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ETUCE's views on Public consultation regarding the current situation of gender equality in the EU and priorities for the next five years

(adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 27 May 2019)

The current EU Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 expires at the end of 2019. The European Commission has launched a [public consultation](#) to gather opinions of different actors on the current situation of gender equality in the EU and suggestions for priorities for the next five years.

ETUCE¹ welcomes the high level consultation of social partners on the EU strategy on gender equality, considering that it is a fundamental right enshrined in the international and EU Treaties and legislation. Furthermore, gender equality and the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning, are two key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and two of the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs 4 and 5), recognising that education has a significant impact on gender relations in society. However, the results of the recent survey among education trade unions in Europe shows that gender equality topics and challenges are still to a large extent not addressed in national and European social dialogue in the education sector.² Some of the reasons include the lack of financial and organisational resources of trade unions, coupled with the lack of understanding by all social partners that trade unions address in their work both employment and professional issues and contribute strongly to social cohesion and equality in support of human rights that are the basis for a healthy democratic society. Therefore, **ETUCE demands from the European Commission a strong EU strategy on gender equality which prioritises education as a key element of building a gender equal society, further supports the inclusion of gender equality in education and the teaching profession in European and national social dialogue and collective bargaining, and mainstreams gender equality topics into other European policies, e.g. the Education and Training Strategy 2030, digital [agenda](#) of Europe³, [EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work](#), and EU [policy](#) in the field of vocational education and training (VET)⁴.**

¹ The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 132 education trade unions and 11 million teachers in 51 country of Europe. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and a European Trade Union Federation within the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International, the global federation of education trade unions.

² Most of the measures taken by trade unions to address various aspects of gender equality are taken by trade unions acting alone or through the trade union confederations (27% and 25% respectively). In contrast, only 11% of measures reported in the survey were the result of collective bargaining between education employer and trade union organisations. A further 16% of measures arose out of social dialogue between education employers and trade unions but were of a less binding nature than those enshrined in collective agreements and a further 20% through tripartite actions of trade unions, employers and the government working together. *Preliminary results of the ETUCE survey among its members in the framework of the EU-funded project 'Empowering education trade unions to address gender equality in the teaching profession through social dialogue'.*

³ Including [Digital Education Action Plan](#).

⁴ Including [A new skills agenda for Europe](#).

The following statement provides ETUCE's views on the current situation of gender equality in education and the teaching profession in Europe, as well as proposals for priorities and measures to introduce into and/or strengthen the future Commission's strategy for gender equality.

1. Despite the European institutions having identified gender equality as one of the EU policy priorities, over the past decade, gender equality has been progressing in Europe '**at a snail's pace**', as shown in the [EIGE Gender Equality Index](#). Furthermore, **new challenges** for gender equality arise from technological, economic, and social changes in our societies. At the same time, the spread of right-wing and conservative political discourses and the intensification of poverty and social exclusion in a number of European countries attack gender equality by pushing women out of the labour market to taking care of the household, by eliminating abortion rights, and removing sexual education from the curricula
2. Although women are often more successful in educational attainment than men and women make up the majority of tertiary students in almost all EU Member States, the **segregation in study fields for women and men** remains a serious issue in the educational systems around Europe. There is a higher concentration of boys in areas related to ICT, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), whereas girls tend to choose language, history and social science classes. ETUCE underlines that encouraging men and women to choose **traditionally gender-atypical study fields and career paths** can significantly boost the potential productive capacity and competitiveness of the European economy while ensuring gender equality in the research sector leads to future innovation and success.
3. Deeply-rooted **gender stereotypes** in our daily lives, publicity and media, continue to persist in relation to perceptions of women's and men's role in the household, caring responsibilities, the labour market and public life. In order to challenge gender stereotypes in society and education, it is of utmost importance to provide education employees, school management, career counsellors, and researchers, with the know-how and practical tools that are necessary to promote a gender-sensitive approach in education and consequently in society as a whole. Therefore, provision of sufficient and sustainable **initial and continuous professional development (CPD) and up-to-date teaching and learning materials** on gender equality for educational personnel, as well as a whole-school environment approach that promotes relationships based on equality and mutual respect between all education actors, should be among the key measures proposed by the future European Commission's strategy on gender equality. Teachers, academics, other education personnel and their unions have a key role in changing society, combating gender stereotypes and transmitting role models for girls and boys that lead to an improvement in women's participation to the labour market. This requires a **strong involvement of teachers in the development of education policies** and **sustainable public investment in education** to ensure teachers and teaching material provide the quality required.

