



Education cannot wait!

// GEW recommendations to ensure access to education and participation for refugees and asylum seekers //

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The GEW is committed to welcome and support people seeking refuge in Germany so that they can live in dignity and equality. The GEW refers to the constitutional and international legal obligations laid down in the Constitution and e.g. the UN Refugees Convention and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as international professional ethics for educators calling on employees in education to combat all forms of racism, prejudices and discrimination in education. An education conscious of gender and diversity issues and sensitive to discrimination must be the guiding principle of their educational work.

Education is a key requirement for imparting basic skills for social participation and a self-determined life in economical independence. Education is a human right: for refugees and asylum seekers as well as every other person. Many of the people coming to Germany now will find a permanent home here. It would be intolerable and irresponsible to attach their access to education to their status or to wait until they receive the permanent right to remain, because: Education cannot wait!

The fundamental right to education and the fundamental right to asylum are not negotiable and like the standards of inclusion they may not be modified for financial reasons.

I. Principles for the access to education for refugees and asylum seekers and the support of educational institutions and employees

Refugees coming to Germany have different educational biographies and professional experience and frequently suffer from traumatization. In day care centres, schools, vocational schools, further education institutions and universities they encounter highly motivated employees who are prepared to commit themselves beyond the call of duty, yet they need additional support and qualifications. Legal obstacles, changes of residence and the lack of experts on migration issues impede a continuous, structured teamwork with refugees. This is why the following must apply:

- All people migrating to Germany must have access to education according to their level of learning and education and other preconditions, regardless of their residence status.
- Changes of residence and educational institutions interfere with the necessary continuity of education and the social exchange in a familiar environment. This is why young people seeking refuge with their families or unaccompanied minors and youths must have safe residence perspectives as soon as possible as well as access to regular public education. Waiting periods, for instance during asylum procedures, are not only incriminating but may result in further traumatization and illegal residence and are a waste of important time for education. Educational institutions must be informed about residence changes.
- It is crucial to learn the German language. Day care centres, schools, vocational schools, further education institutions and universities need sufficient staff and financial means in order to increase their capacities for individual and appropriate language training and to keep up their regular programmes.
- Native language lessons and multi-lingual education programmes support language learning and the development of identity and learning processes.
- In case there is not enough sufficiently qualified personnel, short-term ad hoc measures must be taken and, if necessary, lateral entries, medium-term vocational education and training and - parallel - the corresponding development and reorganisation of teacher training must be facilitated.
- Education in a migration society is the core task of well-trained teachers in different professions in public educational institutions.
- The skills of educators and teachers among the refugees should be recognized and they should be included in mentoring and teaching children and youths in preliminary reception centres.
- The specific needs and problems of refugee women and children must be considered and especially designed measures and consulting offers must be provided for them.
- Volunteers also need professional support in situations which are new and stressful to them.

The GEW asks for the establishment of a high ranking working group of representatives of the Federal, state [Länder] and local level of unions, migrants' organisations, educational institutions, employment agencies and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. This group should develop a coordinated masterplan comprising short-term measures and reliable medium-term structures of education to meet the demands permanently.

II. Recommendations on the access to education available for refugees and the support of educational institutions and their employees

The GEW recommends the following short-term measures to ensure unrestricted access to education for refugees and asylum seekers, to support the work of educational institutions and their employees and thus lay the foundations for successful education.

The Federal Government bears the major part of the responsibility for the provision of financing. Therefore, the financial means must be specified in the Federal budget 2016:

1. Necessary adjustments of the prevailing legal situation and administrative practices

- Security of residence throughout the training or educational programme;
- The right to mobility resp. free movement and no residential obligation during the periods of education and training;
- Information about the rights covered by SGB VIII [= Social Insurance Code] (especially the right to day-care for children) and the removal of administrative obstacles which impede their implementation;
- Removal of administrative obstacles impeding the prompt implementation of compulsory schooling (from the very first day, three months after arrival, at the latest) resp. the right to an education free from discrimination;
- The right to attend a vocational school until the age of 25;
- Waiving educational and study limitations by immigration authorities;
- Reducing the minimum length of stay for the entitlement to BAFÖG [Federal education assistance] and BAB [Federal education benefits] to three months;
- Widening the KMK [the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany] rules of lateral entry for language teachers (German as a second language, native languages);
- Removal of administrative obstacles in the process of recognizing vocational qualifications and competences acquired abroad.

