formal education systems.
 - Civil society organisations are crucial providing supplementary education and accompanying services, and at involving ethnic minority parents in their children’s schooling
 - E.g. project “*De aquí y de allá*” (from here and from there), run by SOLIDAR member MPDL, aiming at reaffirming community and personal identity of children and adolescents with a Moroccan background in a Madrid neighbourhood, and fostering feeling of belonging and interculturality with and within the host inhabitants of the same neighbourhood.
 - Similar projects are e.g. run in France by SOLIDAR member La Ligue de l’Enseignement and a migrants’ organisation with Maghreb background.
 - SOLIDAR calls for a **structured (civil) dialogue allowing for exchange between policy makers and civil society organisations including migrants’ organisations** around a broad range of issues concerning formal and non-formal education
 - There is a **need to closely involve parents associations, migrants’ organisations and other local neighbourhood- and community-based groups**. This request corresponds to one key finding of a project jointly developed and implemented within the SOLIDAR network (Take Part!).

3. What actions could be undertaken via European Programmes to impact positively on the education of children from a migrant background?

Acknowledging that competencies for the organisation of education systems rest with Member States', the EU still has room for manoeuvre to coordinate policies and ensure that diverse education systems benefit from mutual learning and exchanges of best practices.

In this vein, SOLIDAR calls for an explicit recognition of Europe's responsibility in building inclusive societies, free of racism and xenophobia, and asks for a reference to the Union's competencies in the field of non discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin relevant to the field of education on the basis of the Race Equality Directive 2000/43 in documents presented in the context of further steps in a policy process following this Green Paper.

4. How should these issues be addressed within the Open Method of Coordination for Education and Training? Do you feel that there should be an exploration of possible indicators and/or benchmarks as a means to focus policy effort more strongly on closing the gaps in educational attainment?

- National education systems also have to **set clear targets and outline educational standards** they aim to attain or work towards. Both targets and standards should be set in policies developed to better accommodate specific needs of migrant children.
- SOLIDAR considers that indicators and benchmarking can be a useful tool in order to promote a better understanding of the impact of different policies and practices. In the field of education, too, they can provide for one point of reference facilitating evidence-based exchange of good practice and trans-national mutual learning.
 - SOLIDAR support **the inclusion of indicators to measure the attainment levels and experiences of students from disadvantaged groups** amongst the indicators reporting on the implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" integrated action. Similarly, the Lisbon Agenda benchmarking indicators for education and training should be enriched by disaggregated data taking due account of ethnicity or migrant status.
 - **Social impact assessment** could be promoted in order to address the questions of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups in the education system.
- SOLIDAR recalls the need to **guarantee, during all steps of the process, the involvement of civil society organisations when making use of an Open Method of Coordination (OMC)**, both in the OMC on education and training and in the OMC on social protection and social inclusion, both at European and national level.

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SOLIDAR is a European network of 47 NGOs and labour movement organisations working towards all people living in dignity. Working in alliance with trade unions, SOLIDAR promotes equality, solidarity and social justice in the fields of social affairs, international cooperation and education in Europe and worldwide. For more information visit www.solidar.org