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ETUCE reaction on the

“Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future”

Adopted by ETUCE Bureau on 22 June 2020

On 26 May 2020 the Education Council of the European Union adopted in its virtual meeting [Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future](#).

The following text is the response of ETUCE, which represents 11 million teachers in Europe, to the Council conclusions:

1. The COVID-19 crisis has had a major impact on the teachers and education systems across Europe. We highlighted in our [ETUCE Statement on tackling the COVID-19 crisis](#) (April 2020) and [Joint ETUCE-OBESSU-EPA Statement on COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (May 2020) how teachers play an essential role in ensuring that education continues during the school lock downs in the COVID- 19 crisis. In addition, we insisted that they played this role under extraordinary circumstances, thanks to their tremendous adaptation effort, and often at the detriment of their own health, safety, and well-being. Therefore, we welcome that the education ministers appreciate the efforts teachers and trainers made in the COVID-19 crisis stating that: *“The current crisis caused by COVID-19 has put an unprecedented challenge before teachers and trainers at all levels and in all types of education and training. They have been required to rapidly move from face-to-face to predominantly distance, and to a large extent virtual teaching. In such exceptional circumstances, **teachers and trainers have shown impressive commitment, creativity, peer collaboration and made significant efforts to ensure that both learning and learners' progress continue, including by providing support for their wellbeing.**”*
2. In addition, our previous position papers sent to the EU institutions, e.g. the [ETUCE position on Education in the post-2020 EU Strategy](#) (March 2018) and [ETUCE reaction to the Council Resolution on further developing the European Education Area](#) (March 2020) underlined that teachers need to be put at the heart of the future European Education Area and of the future EU- level education strategies. We welcome also that the Council of education ministers acknowledges that *“**Teachers and trainers, at all levels and in all types of education and training, are an indispensable driving force of education and training**”* and that increasing demands, responsibilities and expectations put before the teachers have an influence not only on their competence development, but also on their wellbeing and the attractiveness of the teaching profession.
3. In our previous positions we underlined that **education is a human right and a public good** and the EU should make further steps towards the implementation of

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations (UN) and the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, especially its first principle which is applicable for students and teachers: *“Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market”*. Member States should implement this principle with appropriate legislative measures, social dialogue agreements and adequate, predictable and sustainable funding to education, **to ensure and improve quality, equity and inclusiveness in national education systems**, providing equal access to education for all regardless of the student’s gender, sexual orientation, abilities and educational needs, economic status, ethnic origin, language, religion, and migratory and citizenship status. However, we regret that the Council conclusions of the education ministers do not have any reference to these two important policy documents.

4. The key role of education is to realise the full potential of every student and **inclusive education** is an adequate response to increasingly complex and diverse societies of today, which addresses the needs of all learners, including those coming from a disadvantaged background. Therefore, we welcome the focus of the Council conclusions on ensuring *‘inclusive, socially just and equitable’* teaching and learning, as well as on preparing and supporting teachers and trainers to work with learners from a variety of socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and with different needs. However, we insist that it requires an implementation of the **holistic perspective on education system** which entails the integration of every person in the society and preparing learners to be active and responsible citizens in the socially and economically diverse world, as the main focus of education, instead of sole concentration on the labour market needs.¹ Furthermore, it is important to evaluate the extended use of e-learning during the period of school closure with a special focus on how to overcome two major consequences which have been observed during the distance learning conditions. First, the lack of social interaction with classmates and with teachers have had serious consequences on students’ motivation to participate and to learn from the e-learning offered. Second, certain students groups such as special need students and socially disadvantaged students, students with migrant background, but also adult learners - especially early school leavers or migrants who have returned to formal education - have suffered disproportionately during this period and were left behind due to the distance learning conditions. It is essential to provide support to students with migrant background who have difficulties during distance learning, especially those who still lack an appropriate level of the teaching language. There is a great need of recruiting teachers from migrant background, mother tongue teachers and second language teachers.
5. We also acknowledge that **improving initial and continuous professional development** for the teachers from the perspective of quality and updating competences, skills, and pedagogies are essential. According to the OECD TALIS 2018 report 60% of the teachers received IT training 12 months before the survey,

¹ ETUCE, EFEE, and ESHA [Joint Statement on Inclusive Schools Within the Context of Diverse Societies](#), 2019.

but many of them expressed their high need for more training on digital skills and tools, and on other skills. Before the COVID-19 crisis, European education trade unions experienced an increasing tendency of de-regulation on qualification requirements towards new teachers, deterioration and/or lack of improvement of the quality of initial and continuous professional training, and digitalisation efforts to replace teachers. The COVID-19 crisis showed that in situations of digitalised distance teaching students rely even more on the teachers. Teachers' experience should be included in reforms on teacher training. ETUCE requests the Council of education ministers to regularly consult education trade unions regarding the continuous competence development of teachers to meet their and the students' needs. Indeed, effective and meaningful social dialogue is the key instrument especially in view of implementing the Council's recommendation to increase the minimum level of qualifications of teachers. Teachers should be able to have access to individualised school-based training on ICT. Moreover, information should be collected from teachers to assess the training needs they experienced during the distance teaching.

