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# ETUCE

## European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

### ETUCE Statement “Turn the tide: Invest in Education”

to the Joint Council meeting of the  
Economic and Financial Affairs Council and the Education Council on ‘Investing in  
people’s competences’ - Brussels, 8 November 2019

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***“Do the right thing and do it right”: Increase public investment in education and safeguard public provision and governance of education from the influence and grasp of private sector investment and actors to protect the broad, essential mission of education and of democracy.***

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), representing 132 education trade unions from all levels of education in 52 countries, e.g. more than 11 million education personnel, would like to contribute to the upcoming joint policy discussion between Ministers of Education and Ministers of Finance on “*Effectiveness, efficiency and quality of education and training*”.

ETUCE calls upon the Ministers to raise public education budgets, and to ensure that the policy debate respects the commitment to achieve and to implement the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal four on education in its entirety, to make the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights come true for all citizens of Europe, and to shape the European Education Area post-2020. A limited debate that narrows the value and scope of education to economic concerns and efficiency as defined by business, market mechanisms and attitudes in education policy, has the potential to undermine the quality of education as a public good and a fundamental right under the UN’s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; jeopardizing the prospect of fair societies and challenging freedom and democracy. **More equitable, fair and democratic societies are built on free, universal, high quality public education for all.**

Compounding budget restrictions with irresponsible attempts to expose education systems to marketisation, privatisation and commercialisation have the potential to bring about drastic changes in the main goals and mission of education. Such attempts include the introduction of instruments of an apparently technical nature, such as smart mixes of public and private financing under new EU financing tools, or the push for an increased participation of private actors in financing education and other activities through the promotion of flexible regulatory frameworks for the most profitable allocation of resources in education. While supposedly contributing to economic efficiency and effectiveness, according to prevailing neoliberal dogma, **the introduction of market mechanisms in education systems overshadows broader social and collective objectives, such as those of equity, social cohesion and inclusion. It perpetuates divisions in the economy and in society.**



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**ETUCE alerts Ministers of Education and Ministers of Finance that the reliance on markets to provide public goods such as education is neither efficient nor effective. Moving towards equity and social justice should be one of its central missions, and one that supports coherent and fair societies.** ETUCE recalls the primary responsibility of governments to increase investment in public education and to design public education budgets in a manner that provides sufficient, predictable and sustainable resources. Accountability, public scrutiny and transparency of education budgets are essential prerequisites to assess equitable distribution of public resources and to ensure that they address the needs of the most marginalised in our societies. Already now, governments that transfer their role as providers of public services to private stakeholders have re-enforced galloping economic and social inequality, globally and across Europe, and accentuated a wide range of social problems. **Education authorities and education institutions should make clear that private market opportunities are not necessarily compatible with quality public education, accountability, public scrutiny and transparency.**

**ETUCE urges Ministers of Education and Ministers of Finance to recognise in their discussions these policy points and recommendations:**

- **Education marketisation, privatisation and commercialisation may appear in multiple forms**, including the contracting-out of educational services and the transfer of costs to students, who are increasingly treated as consumers rather than learners; the adoption of ‘business-like’ management practices in the direction of education institution and the entrepreneurial possibility to generate funds at the level of individual institutions. The development of quasi-markets tying performance to rewards and sanctions, standardised, mechanical measurement and the increasing reliance on commercial and economic imperatives may come at the expense of comprehensive and inclusive education and curricula.
- The proposed generalised findings and calculations, and de-contextualised best-practices presented to the Ministers (e.g. regarding the benefits from private and public finance mix, the promotion of school clusters and the closing down of schools) generate **ideologically biased evidence that distorts and steers policy debates in the direction of restructuring in line with market rather than education principles, embracing consumerist values and tolerating the existence of inequalities.**
- Evidence shows (see OECD ISTP, 2019; Stevenson H. et al, ‘Education and training policy in the European Semester’, ETUCE, 2016) that key features of the proposed policy debate such as school-based management and autonomy, results-based accountability and merit-based pay for teachers, all grounded in assumed improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of spending, have **negatively impacted education quality. They may seriously damage public education systems in the EU with long-term effects on people, societies, the economy as well as the European project.**
- 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, these 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.**

- **Reform pressures, business orientation and financial incentives may also steer research and funding to business priorities, which can limit academic freedom.** This includes the freedom to conduct research without interference as well as the ability of universities as collegial bodies to foster independent basic research, including in such areas as the environment and social sciences, providing short and long-term benefits to society and the economy.
- **Public-private partnerships are one of the forms of private involvement in the provision of education and the means to facilitate the entry of private actors and techniques into public management of education.** ETUCE is concerned by the promotion of EU-wide policy frameworks and new EU financial instruments allowing and even encouraging private and public finance mix in education and training systems. From an economic perspective, rapid injections of investment in education yielding fast gains at low costs sponsored by public-private partnership promoters are not grounded in empirical evidence. Where employed, private parties delivering public goods have not raised management standards and proven to be even more costly for public finances in the longer term. The benefits and drawbacks of public-private partnership should be critically assessed to ensure that EU education systems do not fall prey to lobbying interests in an extremely competitive new market segment.
- **Profits and rights should never be confused and put alongside each other. Whilst public-private partnerships can come in many different forms, their use conflicts with the right to education.** Even when, in the partnership, the public capacity is high, accountability and non-discriminatory delivery of education services that cover the most vulnerable children may suffer in terms of development and evaluation.
- **Societal fragmentation and existing inequalities based on wealth, gender, ethnic, geographical or national origin and other differences are aggravated by education privatisation, marketisation and commercialisation,** further marginalising and excluding groups from access to and participation in education at all levels (see OECD WP 52, 2010; OECD PISA 2015, 2016; World Bank's World Development Report 2017). Such funding and management systems rarely take into account the different micro-economic environments of schools, including poverty rates, the existence of local industries, qualification levels and rates of low-skills and unemployment of parents, factors which can impact student access to education and its outcome.