



Education International

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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

### ETUCE education priorities for the AGS 2019

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The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights is 'Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market'. In order to contribute to the implementation of the Pillar and in light of the emphasis placed on the need to expand the provision of high-quality and accessible education for all in the most recent European Semester cycle, ETUCE recommends that the following education policy priorities should be addressed in the 2019 Annual Growth Survey (AGS).

- ***It is time to share prosperity: make high quality education investment a political priority to resume economic growth and progress towards social justice***

The benefits of real, though fragile, economic growth are being experienced unequally across Europe, with the potential to create lasting inequalities and injustices for generations to come. Growth limits and financial repercussions as well as the lingering effects of austerity programmes means that the future of the European economy as well as social justice urgently requires sustainable, predictable and adequate investment in high quality education. To make the social re-balancing process hailed by the EPSR concrete, such issues should be addressed, in part, by real European solidarity and not just by European fiscal discipline, e.g. in the form of more budgetary flexibility under the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) or even of a European Treasury<sup>1</sup>.

The most recent data from the OECD (2017)<sup>2</sup> confirms an average **decrease in public expenditures on educational institutions of two per cent as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** in Europe since the period 2008-2010. Looking at education spending as a percentage of public spending<sup>3</sup>, data also shows an overall decline since 2007. The latest available figures show that an average of 4.4% of GDP is invested in educational institutions from primary to tertiary level. These figures are in line with the European Commission's own analysis<sup>4</sup> showing the ratio of education spending to stood at 4.9 % of the GDP in the EU in 2015; a ratio which has been stagnant in recent years.

**Geographical inequalities between and within countries have emerged**, pushing Europe away from its convergence objectives. Variations in spending between countries reflect respective status of public finance and imbalance levels, as well as *de facto* limits to expenditure. A lack of and stagnating investment in the sector and within countries has generated further inequalities in the provision, quality and outcomes of education, with the lowest figures being accounted for in Czech Republic, Lithuania and the Slovak Republic (less than 2.8% of the GDP being spent at primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary

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<sup>1</sup> ETUC Position Paper: [A European Treasury for Public Investment](#), Adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee, March 2017.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2017), *Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2017-en>

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2018), *Public spending on education (indicator)* <https://doi.org/10.1787/f99b45d0-en>

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2017), *Education and Training Monitor*

[https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2017_en.pdf)

level). As a general rule, people in poorer areas in Europe are not being provided with the same quality education as those living in richer areas.

The most recent Semester's in-depth analysis shows the detrimental effects of education privatisation measures (e.g. in SE and BG). Nevertheless, there continues to be emphasis on **spending efficiency and on ways that the private sector might generate resources to fill investment gaps**. Evidence also demonstrates the high long-term costs and the shifts of risks that public-private partnerships (PPPs) pose to the economy and impose on access to inclusive and equitable education. Instead, **more flexibility under the Stability and Growth Pact and efforts to expand the revenue base to allow for growth-enhancing public investment should be incentivised**. This includes more effective tax collection systems that are free of unfair loopholes, measures to reduce tax fraud and to combat corporate tax evasion and avoidance, and more progressive tax initiatives on financial transaction taxes, on wealth and property taxes, and on implementing the Common Corporate Consolidated Tax Base to limit fiscal dumping and financial speculation across Europe.

- ***Boost professional and working conditions of education personnel to overcome current and future teacher shortages***

Priority should be given to providing teachers with decent employment conditions and salaries comparable to other professionals with similar qualifications, initial teacher training and continuous professional development opportunities to exercise their profession. Eurydice recent data<sup>5</sup> shows that **no less than 17 EU countries experience teacher shortages**, posing threats to education systems' sustainability with knock-on effects for students, societies and economies. In many countries, this is closely linked to the **attractiveness of the profession** among young people, as well as the ability to retain existing teachers. A reduction of the teaching workforce and the deterioration in the quality of work, including increasing demands for flexibility, precarious employment, salary freezes, de-professionalisation, limited autonomy and influence over curriculum and teaching methods, are among the main causes of the teachers' recruitment and retention crisis, affecting in particular young and female teachers.

- ***Make quality education a reality for all***

**Equity and equal opportunities should be a priority.** Equal access to quality education and a more equitable distribution of learning outcomes is a pre-requisite for Europe to compete in the global economy and meet its demands for high-levels of skills, knowledge and competences. The combination of **increasing socio-economic disparities and the hostility towards migrants and refugees** has caused many learning and inclusion difficulties to surface that aggravate inequality and discrimination in society. Far-right extremism and populist nationalism in the community are entering the classroom the same way they enter neighbourhoods and workplaces, endangering acceptance and tolerance of newcomers and undermining democracy itself. Education institutions and its personnel should be provided with the support, space and tools needed to embed teaching **democratic values, active citizenship, critical thinking, tolerance and peace** in healthy and safe environments. Additionally, tensions in society amplify as students and others are swamped with unverified information. New means of communication complicate the challenge of adequate media-literacy particularly for those in the most marginalised areas of Europe. The achievement of **full digital literacy** of all teachers and students and among all citizens could not be more compelling. To this end, public funding for continuous training, updated equipment and competent technical support staff is to be prioritised.

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2018), *Teaching Career in Europe*, Eurydice report