

RESOLUTION

For a sustainable future of Europe: the role of education trade unions in Europe in addressing education and environment for social change

Adopted by the ETUCE Conference, the Regional Conference of Education International, on 5-6 July 2021

Further to and consistent with the Resolutions adopted by the 8th EI Congress in Bangkok in 2019 and the Resolutions adopted by the ETUCE Conference in 2020, this ETUCE Conference,

Acknowledges that:

1. Humanity faces today an enormous and unprecedented threat to its existence because of environmental destruction. At the roots of this environmental emergency are growth and development models that solely focus on profit-making and are incompatible with ecological and democratic models and capitalistic systems that profit from environmental issues. Climate emergency can be effectively addressed only through a social change towards a collective society based on the principles of democracy, social justice, solidarity and sustainability. Education plays a crucial role in that change going far beyond solely addressing the environmental issues in a curriculum;
2. According to scientists, 2019's average temperature was second only to that of 2016 and continued the Earth's long-term warming trend: the past five years have been the warmest of the last 140 years. We experience increased pollution as well as a significantly higher number of intense floods, droughts, forest fires, earthquakes, storms and other natural disasters which cause deaths, destruction of buildings, shortage of water and food, climate-induced migration and overall interruption of our daily lives across the world and in the European region. Poor environment and polluted air have also weakened us in the face of various diseases as clearly shown by the pandemic spread of the virus COVID-19 and its devastating impact on the people's health. These are the consequences of the irresponsible and unsustainable approach to environment where our societies increasingly take natural resources while dumping back enormous quantities of waste and toxins. If we continue this course, there might be soon no planet to live and work on. The time for considerations and discussions has passed and we urgently need to act and address the climate emergency;

3. Environmental challenges and measures to address the climate emergency have a significant impact on the European labour market and on workers' lives. On the one hand, decent working conditions, health and safety at work, employment and pay security, social protection and labour rights are substantially challenged by environmental emergencies and destruction of ecosystems. There will be no jobs on a dead planet. On the other hand, just transition of the European and national economies to the 'greener' and more sustainable future requires prepared and resourceful workers who have access to lifelong learning on environment-preserving work practices;
4. Climate and environment emergencies hugely influence the work of education institutions and challenge access to quality education which is a fundamental human right and common good. Environmental problems obstruct the learning and teaching processes and lead to unsafe and inadequate working and learning environments (e.g. hot classrooms, periods when schools have to be closed or relocated due to changes in the environment);
5. Despite the global nature of the climate emergency which touches upon every country and region in the world, there are significant disparities in its impact and it tends to have a magnifying effect on the already existing geographical, socio-economic, gender, citizenship, and other inequalities. Furthermore, the link between climate emergency and socio-economic challenges causes climate-induced migration which is still not recognised as a basis for international protection even though some places in the world are already becoming inhabitable.

Notes that:

6. European and international frameworks on addressing the climate emergency, including the [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), the [Paris Agreement on climate change](#), the [European Green Deal](#), demand significant reductions of greenhouse gas emissions, decarbonising the energy sector, separating economic growth from the use of exhaustible resources, and other industrial, energy-intensive and economic solutions. However, these top-down solutions alone will not be sufficient to improve the environmental state of our planet. Climate emergency requires a drastic social change, including individual and collective changes in our mentality, behaviour, lifestyle, as well as in the social, political and economic organisation of our countries and societies (e.g. a circular economy, natural energy resources, innovations, sensible consumer models, etc.);
7. Currently, most governments prefer keeping their consciences clear by just promoting 'green' brands (e.g. organic and bio products) or relying on ubiquitous digitalisation instead of showing a true commitment to a social, economic and political change towards a sustainable Europe, supported by solid public funding. Meanwhile, 'green' brands often lead to intensification of consumption and digital devices are produced and managed using exhaustible resources and energy. It is time that education trade unions showed the way to a sustainable future for Europe and lead, in solidarity, on the social reforms and changes necessary for a society based on principles of democracy, social justice, fairness, and sustainability;
8. Climate emergency and environmental destruction are crucial topics for young people and new generations. It comes as no surprise that many students and young people in Europe and around the world are taking to the streets to demand meaningful political action on environmental issues. While education personnel take a lead in educating future generations about causes and consequences of climate change and how to prevent further destruction of the environment, education trade unions should address the needs and demands of their current, and potential, young members regarding the social, political and economic changes necessary for a sustainable future;

