Resolution

Trade union engagement and activity in Europe: Mobilising for quality public education, for the benefit of students, and an enhancement of the status of teachers, academics and all education personnel

Adopted by the ETUCE Special Conference, the Regional Special Conference of Education International, on 5-6 July 2022

Further to and consistent with the Resolutions adopted by the 8th EI Congress in Bangkok in 2019, the Resolutions adopted by the ETUCE Conference in 2020 and the ETUCE Extraordinary Conference in 2021, this ETUCE Special Conference recognises and acknowledges the monumental efforts and ongoing professional dedication of teachers, academics and other education personnel during the period of the pandemic in continuing to seek to deliver quality and inclusive education despite the very real challenges faced.

Acknowledges that:

1. Publicly funded quality and inclusive education is a fundamental prerequisite for societal and economic recovery, for the enhancement of the well-being of children and young people, for building solidarity and empathy, and for delivering a better future for Europe. It is ever more essential in times of crises, regardless of whether such have their origins in financial, health, environmental or political concerns. Quality and inclusive education prepares committed, critical-thinking and active citizens, provides a sense of belonging and equal opportunities in life, and ensures that no one is left behind in these turbulent times.

2. Quality and inclusive education is grounded in a highly valued, attractive and diverse teaching profession which plays a crucial role in education-led recovery, as highlighted in the ETUCE Resolution For an Education-led Recovery. Indeed, the value and importance of the teaching profession to society and the recognition of the important work of teachers, academics and other education personnel became evident in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and continues as societies prepare for the future in the context of digital transformation and the climate emergency.
3. Education trade unions in the European region have been, and continue, working tirelessly on protecting the working conditions and equal opportunities of education personnel, fighting for their rights and social justice, providing the necessary professional and psychological support to their affiliates and enhancing the attractiveness and status of the teaching profession.

4. In many countries the Covid-19 crisis has catalysed the trend on narrowing down education to what only translates into a few easily measurable indicators or into education meant only as direct preparation for the labour market. These trends contribute to the challenges the profession faces as they lead us away from a more holistic view of education, preparing children and young people not only for a working life, but first and foremost for a life as free, independent and responsible citizens able to cope with the society and environment they live in. These narrow views continue undermining the quality of education and the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

Recognises that:

1. The teaching profession is experiencing significant attrition and retention challenges in many European countries, resulting in a less diverse and less attractive profession. The challenges have been further compounded in the last two years by the Covid-19 pandemic which has had detrimental impacts on the status of the teaching profession. These include a major teacher shortage, deterioration of working conditions and increased workload, including challenges linked to digital and blended learning, precarious employment, increasing class size, and casualisation of staff, increased teacher burn-out, mental health and wellbeing challenges, higher work-related stress, a diminution of the status of the profession, and lack of relevant professional development and support.

2. Societal concerns and problems such as poverty, racism and family-matters enter the classroom with the students and complicate the work of the teachers. These have a profound negative impact on the outcomes of education especially when schools do not receive enough support to deal with the challenges they create.

3. Increasing trends towards unilateral decision-making by governments, neglect of social dialogue, and violation of social partners’ autonomy and of their rights to bargain collectively are explicit obstacles experienced by some European education trade unions for many years. And now, education trade unions face even more reluctance, or a lack of political willingness, from education authorities and governments to conduct social dialogue while using the COVID-19 crisis as an excuse.

4. The highly valuable contribution of teachers, academics and other education personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic was not met at all with formal recognition, such as increased salaries, concrete support or improved working conditions. Instead, some governments, in an attempt to address the teacher shortage, used the crisis as an excuse to recruit temporary education personnel without the regular qualifications that are usually required from teachers.

5. Privatisation and commercialisation are creeping into education, leading to casualisation of the profession and precarious working conditions that strongly affect the quality of public
education, thereby risking pushing families towards private tuition or additional educational services and deepening the existing socio-economic and other gaps among students. An unattractive teaching profession and lack of support for teachers and other education personnel also make it impossible to attend to the particular needs of students, including students with special needs, students in multilingual and multicultural settings and students from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds and rural areas.

6. The COVID-19 crisis has also accelerated the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence systems in education which gives rise to a series of challenges for the working conditions of teachers, academics and other education personnel, and risks jeopardising the academic freedom, academic agency and ultimately, the role of education workers. This also contributed to the emergence of new pedagogical practices which re-confirm the irreplaceable value of in-presence teaching and social interaction in education and exposing the unpreparedness of education systems for the use of digital technologies.

7. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already existing health and safety risks for teachers, academics and other education personnel (e.g., work-related stress, psychosocial hazards, cyberbullying and cyber harassment, inability to disconnect, etc.) and exposed the unsustainable and destructive way by which neo-liberal policies promote the survival of the fittest. It also highlighted the significant impact that environmental challenges and mitigation measures has on the European labour market and on workers’ lives.

8. Furthermore, following Russia’s attack on Ukraine, European education systems and education trade unions are facing further challenges trying to accommodate millions of refugees, mostly women and children, and also trying to scale up education for democratic citizenship with a view to ensuring that tolerance, solidarity and critical-thinking skills are employed in education and in society. when addressing the topic of this war.

Believes that:

1. The solution to the current multi-dimensional crisis that Europe finds itself in, requires a profound change in the social, political and economic organisation of our countries and societies, founded on principles of peace and solidarity. Quality and inclusive education based on an attractive, diverse and valued teaching profession is one of the keys to this transformation.