6. We need to underline that increasing the level of initial training of the teachers alone will not contribute to **job satisfaction and attractiveness** of the profession as the Council conclusions say. There are increasing pressures on the working conditions, health and safety, professional autonomy and role of teachers through the **deterioration of the working conditions**, which also endanger the attractiveness and future of the profession and the development of sustainable, and high-quality education. The COVID-19 crisis made apparent many flaws, unfairness and workload issues that teachers face. Education trade unions experienced attacks in several EU countries against collective agreements and fought against attempts of cutting teachers' salary at the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis while education trade unions, students and parents were aware of the rising pressure on teachers during the school lock down. At the same time, **teachers' actual salaries** at pre-primary, primary and general secondary levels of education amount to 78% to 93% of the average earnings of tertiary-educated workers across the [OECD countries](#). Therefore, we demand that education ministers in the EU should recommend to each and every EU country to respect collective agreements in place, and to promote **social dialogue and collective bargaining**, as effective tools to ensure high quality education systems, where teachers enjoy higher job satisfaction, decent salary and working conditions, professional autonomy and continuous learning opportunities, also with a view to make the profession attractive. Aware that quality teaching by well-trained and supported teachers is at the heart of quality education, education trade unions have been raising these demands for a long time. This is why we regret that the Council's suggestions for improving working conditions for the teachers still provide loopholes to countries to avoid social partner consultation (*"where applicable and in accordance with national circumstances"*).
7. Education is the sector with the second highest representation of female workers in the European labour market (73% in 2017). However, there is a **significant gender inequality** witnessed within the sector and teaching profession which hinders teachers' and trainers' well-being, attractiveness of the teaching profession and as a consequence the quality of education. We regret to note that Council conclusions mention only the horizontal segregation in specific education sectors (e.g. early

childhood education, higher education) but omit such significant problems in the teaching profession as the lack of women participation and representation in decision-making, pay and pension gender gaps, gender-based violence and work-life balance issues. Furthermore, concrete steps for improving gender equality in the education sector are not mentioned at all among the solutions proposed by Conclusions for Member States and European Commission.

8. Concerning **early childhood education**, it is important that the Conclusions highlight the existing difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified and well-trained early childhood education and care professionals. On the list we miss the necessity to improve the quality of initial training for ECE teachers underlining the role of play, and the unattractive salary of ECE teachers which is way below the level of teachers in other education sectors. ECE centres and teachers were exposed to huge pressure during the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, the ECE sector could not be replaced by distance learning. Previous [Council proposals](#) put a lot of emphasis on modernising ECE e.g. via new technologies and digital tools. ETUCE reminds that ECE is not only a preparation for school and several studies show that overly academic ECE has a negative impact on children and play should have bigger importance in ECE. The curriculum should be structured **around play-based learning and teachers with pedagogical experience** in early years' learning should be employed in all early years' settings. We highlight the importance of a well-balanced use of digital and IT tools combined with and protecting the well-being of the children and free of charge early childhood education. Teachers with pedagogical knowledge are responsible for the child's early childhood education and care and their professional autonomy needs to be protected.

9. We regret that the Council did not put any emphasis on other challenges teachers in **general education and vocational education** face, such as the low quality of initial education which does not sufficiently prepare novice teachers for the classroom, the decrease of **professional autonomy, and salary and working conditions of the teachers** which feature highest as the reasons for teacher shortages. In addition, high political focus in the recent years on apprenticeship has an impact on teachers who need to be supported in keeping relations to company-based trainers, help with organising company placements for students, participate in students' assessment, and ensuring professional development for the teachers in companies to update their knowledge². In this respect further steps should be made by governments in implementing the [Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships](#) (2018) in particular in supporting teachers and trainers: *"Teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market needs."*

10. The Conclusions underline many challenges that teachers face in **higher education**, but we experience that during the last years, the reduction of core **public funding for teaching and research** had a major impact on increasing the number of part-time and short-term contracts of higher education and research staff and

² [ETUCE Policy Paper on Vocational Education and Training in Europe, 2012](#)

deterioration of working conditions. According to a European Commission report³, several countries recently adopted reforms which extend the possibilities for performance-related pay of academics, making this kind of remuneration possible in virtually all European higher education systems. The same report says that there are high disparities regarding the contractual arrangements of academic staff across Europe. In countries like France, Malta and Turkey, 80% or more academics have a permanent contract. Academics across Europe face **decreasing job security**, due to budget constraints, reduced employment opportunities, and an increasing proportion of staff in externally funded positions. At the same time, the core principle of higher education and research, **academic freedom** and professional autonomy are not respected. Many academics have subjected themselves to self-censorship at work for fear of negative repercussions, such as loss of benefits and career prospects⁴. Precarity affects high education and research staff all across Europe and the education ministers of the EU should urgently solve this problem through effective and meaningful social dialogue and regular consultations with the education trade unions.

11. The Conclusions rightly mention the problem *“teachers and trainers need to remain engaged and supported to effectively respond to changes and challenges”* in relation also to *“participating in policy-making, in particular in development, implementation and evaluation of education and training reforms, including the continuous review of curricula”*. The text, however, does not make any reference whatsoever to **social dialogue with education trade unions**. This proof of disrespect of social dialogue is the lack of consultation with the education trade unions on such an important Council decision which is actually about them, the teachers. ETUCE member organisations reported that few ministries consult on such Council decisions with the education unions and regrettably ETUCE was also not involved in discussions on this document by the Croatian Presidency. However, we hope that the implementation of the suggestions on the document will have an impact in supporting the teachers and enhance social dialogue with the education trade unions at national level.
12. The Covid-19 pandemic has unveiled the gaps in equity and the growing inequalities in access and provision of quality education training, as a result of a decade of underinvestment in education investment. As Europe is experiencing record drops of its Gross Domestic Product and it is moving towards a new deep recession, ETUCE calls the Council to take a firm stand on the need to **rebuild public education investment** to avoid a repetition of the failed austerity measures that followed the last economic crisis, and against any form of public and private finance mix opening the way to lobbying and/or for-profit interests in EU education systems, which should remain publicly funded and governed for the benefits of those working in the sectors, students, and society as a whole.

³ European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2017): *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe: Academic Staff – 2017*. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴ *Scholars at Risk (2019): Free to Think 2019*, Scholars at Risk: New York, pp. 25-30