

CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND MIGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: *Respect for equal opportunities and control of migration are the basis for the development of any democratic society, the magnitude of these phenomena and their importance on the state balance determining an analysis consistent with the very identity of states and the European Union as a whole, especially as they can influence the values and cohesion of a state. The objective of the research is to present the challenges and vulnerabilities identified in relation to equal opportunities and migration from the perspective of education, their impact on the environment, but also the challenges that may arise in the current global context, caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The article starts from the exposition of the importance of equal opportunities and migration in a complex security environment with rapid evolutions and significant implications on multiple levels of social, economic, political and security life, and the main conclusion is that at EU level joint efforts must be made to adopt and respect unitary measures to ensure respect for human rights, in order to ensure security.*

Keywords: *migration; equal opportunities; security; challenges; vulnerabilities; education.*

Introduction

In a complex, constantly evolving security environment, which aims at ensuring global stability and create effective structures in key areas of citizens' lives, strengthening resilience in education is one of the priorities of European policy indispensable for reducing vulnerabilities in the field, but also for the efficient management of current challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring the security of citizens at EU level (Commission Communication 2020 Strategy) and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms can only be analyzed in close connection with a high-performing education system, based on respect for equal opportunities, but also on guaranteeing an effective access to education for migrants, especially given that migration is a reality of today's globalized world.

In the context of security generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system in the EU has been severely affected, in the sense of fundamentally changing some coordinates of the learning process, which have had an impact globally, not only from the perspective of radically changing the way of delivery, which was for the first time faced with the challenge of running online, but also from a financial and logistical perspective, given the costs and technical resources required.

Therefore, a relevant analysis of respect for equal opportunities and the rights of migrants in education is needed to consider the challenges and vulnerabilities that may arise in this area in relation to the need to respect fundamental rights and freedoms, the values of the European Union, but also to ensure an efficient framework that can guarantee an adaptation of the existing system to the constantly changing practical realities.

1. Equal opportunities in education

As a fundamental right of every human being, education is the basis of a society's progress, guaranteeing respect for a state balance, which has led to increased attention at the European Union level, given the implications not only on the education sector itself, but also on the labor market, but also the vulnerabilities that can appear in the address of security, especially in the situation of the existence of some discriminations that can lead to inequities.

The analysis of vulnerabilities must have in the foreground the study of the quality of the educational act and the importance of investments in human resources in education, through European funding and by allocating sufficient amounts by Member States to train teachers, but also to create a suitable framework to facilitate the learning process for students, including through investments in digitization, which have become indispensable in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact it has had on the educational process.

Respect for equal opportunities in education, which is considered essential in the European Union but also worldwide, derives from its regulation not only at the level of the European Union, but also through international legal acts, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women who rule in art. 10 the need to eliminate gender discrimination in education, the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (International Covenant 1966,5) which guarantees in art. 13 the right of everyone to education, including those belonging to racial, ethnic and religious groups, as a basis for the development of a free society, but also the UNESCO Convention on Action against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO Convention 1960), which requires the adoption of each state of policies capable of ensuring the participation of all children in the educational process, without discrimination and with the recognition of the rights of minorities.

Fundamental value of the European Union, established by art. 2 of the Treaty on European Union, equality finds its applicability in all spheres of social life, constituting the basis for the development of a modern society and imposing on the Member States a positive obligation (Rădulescu 2021, p.3) to ensure an adequate framework for implementing policies.

Equal opportunities in the field of education at European level is regulated specifically by art. 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which guarantees the right of any person to education, but also to access to vocational training, these provisions complementing the principle established by art. 21 of the same normative act that generically prohibits discrimination, for any reason.

In this regard, the Council adopted the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training -ET 2020- which sets as its basic objective the observance of equity and social cohesion in education, so that "all citizens, regardless of personal circumstances, social or economic development, to develop lifelong skills specific to the profession", being applicable to any form of education, including that of adults, the principle being found in the Declaration on the Promotion of Citizenship and the Common Values of Freedom, Tolerance and non-discrimination through education (Promoting citizenship, 2015) that promotes gender equality in education.