4. Gender segregation in the labour market is especially reflected in the public sector, with **teaching being a highly gendered profession**. In 2017, on average, 73% of education sector workers in the EU were female.⁵ Furthermore, **gender segregation** in the teaching profession with men mainly employed in better-paid, higher-status positions (e.g. in tertiary education), and women mostly working in early childhood and primary education, also undermines gender equality in education and the labour market. ETUCE stresses that in order to make the teaching profession more attractive to both men and women, the **status of the teaching profession** in Europe needs to be enhanced by increasing education personnel's salaries and improving their working conditions.
5. Despite making up a high share of the workforce in the education sector, **women are still under-represented in leadership and decision-making positions** in education institutions, as well as a high percentage of women work in part-time employment and on short-term contracts. Across Europe, in pre-primary education, an average of 90% of school leaders are women, while in lower secondary education, this decreases to 61% and to 48% in upper secondary education, with only 12% of university deans in Europe being women.⁶ ETUCE emphasises the importance of **enhancing the representation and participation of women in decision-making** in all education sectors and research, as well as providing better opportunities for career progression and professional support for female education personnel, particularly in higher education and vocational education and training.
6. ETUCE recognises a significant progress made through EU legislation regarding the reconciliation of personal and professional lives of working parents and carers across the EU, linked to the adoption of the [Directive](#) on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers. However, ETUCE cautions about the work-life balance challenges that are relevant for education personnel and which are not addressed in the Directive, including **workload issues and work-related stress**, CPD taking place outside of working hours, and the **impact of digitalisation** on work in the education sector. Therefore, ETUCE is confident that work-life balance must remain one of the key priorities in the future Commission's strategy for gender equality, focusing on **affordable and accessible public early childhood education and elderly care**, models that encourage men to take **parental leave**, and **time models** which cater for both male and female teachers at different stages of their lives, including the right to disconnect.
7. Even though in most of the EU countries, teachers' salaries are fixed and based on state salary grids, male teachers usually advance in their career faster than their female colleagues (due to career breaks or part-time work taken more often by women for caring responsibilities), they are more present in better-paid and higher-status positions, and they are often given extra-curricular opportunities to earn more. Such arrangements result in **significant gender pay and pension gaps** in the sector. Horizontal segregation in the teaching profession also contributes to the gender pay gap as **teaching in primary and**

⁵ Eurostat, Employment by sex, age and economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2) - 1 000 [lfsa_egan2], accessed on 04/07/2018.

⁶ Eurostat, Classroom teachers and academic staff by education level, programme orientation, sex and age groups [educ_uoe_perp01], accessed on 05/07/2018.

early childhood education sectors where the majority of education personnel are women, is in many countries undervalued and paid less than other education sectors.

8. **Gender-based violence** remains a serious and highly unreported problem in Europe: according to the [study](#) on violence against women by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), one in three women (33%) in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since she was 15 years old. Gender-based violence in education institutions has also a damaging effect on the learning environment of students and the working environment of teachers. Preventing and tackling **gender-based harassment and violence in education, including cyber-bullying and harassment**, as well creating learning environments based on mutual respect, trust and universal values are crucial measures to be highlighted by the European strategy on gender equality.
9. To summarise, reconfirming the crucial role of education and teachers in improving gender equality in European societies, ETUCE suggests that the European Commission develops a comprehensive EU strategy for gender equality built on the following priorities:
 - a. **Supporting the initiatives of social partners at European and national level to include the gender dimension in the social dialogue in education sector** with the view to involve teachers, academics, and other education personnel in the design of education policies and monitoring of their implementation, and to better support them in promoting gender equality in schools.
 - b. **Addressing deeply-rooted gender stereotypes in society and in/through education** by including gender equality topics, gender-sensitive language and values of mutual respect in the curriculum for children from an early age and **providing sufficient and sustainable initial and continuous professional development for education personnel as well as the knowledge and practical tools for other education stakeholders**, necessary to promote a gender-sensitive approach in education.
 - c. **Preventing and tackling gender-based harassment and violence** in society and in particular in education, **including cyber-bullying and harassment**.
 - d. **Further improving work-life balance arrangements**, taking into account the impact of digitalisation on working time and the specific challenges of the teaching profession.
 - e. **Addressing gender pay and pension gaps as a complex issue interlinked with other gender inequalities**, including horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market and within particular sectors (such as the education sector), work-life balance, precarious and part-time employment, and others.
 - f. **Combatting gender segregation in the labour market by raising the status of education sector professionals**.
 - g. **Enhancing the representation and participation of women in decision-making** (in particular, in all education sectors and research).