Student Working Group 2020 Statement

For the students, COVID-19 means difficulties in the learning process, with possible repercussions for their studies and careers in the years to come. Almost 1.2 billion students and youth around the world are affected by the closure of schools and universities. (UNESCO)

This pandemic not only had negative effects on education, but also on people’s life, health and economy. In addition to the closure of educational institutions, jobs were closed and many families have suffered loss of income, further exacerbating inequalities in the population.

The link between education and health today more than ever, demonstrates the importance of intersectionality and indicates that civil society, private sector together with governments have an important role to play to provide learning opportunities for children and youth.

The IUSY’s Student Working Group held a meeting with students and leaders of member organisations to discuss the problems that we face in our regions and join forces to guarantee student rights.

It is essential that we take this pandemic as an opportunity to reduce the existing inequalities, aggravated in this period, and generate spaces and public policies that guarantee inclusive education.
COMMON PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS AROUND THE WORLD

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND VIRTUAL PLATFORMS

After the prohibition of face-to-face classes, virtual platforms seem to be the most viable solution to guarantee the educational process. Unfortunately, this only revealed the enormous technological gap and Internet access that is fundamental, although not exclusively, in developing countries.

In addition, this new situation poses challenges such as not overloading the different actors and trying to establish and maintain a pedagogical link remotely. Despite the enormous efforts of students, teachers and institutions, we analyze in general there have been no successful results in relation to this. Consequently, we see many students affected in their mental health due to uncertainties and overloads on our education aggravated by confinement and by not having adequate support.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

With enormous concern, we see how the closure of institutions affects students’ access to fundamental rights such as food and health. Although solutions have been developed in the countries with more inequalities, it has not been possible to reach completely all the students and families that are in need.

Another issue that affects the economy of the students is the tuition fees. We are in a state of alert because students are facing difficulties to continue their studies for multiple reasons of an educational but also economic nature. The families and students have suffered losses of income due to the pandemic is why it is increasingly difficult to keep paying tuition fees and guarantee the right to education.
STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING
It is a time when university authorities and governments are making many decisions about our education. Unfortunately, the level of participation given to students to make these decisions is low around the world. In many cases, consultative processes were opened but still we have not been part of the planning of solutions that affect the entire educational community.

STUDENTS IN UNRECOGNISED STATES
Due to not (fully) being recognised as states, students from Palestine, Artsakh, Western Sahara etc. have limited resources to provide a safety net for its students. This safety net has endured further deterioration from the world wide crisis on top of the precarious situation they find themselves in every day. With furthering problems from border blockades, living in refugee camps, travel restrictions, limited access to ICT equipment, limited access to electricity, limited access to internet services etc.

The political situation in these regions heavily affects education. It complicates the transition to online education, thus having to resort to traditional methods of sitting in class together. This troubling reality cannot be the reason that students can’t access proper education. A better world and an educated global population are inseparable.

EDUCATION IN REFUGEE CAMPS
The pandemic affected the education in refugee camps enormously. Educational programmes in the refugee camps are in jeopardy because its continuity is not guaranteed. Online programmes and courses are effective,
but in many cases, it is either very difficult or impossible to organize them for several reasons. For example, cut of electricity, limited access to the internet, delay or lack of financial support in organising educational programmes on TV.

The current crisis calls into question the possibility of receiving scholarships for study programmes abroad. It also intensified the lack of possibilities for advocating for students’ rights in the refugee camps.

**STUDENT WORKING GROUP JOINS FORCES TO GUARANTEE STUDENT RIGHTS**

As students, we are available to work on local solutions that eliminate inequalities in terms of access to technology and the internet and above all, to work with the authorities of the universities to find the best joint solution. We understand that it is our responsibility to contribute to this process and help find solutions to guarantee the right to education even more in times of crisis. Educational institutions are slowly opening up and it is at this time that we must strengthen cooperation ties between teachers, youth workers, students and authorities. We consider that special attention should be given to students in these moments of transition, to those who are most at risk of dropping out, since, without this attention, it is not only the learning gap between students that will increase, but also inequalities within the system.