



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación

<http://www.ei-ie.org>

ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

President

Christine BLOWER

Vice-Presidents

Odile CORDELIER
Andreas KELLER
Trudy KERPERIEN
Dorte LANGE
Galina MERKULOVA
Branimir STRUKELJ



5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92
Fax +32 2 224 06 94
secretariat@csee-etuce.org
<http://www.csee-etuce.org>

European Director

Susan FLOCKEN

Treasurer

Mike JENNINGS

ETUCE Statement on

the road to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis

Adopted by the ETUCE Committee on 16 June 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is a **health, social, and economic crisis**. Its repercussions will impact the more vulnerable the hardest, and **education is a key sector** to address its negative consequences, and recover. The importance of the education sector for the public good is now, more than ever, evident. Education trade unions across Europe have, since the beginning of the pandemic, mobilised to provide support to education personnel, at all stages of the pandemic, from the transition to distance teaching, to the reopening of schools strategies, and will continue to do so, on the long road to recovery from this crisis. The economic costs of the pandemic will linger even after the imminent threat to public health has passed. As the EU economy is expected to contract by about 7.5% in 2020¹, far deeper than at the time of the economic and financial crisis in 2009, government deficits are expected to surge. Hit by a deep recession, without the necessary fiscal space and an uncertain recovery, governments may be reluctant to commit to boosting lagging investment in education and willing to open the doors to a mix of private and public financing in education and training to allow for rapid injections of investment. This approach will have the potential to create lasting inequalities and injustices for generations to come. In taking stock of lessons learnt from the past, and in keeping with the fact that a big number of countries are gradually relaxing restrictive measures through the elaboration and implementation of exit strategies across Europe,

we call on governments and relevant authorities to:

- Show strong **solidarity and cooperation** between the EU Member States, the EU enlargement countries, neighbouring countries, as well as Central Asian countries through its regional cooperation, to foster transparency, democracy, respect for rule of law and universal rights and freedoms in tackling negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Comply with and fulfil **European and international obligations** and responsibilities with regard to a safeguard and respect for fundamental **trade union rights and freedoms**;
- Respect and promote fundamental **workers' rights and working conditions** in particular their rights to **health and safety at workplace**, labour law and protection against all forms of discrimination;
- Further promote and preserve fundamental principles and values, among other things, of the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the [ILO/UNESCO](#) Recommendation concerning the status of Teachers (1966) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997), the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#);

¹ European Commission, 'European Economic Forecast, Spring 2020', Institutional Paper 125, May 2020

- Commit to **effective social dialogue and collective bargaining** in all matters related to teachers and other education personnel to ensure decent working conditions, including salaries, fair recruitment and employment, adequate workload and working hours, career progression, fair pay and job security in particular among education workers on fixed-term contracts or other casual employment relationships, as well as to guarantee effective elaboration, implementation and monitoring of the COVID-19 exit related measures at all levels of education in a climate of transparency and accountability;
- Respect the right of education social partners to be informed and consulted in all matters relevant to them, in particular on education policies, teachers and other education personnel's issues and investment, to ensure that resources reach the most marginalised, by means of constructive consultations in a timely manner at all levels;
- Commit to **boosting public investment in high quality public education for all**, to address growing inequalities in access and provision of quality education and training, to secure school and other education institutions' infrastructures, and to provide teachers and other education personnel with resources, tools, and professional space to make the profession more rewarding;
- Issue, and commit, in close cooperation with education trade unions and health and safety authorities, to the implementation of the **suitable hygiene concepts and measures in education institutions**, during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, to ensure the protection of teachers and students who belong to risk groups;

Distance education and digitalisation in education

- Recognise the tremendous efforts teachers, trainers, academics and other education personnel have made during the pandemic crisis and in remote teaching settings to uphold quality education throughout the emergency period; the flexibility they have shown to adapt to these extraordinary teaching conditions in order to reply to the students' needs and support them to their best availabilities and responsibility in unprecedented times.
- Respect, in all matters pertaining to the provision of education, and as an overarching principle the **professional autonomy** of teaching personnel, in particular in the transition back to face-to-face classroom settings;
- Acknowledge, in this view, that teachers are irreplaceable, that the **social aspect of education is central to the development of students** and their well-being, and that distance and online education can and should not replace face-to-face education;
- Consider the impact of distance education, and digital teaching practices on education personnels' **workload and working hours**, and in turn, **well-being and health and safety**, and ensure that emergency distance education does not water down pre-existing regulations on working hours;
- Address the pressing issues of education personnel's in-service **digital training**, both initial and continuous, and equally, ensure the necessary public investment for **secure, quality, digital infrastructure** in education institutions;
- Elaborate in consultation with education trade unions comprehensive policies to enable education personnel to play their crucial role in addressing the **digital skills**

gap, and ensure that no student is left behind for not having access to the necessary quality digital material and education;

- Refrain from resorting, with a cost-saving approach, to private ed-tech companies for the provision of digital material in education, in view to preserve the **public education sectors' independence from private interests**;

Inclusion and equality in education during and after the COVID-19 crisis

- Ensure that no **student or teacher is left behind** during and after the time of the COVID-19 crisis because of not having access to appropriate digital and communication devices and tools or because of facing specific individual and/or social barriers; indeed, inequalities in access to quality education due to the socio-economic and geographical background of students must not be further exacerbated and the digital divide needs to be addressed;
- Ensure that measures and policies to prevent the spread of the virus in the return to school-based education and the re-launch of the economy in Europe, take into account **specific needs of vulnerable social groups**, including migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, and others, and provide them with targeted support;
- Guarantee a safe and **supportive physical and social learning and working environment** both during the distance education period and school-based education;
- Ensure **equal access** of all teachers, academics, and other education personnel to **relevant and sustainable professional development and professional support**, especially regarding inclusive education and harnessing distance teaching on tools and methodologies for more inclusive education with a view to mitigate any negative impacts of remote teaching and learning on the education community and relationships to ensure the benefit of quality education for all;
- Ensure that the different needs of men and women are taken into account before any measures to address the pandemic crisis are implemented and the economic impact of these measures do not put **gender equality** in the education sector and in the society as a whole at risk; Prevent the magnifying impact of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on **equality and inclusion** in the education sector and in society as a whole;
- Implement a **holistic perspective** on education that aims to prepare active and responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and preserve principles of democracy, solidarity, equality and non-discrimination even in the crisis situations;

Investment in education

- Safeguard the **public provision and governance** of education systems from the influence and grasp of private sector investment and actors and increase public investment in high quality public education for all at all levels of education as the best way to ensure equal access and provision of quality education and training;
- Strengthen efforts to increase equity and to expand the public revenue base from **fair and progressive tax systems** according to the principles of redistribution to fund public education. This includes ensuring that companies pay their fair share of tax where profits are made by closing tax havens and combating tax fraud,

corporate tax evasion and by enforcing new rules to **reduce fiscal dumping** and financial speculation across Europe and beyond.

- Urgently revise the **Stability and Growth Pact** rules to allow for an EU fiscal framework that *excludes public education, training and research investment from the calculation of the deficit and debts levels*;
- Commit to an **increased EU budget** to respond to the challenges of increasing inequalities in educational access and to back the implementation of the fiscal capacity of the EU.
- Adapt the **EU Multiannual Financial Framework** to raising challenges of increasing inequalities in educational access and opportunities to introduce additional targeted funding for disadvantaged areas in many EU countries, according to the principles of solidarity between countries.

**The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 132 Education Trade Unions and 11 million teachers in 51 countries of Europe. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within ETUC, the European*

Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of education trade unions.