It should be clarified that Member States have competence in the field of education, setting guidelines related to national specificities, but the role of the EU, which provides funding and support, cannot be neglected in order to guarantee a framework to ensure investment. efficient in human capital, but also an active involvement in the development of education in areas with difficult economic situation.

The connection between equal opportunities and education must be analyzed both from the perspective of equal access to education for all, without discrimination, and the professionalization of teachers in the spirit of respecting and understanding these concepts in order not to create differences in the educational process chosen in the conditions in which a

low quality of the educational act and the existence of discriminatory elements in the field can constitute vulnerabilities to security.

Thus, the European Union made considerable efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain and strengthen a European area of education (Commission Communication Space 2020) with a focus on both the development of the digital sector and the promotion of an interdisciplinary education policy, including on promoting intercultural education which is indispensable for the progress of states and which cannot be dissociated from respecting diversity and accepting the idea of preserving the values and culture specific to each group and whose non-compliance can be a vulnerability in the context of today's globalized society.

At European Union level, several programs have been adopted to lay the foundations for increased performance in schools in the Member States, with a focus on preventing early school leaving (Eurydice Report 2019, 31) which is a real problem, especially in rural areas, which makes it necessary to implement programs to provide grants for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including both logistical support for the educational process, such as textbooks, supplies, and social scholarships.

In this sense, it is necessary to specify the Erasmus program, which is applicable in all European Union countries and which is important in respecting mobility in the European space, by ensuring the right of everyone to social inclusion, but also to cooperation in education and in vocational training, by promoting a quality education that ensures the premises for the social integration of the beneficiaries and for the economic development of the society.

The education system is based on respect for and promotion of human rights, so equal access to education must be presented in terms of respect for equality, as the basis for effective integration into society and access to employment, which ensures the maintenance of social security, taking into account the fact that the main causes of inequalities in the education system are based on socioeconomic differences, deterioration of living conditions, including differences between educational institutions regarding the quality of education, or concrete learning conditions (Neagu 2009, 76).

Regarding the identification of potential challenges that could arise in respecting equal opportunities in education, it is necessary to mention first of all the need to correlate public education policies and reform policies adopted with the actual needs of the system and with the implementation of measures to ensure a predictability at least in the medium term in order not to generate disturbances in the educational process.

The importance of respecting equal opportunities in education must also be analyzed in relation to information campaigns carried out mainly at the level of teachers, in order to explain the need to apply the principle of equality in education and to be aware that the risks of non-compliance may affect long-term and not only at the level of the education sector, but also affects all spheres of social life, especially since the existence of forms of discrimination is an interference with respect for human rights.

The schooling of a child must be based on creating all the prerequisites for providing opportunities for integration into the labor market, by providing free access to any type of career option, according to skills. Education is the foundation of any citizen's development, it is a real challenge, including emphasis on the fact that education must not be seen only in terms of completing the compulsory stages of schooling, but is an ongoing process, which is indispensable in professional activity.

In discussing the challenges to equal opportunities in the field of education, it is necessary to take into account the factors that lead to inequities, which are so subjective and related to the social environment of the student, the entourage, the cultural-educational level of the family, as environment in which a child grows up and is trained for life (Bădoi, Mateiescu 2016, 26), financial resources as well as objective ones, such as those related to the distance

from the school in the case of children from disadvantaged areas, they must be taken into account in developing the state policy in order to implement the curriculum related to the possibilities of children, but also to ensure sufficient funding and implementation of programming through which objective impediments can be eliminated.

In conclusion, in applying the principle of equal opportunities in education, both vulnerabilities and challenges can be identified, and it is essential to correlate state policy with the concrete and particular situation of each Member State of the European Union, especially given that the educational process occupies a significant part in each person's life and has long-term effects, not only on the information needed for schooling, but also on the implementation of principles of life that are in the spirit of European values and respect for human rights.

Thus, equal opportunities in education are not limited to the analysis of respect for gender equality, non-discrimination in relation to criteria such as ethnicity, religion or nationality, but extends to society as a whole, including the impact on economic fields, socially or politically, the existence of cases of discrimination having effects on maintaining state societal security, so that the emergence of vulnerabilities and challenges in this area is increased.

