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Education trade unions must be on board in shaping the future EU education strategy

ETUCE reaction on the “Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems”

Adopted by ETUCE Bureau on 30 March, 2020



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On 8 November 2019 the Education Council of the European Union adopted its [Resolution on further developing the European Education Area to support future-oriented education and training systems](#).

The following text is the response of ETUCE, which represents 11 million teachers in Europe, to the Council resolution, based on consultation with its Member Organisations:

1. We remind the Council about the [ETUCE position on Education in the post-2020 EU Strategy](#) which we published in relation to the initiation of the European Education Area. In our position we underlined that **education is a human right and a public good**. This needs to be respected and strengthened by 2030 in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations (UN) and the full implementation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** which foresees to ensure that “*Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market*”. Member States should implement this principle with appropriate legislative measures to ensure and improve quality and equality in national education systems.
We welcome, therefore that the Council resolution puts an emphasis on the implementation of the UN SDG4 and the European Pillar of Social Rights by highlighting that “*The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning should be respected at every stage of life, from early childhood to older age, and at all levels and forms of education and training, in synergy with efforts made in connection with the European Education Area.*”
2. We remind the European Commission that for education and training systems to be of high quality, inclusive, and effective the **support of teachers** is crucial. They need to be highly valued within the society, have decent working conditions, and receive payment equal to other tertiary level qualified professionals in other sectors. This is why we ask the European Commission to involve ETUCE in “*taking further initiatives towards the creation of a genuine European Education Area, aiming to develop further its goals, objectives and scope and to enhance its links to the post-ET2020 strategic framework*”. We believe that within the European Education Area

initiative the **national competence** on education and training needs to be ensured and respected in order to enrich cultural diversity and to improve the **quality and inclusiveness of schools**. We also ask the European Commission to define well the support to teachers within the post-ET2020 strategic framework with the involvement of ETUCE.

3. We take note of the Council's call for coordinated progress on a comprehensive *Digital Education Action Plan for Europe* and on the *Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence*. We acknowledge, in view of the fast evolution of technological progress, and its impact on the labour market and society as a whole, the need for a **meaningful reflection on the potential benefits of the digital era for the education sector**. We believe that these reflections and decisions will durably impact the education sector, for practitioners and students alike. Therefore, we recall our [Position Paper on the EU Digital Education Action Plan 2020](#) which underlined that teachers, other education personnel, and schools must be drivers in this process, and policy makers should engage them meaningfully in view to take into account their expertise and foresight.
4. ETUCE welcomes the focus of the Council resolution on the **promotion of democratic citizenship, common values, sustainable development, and inclusion**. At the same time we remind the Council of education ministers that teachers and school leaders need to be well prepared to work in culturally and socially diverse educational institutions and receive high quality initial and continuous professional development on teaching critical thinking, democratic values and human rights, civic engagement, and responsible and secure use of new technologies.
5. We are concerned that the Council recommends to the European Commission within the resolution to establish a European Education Area alongside with "*develop[ing] new means to train and support competent, motivated and highly qualified teachers, trainers, educators and school leaders, and promote their continuous professional development and high-quality, research-based teacher education*". We call on the European Commission to consult ETUCE on ideas behind these '**new means**' of teacher training as our member organisations experience an increasing tendency of de-regulation on qualification requirements towards new teachers, deterioration and/or lack of improvement of the quality of initial and continuous professional training which should meet the needs of students and teachers, and digitalisation efforts to replace teachers.
6. The resolution mentions that **efficient public investment** in education and training can help Member States in **developing more inclusive, effective and responsive education and training systems**. Nevertheless, it lacks an explanation about what "effectiveness" of the education system means and how the Council plans to measure it. On several occasions, ETUCE has reported on the effects of efficiency-based education reforms decentralising decision making and promoting market-oriented behaviour in the management of education institutions. These changes have come from unilateral decision-making by governments at the expense of social dialogue, respect for the profession, free collective bargaining and education trade union involvement in policy making. Across Europe and globally, there are **increasing pressures on the working conditions, professional autonomy and role of teachers through the deterioration of the working/teaching and learning**

environment, which also endangers the attractiveness and future of the profession and the development of sustainable, and high-quality education. In relation to effectiveness and funding, education trade unions have a role in **monitoring and shaping** the European Semester and the Country Specific Recommendations.

7. ETUCE comments that **tracking vocational and higher education graduates** should be fair and it should not be punitive or cut access for teachers and students to education by linking funding of schools to the employment rates of the graduates trying to prove the “effectiveness” of education.
8. In terms of suggesting to the European Commission to “*enhance investment in those competences that are needed to meet the demands of work and a changing society*”, it should be noted that **the labour market is always changing**. As education is about more than employment and developing the future workforce, the European Education Area should be developed by ensuring that the aim of education is to enrich the life of citizens and not as a tool for the labour market. We suggest that the aim of the European Education Area must be to support Member States in improving life and opportunities for its citizens while contributing to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a European. As we suggested before, under this initiative the European Union could support policies on better connectivity of all schools to promote European identity.
9. We consider that the **social partners in the education sector** are key partners on designing EU-level policy on education. At EU-level, the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education can offer valuable policy guidance to design and to implement the European Education Area in a way that promotes and respects the views of the education personnel and of the education employer organisations, recognised as representatives of the two sides of industry in the education sector under Article 154-155 of the EC Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). At national level, we regret that only a few ministers have consulted with the national education trade unions on this resolution. We regret that the resolution does not mention social partners and social dialogue, especially that the recommendation to the Member States to “*support for improvements towards high-quality, inclusive, lifelong, flexible, gender-responsive and innovation-driven **education and training systems***” lacks mentioning the necessity that these systems should be improved within effective **social dialogue** with the education trade unions. **Democratic governance of education and collaborative leadership** in schools are the fundamental requirements of high quality education systems. This entails the essential involvement of education trade unions in the framework of effective **social dialogue** with education employer organisations, including governments, in designing and implementing (including monitoring and evaluating) necessary educational reforms. In the post-2020 strategy, the assurance of **effective social dialogue with education trade unions** should be a target.
10. We note that the European Commission will take actions for “*building on the ET2020 cooperation toolbox, develop concrete future-oriented and innovative working methods in the field of European cooperation in education and training.*”

We call on the European Commission to involve ETUCE in the consultation on defining new working methods to define and implement the post-2020 priorities. Our experts have been active contributors of the success of the **ET2020 Working Groups** under the open method of cooperation. In this context we call on the European Commission to ensure representation of the education social partners in the future open method of coordination activities, consult the mandates of the future working group with us, and adopt fair working rules to apply equality in all working groups concerning the participation of the social partners and methods of information exchange.

11. Concerning the **European University Initiative**, we note that the ambitions are high but since the project just started, it is impossible to make predictions about its success. Moreover, it is not clear if the future Erasmus+ programme should fund all already existing and future networks. We would like to underline that these networks should be created while ensuring **inclusiveness and diversity** of the networks concerning the involved institutions and concerning the students. It is essential that any such network of universities are inclusive for all universities and students, regardless of the status or socio-economic background. Creating elitist networks or universities works against diversity and inclusiveness. We also would like assurance that the networks will not be used to harmonise education content and introduce/increase tuition fees for students. The offers of these networks should be equally available to all students, higher education teachers and researchers. We ask the European Commission to strictly monitor the inclusivity of these networks.