ETUCE recommendations to address the Long COVID-19 syndrome in the education sector

Adopted by the ETUCE Committee on 7-8 November 2022

The ETUCE study on the impact of the COVID-19 Omicron variant (March 2022) showed that the spread of the Long COVID-19 syndrome is increasingly threatening the health and ability to work of teachers, academics, and other education personnel across Europe, posing new challenges for education trade unions.

According to the clinical case definition by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Post COVID-19/Long COVID-19 condition ‘occurs in individuals with a history of probable or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, usually 3 months from the onset of COVID-19 with symptoms that last for at least 2 months and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis.’

On 20 September 2022, ETUCE organised an Online Seminar on Long COVID-19 with more than 50 education trade unionists to shed light on the scientific evidence regarding the Long COVID-19 condition and its labour-market impact on the education sector.

Based on the outcomes of the ETUCE Seminar, the following document is a collection of trade union actions and good practices regarding the Long COVID-19 syndrome in the education sector. It is intended as an agile supportive tool for education trade unions to address the challenges of the Long COVID-19 syndrome.

Possible education trade union actions to be implemented at a national and European level include:

At European level:

1. Raising awareness on the high exposure of teachers, academics, and other education personnel to the contraction of the COVID-19 virus due to the contact-intensive nature of their profession.

2. Lobbying the implementation of the Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) calling for adding COVID-19 to Annex I of the Commission Recommendation 2003/670/EC concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases, which promotes the prevention, recognition and compensation of causal agents and occupational diseases directly linked to relevant occupations.

3. Requiring concrete social dialogue and cooperation with education trade unions in preventing and combatting (Long) COVID-19, including through the introduction of the Long COVID-19 syndrome within European tools for risk assessment for the education sector.
4. Raising awareness on the disproportionate impact of Long COVID-19 on women, who represent the majority of the workforce in the education sector, as well as on people with special needs.


6. Continuing to share knowledge and good practices among education trade unions to build capacity in supporting and protecting education workers affected by Long COVID-19.

At national level:

1. Lobbying the recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease for the education sector in the national regulatory systems.¹

2. Raising awareness on the underreporting of and social stigma around Long COVID-19 cases as well as unequal access to treatments across and within countries.

3. Calling on national governments to ratify the ILO Convention C121 on Employment Injury Benefits which establishes workers’ right to compensation in relation to occupational diseases.²

4. Advocating meaningful social dialogue to develop workplace preventive measures tailored to the needs of the education sector beyond the pandemic period, through regular risk assessment in education institutions and at the individual level.

5. Engaging in effective social dialogue and reinforced collective bargaining to develop protective strategies and adequate return-to-work, including through adaptation of the workload and tasks, to better protect education workers affected by the Long COVID-19 syndrome.


Collection of good practices shared by ETUCE member organisations:

- Engaging in social dialogue with employer representatives to negotiate an extension of sick-leave periods and more time for reintegration, recovery, provision for additional payments (extra income, compensation for medical expenses) and demanding the set-up of a specific fund for people suffering from Long COVID-19.

¹ See Eurostat Report (2021) providing a detailed review of countries and respective economic sectors where COVID-19 is recognised as an occupational disease and/or an accident at work.

² See the ETUCE table on the list of ratifications of the ILO Convention 121 in the European Region.
• Opening **hotlines for employees affected by Long COVID-19** in the education sector\(^3\).
• Increasing **income security in case of long-term illness** caused by the Long COVID-19 condition.
• Seeking cooperation with **Social Labour Inspectors** to assess the impact of Long COVID-19 in the education sector.
• Provide **legal and social support** to members affected by the Long COVID-19 syndrome.
• Developing **guidance for local branches**\(^4\) and a **joint union protocol** as a basis for negotiation with employers to develop a consistent approach to management at the workplace of education workers affected by Long COVID\(^5\).
• Advocating the **inclusion of Long COVID-19 within the disability law** to ensure better protection to education worker affected by the Long COVID-19 syndrome.
• Conducting **surveys among members** to shed light on the gap between data provided by the national authorities and the real cases of Long COVID-19 and investigate the reasons for underreporting.

**Other useful resources:**

- **WHO website on Long COVID-19/Post Covid syndrome.**
- **EU-OSHA guides for workers** and **managers.**

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\(^3\) Link to the hotline on Long COVID-19 by AOb (the Netherlands) [https://rb.gy/yonyiw](https://rb.gy/yonyiw)