2. The dual role of education trade unions, and their legitimate right to be consulted in good time on all matters relevant to those working in the sector is a cornerstone and the only solution to address acute socio-economic issues in society. The respect for, and safeguarding of fundamental trade union rights and freedoms are essential pillars of a modern and democratic society, while effective social dialogue and the reinforcement of collective bargaining are essential prerequisites to guarantee adequate salaries, pensions and good working conditions that match the increased demands for quality learning and for a valued, attractive and diverse teaching profession.
3. Education trade unions work towards effective social recovery for a better future for education personnel, young people, society and the planet, and demand strong investment priorities in education and training, including in the framework of the recovery and resilience funds and policies, based on a democratic balance between the technocratic view of the goals and their sustainable accountability, starting from the support to the teaching profession as a pre-requisite for high quality and inclusive education.

4. Ensuring healthy and safe education environments and the well-being of teachers, academics, and education personnel – taking into account the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, climate emergency and increasing digitalisation - is of paramount importance to preserve quality working and learning environments and enhance the status of the teaching profession.

5. An increasingly digitized, inter-connected and sustainability-oriented society and education system require from teachers, academics and other education personnel a complex set of skills and fundamentally different learning and pedagogical approaches. Among others, these include; interdisciplinary learning, a whole-school approach, a hands-on approach to practicing green and digital skills and competences, as well as the ability to assess and address the risks and opportunities associated with digital technologies and artificial intelligence systems for educational pedagogies. Therefore, education trade unions focus strongly on ensuring the provision of effective professional support to education personnel in order to ensure their preparedness for the profession with quality and inclusive initial education and continuous professional development, while respecting and enhancing national entry requirements and regulations to become a teacher.

6. The use of digital technology for educational purposes must be responsible and respectful of the applicable rules, in particular concerning intellectual property. These must take into account the right to disconnect (essential for the well-being of staff members), which already exists in some legal frameworks and agreements, and cannot be part of a conception of the digital tool as a control tool for students and staff members in education. In this regard, digital tools and resources should be used in a critical manner.

7. Equality, inclusion and respect for human rights in the education system are key factors for attracting a more diverse population to the teaching profession, improving its status and perception in society, and ensuring that teachers and other education personnel feel appreciated and supported. Initial and continuous professional development of teachers, academics and other education personnel, that is free of charge and takes place during working hours, on inclusive education plays a critical role in this.

8. Education trade unions should also address equality and inclusion in the context of trade union renewal with a view to accommodating the needs of education personnel from various backgrounds and to being the representative voice of all teachers, academics and other education personnel in the European region.
Asserts the commitment of ETUCE Member Organisations to:

1. Mobilise for an attractive, diverse and valued teaching profession based on the respect for professional autonomy, professional ethics and academic freedom, by implementing the ETUCE Policy Paper on Raising the Status and Improving the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession and by facilitating exchanges (including cross-border) of experiences and good practices among affiliates and other education trade unions;

2. Strengthen the voice of education personnel in Europe and ensuring that the fundamental role of the teaching profession in society is respected, acknowledged and promoted through meaningful social dialogue, collective bargaining, and involvement in policy-making;

3. Continue to press governments and education authorities to increase investment and to design public education budgets in a manner that provides sufficient, predictable and sustainable resources even after the lifetime of the recovery plans and in a holistic, rather than fragmented and project-based manner;

4. Continue to make government and public opinion aware that education must be a human right and public good, supported by society as a whole and with long-term investment across political mandates.

5. Continue to press governments to ensure sustainable, equitable and long term public funding of research in order to enhance quality teaching in higher education, research-based knowledge relevant to the teaching profession, as well as research to meet societal and economic challenges

6. Campaign for better mechanisms of recruitment and retention in the teaching profession based on attractive salaries, working conditions, work-life balance, and career pathways for teachers, academics and other education personnel;

7. Protect and uphold national requirements of education personnel entering the teaching profession while lobbying for the provision of quality and inclusive initial training and continuous professional development to meet the professional needs of all teachers, academics and other education personnel, including digital and green skills and competences, as well as skills and competences for implementing inclusive education;

8. Address equality and inclusion in the teaching profession in a holistic manner and mainstream it into all education trade unions’ fields of work while looking at issues through different lenses (e.g. urban/rural, public/private, geographic differences) as underpinned by the key priorities set out in the ETUCE Action Plan for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion;

9. Promote a stronger focus on democratic citizenship education in European education systems with the view to ensuring that all education personnel are equipped to promote critical thinking, democratic values, human rights and civic engagement, and that students and education personnel enjoy safe and open learning and working environments based on tolerance and mutual respect;
10. Lobby for improving the protection of the occupational health and safety, work-life balance and well-being of education workers - including through national and European legal frameworks - with particular attention to addressing psychosocial risks in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis;

11. Advocate for further public accountability and effective legal frameworks to address the deregulated activities of for-profit actors (e.g., EdTech companies) in the education sector with the aim of preserving the public value of high-quality education for all;

12. Continue lobbying for the active involvement of education trade unions in each step of the formulation of policies having an impact on education pedagogies and the status of the teaching profession and engage more in conversations with politicians;

13. Engage in the design, assessment and implementation of national and European climate and education strategies, including the European competence framework on sustainability;

14. Lobby education authorities to provide effective support and up-to-date high-quality materials, guidelines and tools for teachers and other education personnel for the green transition of education and education institutions;

15. Focus on trade union renewal by increasing engagement with young members and further addressing the needs of those who have not been involved in trade unions, often at the margins of the labour market, with the view to connecting with young people and developing a stronger presence in different, but inextricably linked contexts, such as the workplace and in the communities that young people are part of.

16. Further develop their skills and capacities to better communicate and advocate for the needs of young members including leadership training amongst the younger generation of education professionals.

17. Continue building awareness of the challenges and barriers that young teaching professionals face in accessing the labour market and creating opportunities for addressing these challenges/barriers via engagement in education trade unions.