2. Immigrant education

States facing a significant influx of immigrants must ensure a functional framework for their effective integration into the host society and for ensuring access to an education system that facilitates their access to the labor market, as a key aspect of accelerating the process of integration (Avram 2019,87), which can be a real challenge to security, especially given that education is the main means of adaptation in the new state, which can help establish lasting social relations in the community.

In European countries, it is necessary to organize the education system in order to facilitate the access of all immigrants to education and vocational training and to ensure the provision of the necessary knowledge and the provision of sufficient skills to try to effectively guarantee them equal opportunities in society with those of the citizens of that state and to constitute a real guarantee against discrimination (Rădulescu 2021,143), especially taking into account the fact that students from migrant families face challenges related to the migration process, the socio-economic context and general policy or the way in which students participate in education, which does not always take into account both school and non-school aspects that may affect their education and development (European Commission Integration of Students 2019, 9).

Currently more than 34 million people are born outside the European Union (Communication Commission Action Plan 2020.2) and more than a quarter of them have higher education (Idem Plan 2020) at the time of leaving the country of origin, but are few people manage to capitalize on their previous professional training in finding a job that matches their studies, most of them either working in fields that do not require a higher qualification, or in areas of activity completely different from their training.

Immigrants go through an educational process giving them an extra chance to integrate into the host state, the proportion of effective integration being even higher as access to education takes place at an earlier age for children, which increases hopes for access to higher positions in society for migrants, which was the premise for leaving the country of origin, in search of a higher standard of living and a better life.

The real challenge for children from migrant backgrounds is to have school results similar to those of native children, especially as they start with a deficit caused by a lack of sufficient financial resources to facilitate their access to a successful education system, possible shortcomings in the educational system of the families of origin, but also in the insufficient

resources allocated by society to combat inequalities in the educational process, aspects that diminish as more generations of migrants live in the host country and which can accentuate sentimentally the lack of membership in the host state. Thus, in France, for example, the persistence of the gap between children of the second generation of immigrants and those of the indigenous population contradicts predictions of intergenerational mobility based on educational and social progress in this regard (Meurs, Pailhé, and Simon 2005, 1) which indicates a process of educational discrimination over a long period of time, thus affecting even the descendants of immigrants born and raised in the host country.

These situations make it difficult to integrate into society, especially from the perspective of the deficiencies of deepening the language of the host state, which can be a factor of intimidation for immigrant students, but also a barrier in adapting to the new community, which led to the need to implement policies at European level to focus on the integration of migrants in the host countries, but also on the assessment of the situation, in relation to the skills acquired by them, given that completing an educational cycle in the host state provides the preconditions for obtaining a job obtained through studies, taking into account the aspirations of students, but also the respect for equality in the labor market.

The difficulties of integration into the education system of the destination country and the constant challenges faced by European countries with a large influx of immigrants have generated the need to implement exchanges of good practice aimed at monitoring the school situation of immigrant children, including performance their education in the countries of origin, if the child has previously completed stages of schooling in that country, but also in the integration into the new state, with the analysis of respect for intercultural dialogue, but also for linguistic and cultural diversity (Eurydice Report 2019, 16).

The importance of the educational act, as a vulnerability to security, must also be analyzed in terms of ensuring greater attention in favor of children from migrant families in order to guarantee, on the one hand, the existence of equality in the education process and, on the other, further integration into the labor market, given that the needs of migrant children are higher than those of children of native parents in the host country, taking into account economic and social disparities, which may lead to the need to adapt curricula to their needs.

In this context, an important role can be played by the actions taken by society to advise migrant students, but also to train teachers to facilitate the integration of these children in the community, respecting their own culture and traditional values in the country of origin. The lack of attention to these aspects can lead to dropping out of school and to social exclusion, given the fact that the educational process of migrants is a complex one.

At EU level, challenges in the field of immigrant education can be identified mainly in countries facing significant migratory flows and which are an attraction even for students accessing mobility programs, such as Erasmus, which target higher education people who want to benefit from an exchange of experience with partner universities from other states and to access the educational system of another state, which is culturally and linguistically different, in order to benefit from an international educational experience.