2. Programmes and Activities

Early Childhood Education

- Broadening the Federal programme of "Sprach-Kitas" (language learning in day-care centres);
- Assigning qualified early childhood educators in preliminary reception centres;
- Employment of personnel for newly arriving children according to the proper educator/children ratio;
- Immediate in-service and further training as well as additional qualified personnel for traumatised children and the provision of interpreters for the work with parents.

Schools and Vocational Schools

- Emergency programme for the support of basic and advanced training for educators capable of teaching “German as a foreign or second language”/the provision of compact courses prior to the implementation of measures;
- Employment of additional teachers for refugee children;
- Setting up “Welcome classes”/learning groups for refugee children resp. youths with maximum 12 pupils. Moreover, supplementary language training in regular classes right from the beginning;
- More school social work: at least two experts in every school concerned;
- Upgrade German as a second/foreign language to a proper teaching credential and a fully-fledged subject of teacher training;
- Continuous language training to be an obligatory component in all subjects;
- More assisted training and accompanying support in vocational education.

Higher Education

- More study places and further extension of the “Higher Education Pact” to meet the demands, facilitated access for guest auditors;
- Comprehensive provision of free German language courses;
- Special contact persons in every higher education institution as well as teaching and consulting services for refugees;
- Comprehensive training offers to prepare teachers for the professional interaction in heterogeneous and intercultural groups.

Adult Education

- More integration and language courses by ESF/BAMF (European Social Fund/Federal Agency of Migration and Refugees);
- Increasing the attractiveness of integration courses by reducing low pay, precarious employment;
- Special courses for women.

3. Offers for Counselling, Care and Support

- Further expansion of youth migration services and comprehensive access for refugees;
- Development of psychological support services in schools and psychosocial counselling centres/offices;
- Contact points for family counselling and therapeutic offers;
- Hotline for educators and higher education teachers looking for advice;
- Nationwide web-based platform to facilitate the exchange of advice, ideas and information and regional networking;
- Provision of multilingual teaching and learning material as open educational resources;
- Federal programme for artists, musicians and theatre in education teachers to support trauma counselling;

- Additional offers in the fields of music therapy, ergo therapy, dance therapy, therapeutic exercise and sports therapy, native mediators and “education guides” in day-care centres, schools, regional training centres and youth welfare offices;
- Multilingual information campaign about education offers and access opportunities;
- Expansion of counselling offers concerning the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad; covering the costs for acknowledgement procedures and adjustment resp. further qualifications;
- Establishment of community integration centres;
- Separate housing space for women, men and families;
- Implementation of district conferences according to SGB VIII (Social Security Code) to support and coordinate measures;
- Coordination and counselling for volunteers.

The GEW points out that a qualitative development of all-day schooling for all students, regardless of their background, would provide comprehensive education, care and support services offering the structural conditions for learning in heterogeneous groups. This applies in particular to the employment of multi-professional teams consisting, a.o., of teachers, educators with knowledge of the native languages, social workers, psychologists and other experts.

The GEW calls on the Federal and state governments to swiftly agree on and implement such a Federal programme.

The GEW notes, furthermore, that the whole education system has been under-financed and in need of qualitative and quantitative development for a long time. We prompt the Federal and state governments to provide and ensure sustained educational funding on all state levels. The state budgets for education must be permanently raised in order to meet the challenges of education in a migration society and the development of an inclusive education system.

III. Education in a migration society, cross-sectional and permanent task of the entire educational sector

Our society is characterized by diversity; diversity due to migration is part of our daily reality. Resulting questions must be systematically dealt with by all parties involved and together with political representatives, social partners and other members of civil society sustainable solutions with a structural effect on the education system must be found. Therefore, the GEW calls for a comprehensive dialogue about the future of education in a migration society and will make concrete suggestions to this end.

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