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Boulevard Bischoffsheim, 15
1000 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92
Fax +32 2 224 06 94
secretariat@csee-etuice.org
<http://www.csee-etuice.org>

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Susan FLOCKEN

Treasurer

Joan DONEGAN

ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education
EI European Region

ETUCE Statement on the Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

Adopted by ETUCE Committee on 30 March 2021

The European Trade Union Committee for Education* (ETUCE) **strongly condemns Turkey's withdrawal from the [Istanbul Convention on Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#)**. On 20 March 2021, through [Presidential decree No.9](#), the President of Turkey announced the annulment of the signature of the [Istanbul Convention on Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#). The official process of withdrawal started on 22 March 2021, when the Council of Europe was notified of the decision, and it is expected to be completed by next July. However, before the completion of the withdrawal process, the Istanbul Convention remains in force and applicable in Turkey.

ETUCE reminds that the Istanbul Convention stands as the first international agreement recognising violence against women and girls as a human rights violation. The Convention criminalises gender-based violence against women and domestic violence and ensures measures to prevent violence, protect and support victims and witnesses, and prosecute the perpetrators. In 2012, Turkey was the first country to ratify the Convention that was integrated within the national legislative system in compliance with the Turkish constitutional law. ETUCE is seriously concerned about exceedingly damaging consequences that this withdrawal will imply for the protection of human rights of Turkish women and girls as well as the LGBTI community, who will be further exposed to vulnerable situations and attacks.

The President of Turkey's decision comes at a moment when reinforced co-operative efforts to defend human rights of women and girls are urgently needed. Violence against women is one of the most harmful and pervasive challenges of our times. One in three women are victims of physical or sexual violence globally and the phenomenon remains largely underreported. In Turkey, in particular, there is an extreme level of domestic violence and alarming increase of femicide has been recorded over the last years. Furthermore, the lockdown measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a further escalation of domestic violence incidents and femicides, leaving victims alone with their perpetrators behind closed doors. This situation is unacceptable. Violence against women is one of the strongest expressions of gender inequality and governments have the responsibility to act in protection of the fundamental rights of women and girls deploying adequate legal means and support and making clear that it is not a private matter.

The Istanbul Convention is an effective legislative tool to empower women and girls and protect their fundamental rights. However, this pull-out means that women and girls will be left without adequate protection from violence and all forms of harassment as Turkey

does not have effective national regulations at this scope. The impact will be devastating also in the education sector where cases of violence and harassment on women teachers and girls already occur. The lack of protection from the Istanbul Convention risks leading not only to a rise of violence in schools but also to a higher drop-out rate, pushing girls out of the education system and undermining women and girls' status in all segments of the society.

Turkish government's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention is not an isolated case of a political attack on women's rights and gender equality. It is part of the rising conservative policies and practices that lead to violation of women's rights in various forms including their exclusion from economic, social and cultural life. This alarming trend can be observed in many European countries with right-wing and conservative discourse where anti-gender movements are increasingly undermining women's and LGBTI persons' rights in the name of preserving traditional values. In this respect, further efforts and measures, including democratic citizenship and inclusive education, are urgently needed to counter these anti-democratic and anti-equality political and social tendencies.

European education trade unions support the call of its member organisation in Turkey against the Turkish government's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. We call on Turkey's government to reverse its decision to pull out of the Istanbul Convention and reaffirm its international commitment to protect and promote women's and girls' human rights and to preserve and defend universal and fundamental values. ETUCE also calls on the European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the EU and all EU Member States to ratify the Istanbul Convention, speed up the EU accession to the Convention as promised by the [Council Decision](#) in 2017, and act upon combating all forms of gender violence and harassment at home and at work.

**The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 127 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.*