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ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

Education Trade Unions in Solidarity with Refugees in Times of COVID-19

(adopted by ETUCE Bureau on 26 May 2020)

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Across Europe, governments have put in place strict measures such as social/physical distancing to prevent the COVID-19 virus from spreading. People living in the streets or in often overcrowded refugee camps have difficulties in accessing health care, hygienic facilities and education. It is especially hard for people in temporary employment contracts and whose employment depends on their residence status to apply the prevention measures. In these times of crisis teachers and education trade unions need to enforce their **sense of solidarity and responsibility for people in vulnerable positions and for those seeking help and protection from violence, poverty, and environmental disasters.**



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Already in April 2020, the WHO [highlighted](#) that refugees and migrants, particularly those who are displaced and/or living in camps and camp-like settings, are faced with specific challenges and vulnerabilities that must be taken into consideration when preparing for or responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Trade unions and NGOs in Greece, Turkey, Italy, and other countries on the frontline of migration in Europe report that refugees and migrants – many of whom are unaccompanied minors - are at increased risk of contracting diseases, including COVID-19, because they typically live in overcrowded conditions without the means to follow basic public health measures. They have limited access to hygiene, health-care services and information about the virus and measures to prevent it. ETUCE joins other trade unions in the request to **evacuate overcrowded refugee camps with a view to provide safe accommodation for refugees and ensure necessary quarantine and protection from COVID-19.**

Education trade unions in Europe are particularly concerned about refugees and migrants being deprived of their **fundamental right to education**. Often, they have no or limited access to education as European governments have closed schools, universities, and other education institutions in their attempt to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Without access to appropriate devices or the necessary online equipment for distance learning, children and young adults in refugee camps and poor migrant households risk being left further behind.

Their psychological and emotional health is also at risk because **education is central to migrants' integration into the host country society and for providing a sense of belonging and normality to them and their families**. ETUCE calls¹ on governments in Europe to provide high quality and inclusive public education for everyone regardless of migratory and citizenship status and to address the lack refugees and migrants are experiencing in accessing **distance teaching and learning material**, including **targeted support**, e.g. interpretation services, individualised education plans, etc.

Income loss, health-care insecurity and the difficulties linked to the uncertainty in their legal status or to the reduction of employment due to quarantine measures, further affect refugees and migrants and their families, and are especially hard on undocumented migrants. Across Europe, migrant workers are disproportionately employed in precarious

¹ [ETUCE Statement on tackling the COVID-19 crisis](#), 2020.

work and employment conditions², meaning they are among those who risk to first lose their job (and often the right to stay in the country too) due to the economic consequences of COVID-19. Furthermore, economic crises and rising unemployment rates most of the times lead to increased migration from regions with a more difficult economic situation.

Instead of closing borders, promoting single state policies, and allowing xenophobic and racist discourse against migrants and refugees as well as the circulation of fake news about COVID-19 which seek to destabilise democratic structures rather than to promote public health, **ETUCE and its member organisations call on European governments and the citizens of Europe to remember the principles on which Europe and the EU in particular, were established: democracy, tolerance, human dignity, the rule of law, and solidarity.**

ETUCE supports its member organisations in their engagement and urgent appeal for solidarity-based policies and actions in their countries to ensure the full protection and safeguard of universal human rights and freedoms, notably the fundamental **right to education and health:**

- advocate for the implementation and respect for European and international laws, including, among other things, [the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#), [the 1951 United Nations \(UN\) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol](#), [the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination \(CERD\)](#) and
- recall Governments about their commitment to the fulfilment of [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the [Goal 4](#) - ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- promote the implementation of the resolutions on “[Protecting The Rights Of Immigrant And Refugee Children And Young People](#)”, “[Education For Refugees](#)”, adopted at the 8th World Congress of Education International (EI) from 21st to 26th July 2019 and the ETUCE Resolution on “[Refugees and Displaced Children](#)” adopted by the ETUCE Conference in Belgrade.
- continue supporting and engaging in initiatives and actions fostering, among other things, the promotion of rights and freedoms, as well as respect and solidarity towards migrants, refugees, and displaced children (e.g. initiatives like [#leavenoonebehind](#)).
- continue contributing to the EI COVID-19 Response Fund with a view to asking for undertaking activities that address issues of access to quality education to migrants, refugees, and displaced children.
- give visibility to issues around the rights of migrants, refugees, and displaced children especially in times of the pandemic COVID-19.

**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.*

² ETUC Statement ‘[Overlooked: migrant workers in the COVID-19 crisis](#)’, 2020.