In the same vein, the School Education Gateway portal has been set up, which is subsidized by Erasmus + and which facilitates students from other countries to access information materials and exchange information that will allow them to be more easily included in the host state, with ensuring the cultural diversity and values of each community, but also the eTwinning Platform (eTwinning) which offers teachers the opportunity to present their experiences of interaction with migrant children, in order to facilitate their integration, including in terms of language differences.

In addition, another real challenge facing immigrants in the education system is the language difficulty in the host country. This aspect can be a negative point in the educational

process and can be a determining factor for school dropout, given that the emphasis at the social level is not on the development of intercultural dialogue, as a basis for the integration of migrants in the host state. It is therefore necessary to adopt language training programs prior to integration into the compulsory education system in order to eliminate situations in which immigrants feel harassed by native students, which creates a feeling of discrimination, language differences can be an important factor to generate a state of intimidation and generate a lower sense of belonging to the school.

At the level of EU decision makers and Member State decision-makers, it is necessary to adopt policies for the protection of immigrant children and to guarantee their effective equal access to education, both in relation to other migrants and to the natives of the host state, so that there is no risk that in fact the children of immigrants will not be able to benefit from the same educational conditions, which would generate an inequality of cognitive development.

Thus, since 2016, the European Commission has supported EU Member States in their efforts to integrate migrants into their education and training systems - from pre-school education and care to higher education, the Commission's Action Plan on Integrating Third-Country Nationals (Commission Plan 2016,8-9) developed for this purpose focusing on several priority directions such as the integration of newly arrived migrants in general education structures as soon as possible, the possible prevention of poor school results among migrants, as well as the prevention of exclusion and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

In addition, access to education must be effective at both compulsory and post-compulsory schooling, which can allow the exploitation of the intellectual potential of each student, but also his concrete skills that will allow him to find a job in conditions similar to a native, adapted to professional training and skills, which is a real challenge for the host state to adopt a legislative framework in this regard and to sanction legally or jurisprudential cases of violations of the principle of equality in this area.

Given that education and migration have been among the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, they can continue to pose multiple challenges and vulnerabilities, which can affect security and involve rapid and effective action by state authorities, on the one hand, to guarantee real access to education for all social categories, targeting both natives and immigrants, and, on the other hand, to ensure access to the labor market for effective social integration in the host state.

Conclusions

Education is one of the key areas of state security, which involves the adoption of resilient policies that ensure cooperation between the states of the European Union, given the interdependence in the implementation of coordinated measures to reduce vulnerabilities in the field and deal effectively with challenges, which are more and more numerous, also taking into account the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this context, the identification of vulnerabilities and challenges related to education are the initial prerequisites for guaranteeing equality and for their efficient management, in the sense of adopting legal measures to reduce the risk of affecting the security of states and the EU as a whole, being indispensable a common action of the institutions of the European Union and of the Member States in this respect.

The present paper identifies as main vulnerabilities in the field of education those related to: the low quality of the educational act that can generate discrimination and social inequities with the violation of equal opportunities; undervalued investments in the field of human resources in relation to teacher training and digitization investments strictly necessary during the pandemic COVID-19 and the existence of a deficient and unequal educational process, violating the values and culture of each group of immigrant children with effects negative for

their full integration into European values, which accentuates the feeling of discrimination and belonging to the host state.

The challenges analyzed in the paper are multiple but, mainly, refer to the identification of the best solutions for the correlation of public policies in education and reform policies; ensuring predictable medium-term measures in education; ensuring the institutional and organizational framework for the learning activity to be a continuous process, including in the professional activity in the spirit of European values; Elimination of subjective and objective factors that lead to inequities in education; ensuring a functional framework for the rapid integration of immigrants into host societies and their access to an equal and effective education and training system that provides the knowledge and skills necessary for development within that society; respect for intercultural dialogue and linguistic and cultural diversity; combating school dropout and social exclusion of immigrants as well as providing them with intensive training programs for language learning in the host country.

Respecting equal opportunities and controlling migration through the implementation of measures to ensure that the rights of immigrants in the host state are respected are some of the most difficult aspects to manage in today's globalized society, where it is essential to guarantee diversity in all respects and non-discrimination access to employment, on equal terms for all, including natives.

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