



Resolution 2220 (2018)¹

Integration, empowerment and protection of migrant children through compulsory education

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The right to education and States' duty to provide it are enshrined in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13 of the 1966 United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Article 17.2 of the 1996 European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163).
2. Despite this range of international legal provisions framing European countries' obligation to provide accessible, acceptable and adaptable education to all children, in 2016 only 61% of refugee children had access to primary education, compared with 91% among non-refugees worldwide. An average of 23% of refugee adolescents attended lower secondary school, compared to 84% of non-refugee adolescents; and only 1% of refugees were attending university, compared to 36% of young people worldwide. Out of 6.4 million primary and secondary school-age refugees around the world, an estimated 3.5 million had no school to attend.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly is extremely concerned about Council of Europe member States' failure to assume their obligations with respect to education for migrant and especially refugee children, and stresses the urgent need to remedy the situation by giving priority to providing inclusive and effective educational programmes, as well as the infrastructure and teaching resources to support them. It calls on member States to respect their international commitments, in particular the obligation to provide accessible and free primary and secondary education to all migrant children within their territory, whatever their origins, gender and background. In the light of the obligations under Article 17.2 of the European Social Charter (revised), the Assembly urges Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Poland, San Marino, Spain and the United Kingdom to ratify this instrument.
4. In conflict-affected regions, schools must be recognised as sanctuaries that are not to be used by military or police forces. In countries not directly touched by war or tensions, domestic legislation should prohibit the presence or entry of police or armed forces inside classrooms in any normal circumstances (for purposes of expulsion, for instance). Their presence is a source of trauma not only for the children concerned, but also for children who witness violations of rights, inhuman treatment and intimidation. In this regard, the Assembly calls on those member States which have not yet done so to sign the Safe Schools Declaration adopted at the May 2015 Oslo International Conference on Safe Schools.
5. Most countries provide the same services to migrant children, once integrated into mainstream classes, as to others. The Assembly welcomes this state of affairs and urges States to extend equal treatment to all the different situations in which migrant and refugee children find themselves, from reception to integration and during relocation and resettlement, in order to ensure continuity in education, individual well-being and social stability in the host country, and to favour future integration. Children destined to return to their countries of origin will also suffer from gaps in their education once home.

1. *Assembly debate* on 27 April 2018 (18th Sitting) (see [Doc. 14524](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Petra De Sutter). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 April 2018 (18th Sitting).



6. The problems encountered by migrant and refugee families and unaccompanied children concern above all the precariousness and unpredictability of situations, waiting periods for access to education, language barriers, geographical accessibility, insufficient information and guidance for families, inadequate or inexistent financial assistance for asylum applicants to cover educational expenses, and the treatment and integration of traumatised children. The Assembly therefore calls on member States to:

- 6.1. provide primary and secondary education that is accessible to all migrant children and free of charge;
- 6.2. set national objectives for the school attendance of migrant and refugee children;
- 6.3. integrate education for migrant and refugee children and specialised teacher training into the budget of the ministry of education rather than into that of humanitarian and development assistance;
- 6.4. not differentiate between children according to their asylum status for educational purposes;
- 6.5. encourage all children to attend secondary school until the age of 18, regardless of whether possible school-leaving ages are lower in either the host country or the country of origin;
- 6.6. provide full and comprehensible information to parents about the educational possibilities for their school-age children and their own responsibilities to allow their children to study;
- 6.7. put in place effective firewalls between the information systems of schools and immigration authorities to protect data on the status of migrants in irregular situations, in order to avoid misuse of the data to deny or complicate access to education for migrant children;
- 6.8. inform and give access, encouragement, learning incentives and assistance to unaccompanied minors to attend classes;
- 6.9. give access wherever possible to mainstream education in local classes and provide adequate transport and accompaniment to children living in centres and camps;
- 6.10. make sure, when education in mixed local classes is not possible, that the schooling provided follows recognised methods and curricula which can be used to establish levels of education later;
- 6.11. ensure that psycho-social assistance is provided in order to diagnose and address cases of trauma, as well as specific teacher training to recognise early signs of distress linked to refugee children's experiences;
- 6.12. address the infrastructural challenges in terms of educational facilities, which is one of the main obstacles to attaining high enrolment rates of refugee and migrant children.

7. Migrant and refugee children should be given the opportunity to attend pre-school structures in countries where these exist. Where pre-schools are not free of charge, help should be given to enable these children to attend. The Assembly appreciates the organisation of "welcoming classes" in primary education and international classes in secondary education; these should be provided on regular school premises rather than in dedicated centres and should not be used as a way to segregate migrant children (the length of classes should not, therefore, exceed the point where children are ready to join normal classes).

8. Language learning is an important part of integration and a precondition for the advancement of other learning abilities. Additional language courses should be made available free of charge to children (and parents) where needed. Where possible, access to mother-tongue educational resources should be made available. The Assembly also calls on all Council of Europe member States to encourage, financially and structurally, further and higher education for migrants, making use of tools such as the Council of Europe Language Support Toolkit for Adult Refugees and supporting projects such as the Council of Europe's European Qualifications Passport for Refugees piloted by Greece in 2017.

9. Gender-sensitive education should be in place and teachers trained in how to manage culturally sensitive situations linked to gender, to recognise gender-specific issues and to reject and avoid propagating stereotypes. These skills should be taught as a general rule, but the Assembly points out that they are all the more important when the cultures, habits and beliefs of migrants and refugees differ from those of the majority in the host country. Accepting difference and inciting curiosity about other cultures and indeed one's own culture and history begins in the classroom.

10. The Assembly therefore strongly urges member States to work actively towards fulfilment of the objectives set out above. Non-respect of the legal obligations involved in the implementation of these concrete measures constitutes a flagrant violation of children's rights. Education is a powerful tool for the integration of migrants and refugees and for the empowerment of young people who have been destabilised by situations for which they are not responsible.