

Panel 3 on the ‘Recognition of skills and qualifications and relevant measures’

Thank you Mr/Ms Chair.

UNICEF would like to align itself with the Position Paper by the Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts, to which we also contributed. For the purpose of today’s panel discussion, we would like to focus on access to schooling for migrant children – for which recognition of skills and qualification is vital.

For UNICEF, a ‘Child is a Child’ – the Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all children, no matter their migration status, the way they migrated, or lack of nationality. And every child has the right to the safety, stability and opportunity that education can provide.

Education is a right and a critical opportunity. For children and adolescents worldwide, it holds the key to a life with less poverty, better health and an increased ability to take the future into their own hands. For nations, it holds the key to prosperity, economic growth, and poverty reduction. School is also often the place where migrant children learn most about the norms and values of their host society – access is vital!

Recognition of skills and qualifications presents an important building block for facilitating the integration of migrant as well as returnee children and adolescents in education systems of host communities. At the same time, they pave the way to initiate start-up enterprises, or find employment after returning to their countries of origin. Certification has psychosocial benefits as it strengthens self-esteem and motivation to persevere in difficult circumstances.

When it comes to children attending primary and secondary school, efforts should be undertaken to provide accredited programmes recognized by both the host country as well as the country of origin. Agreements can be reached by coordinating accreditation standards between Ministries. Where migrant children and youth migrate to regions where education programmes and language of instruction vary drastically from their home background, it is necessary to assess children’s academic competencies and to allow them to join catch-up programmes that certify progress made, and that serve as stepping stone for academic reintegration at a later point in time. Again, there is a need to ensure that Ministries of the country of origin recognize academic achievements of migrant children obtained in host countries.

The International Standard Classification for Education, while not explicitly designed to make equivalencies for education systems in different countries, can be a good start for comparing overall systems. UNICEF has already made available analysis of the Syrian education system and curriculum, which would enable European educators to best adapt and amend existing structures and systems in order to meet Syrian refugee and migrant children’s needs. Similar exercises can be undertaken for the education systems of other countries of origin

It is clear that barriers in accessing education go beyond the recognition and transferability of skills, which is the center of today’s discussion – migrant children, especially those undocumented, face many other barriers to entering public school systems: lack of information, xenophobia and discrimination, fear of deportation, little hope of pursuing higher education, or the need to work for example. Children can also face legal barriers to accessing education – especially those undocumented migrant children to enter the school system is not recognised. Legally anchoring the right to education for all children in a given territory,

as well as creating firewalls between education systems and law enforcement so children, regardless of their legal status, can freely attend school and learn is vital.

In closing, let me say that UNICEF continues to be ready to support Governments to care for children on the move.

Thank you.