9. The [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) 4 and 13, state that education is the best tool for creating responsible and critically-thinking citizens with awareness and understanding of the causes and consequences of the climate emergency and other environmental problems, as well as providing them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to find solutions, to change consumption models and to transform society towards a more sustainable way of living. Education on environmental sustainability and 'green' skills is also a substantial part of quality education and training in all industrial sectors. In the era of the "know-it-all internet", social media and fake news, it is crucial that this process is designed, assessed and implemented by teachers, academics, and other education personnel;
10. Teachers, academics and other education personnel need to be supported in delivering education on sustainable treatment of the environment with relevant and up-to-date teaching materials, methods and practices, as well as with initial and continuous teacher training on the topic. Furthermore, education authorities need to review national curricula to introduce adequate time and space for equipping young generations with the necessary skills to bring about social change;
11. Sustainable and decent working conditions in the education sector also require that the infrastructure of education is built with a view to creating learning and teaching environments that are climate-aware and environment-preserving.

To tackle the environmental emergency, we need to set a bigger frame that does not follow the neo-liberal approach of the survival of the fittest and ensures a fair and inclusive transformation.

Therefore, the Resolution asserts the commitment of ETUCE and its Member Organisations to:

12. Ensuring that responsibility for the environment is shared by everyone, including European and national level institutions as well as national and regional governments, members of international agreements, education authorities, social partners in education, education trade unions, education personnel and employers in education;
13. Holding governments and education authorities accountable and demanding support for evidence- and science-based policies for a green and sustainable environment;
14. Securing their place in the design, assessment and implementation of national and European climate strategies and demanding social change for a sustainable and green future, through social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels;
15. Advocating and lobbying governments and education authorities to fully integrate education into environmental issues and sustainable development into education policies, national curricula, and key competences frameworks at European, national and local level, while ensuring the academic freedom and professional autonomy of teachers, academics, and other education personnel;
16. Demanding that this integration be accompanied by sustainable and adequate technical, financial and staff resources and be funded from the public budget;
17. Raising awareness that solid public investment in the social change towards a more sustainable Europe, like an investment in quality education, is an investment into the future and is more beneficial for the economy in the long-run than current development models;

18. Working to raise the status and promote the attractiveness of the teaching profession to ensure the provision of high quality and inclusive education for all with a view to preparing committed, responsible, critical-thinking and active citizens who are ready to preserve our planet for future generations;
19. Demanding the provision of publicly funded and sustainable initial and continuous professional development for teachers, academics, and other education personnel on teaching about environmental issues, sustainable development and democratic citizenship, as well as the provision of adequate professional support and relevant, up-to-date teaching materials, tools, methods and practices;
20. Lobbying for more sustainable teaching and learning environments, including climate-aware and an environment-preserving infrastructure of education institutions;
21. Developing trade union policies and strategies on addressing the topic of education and environment for social change and a sustainable future;
22. Building the capacity and awareness of their affiliates on environmental issues and the climate emergency, as well as employing environmentally friendly practices in the organisational culture of the trade unions themselves;
23. Ensuring that social change towards a sustainable future, 'green' skills, climate literacy, and education on environmental sustainability is accessible and affordable for everyone, also taking into account the gender dimension;
24. Emphasising the particular role of VET and lifelong learning in retraining and developing the new 'green' skills, as well as the particular role of research and higher education in providing a scientific basis for mainstreaming environmental issues into all European and national policies;
25. Cooperating with research institutes, youth and student movements, and civil society organisations dealing with climate emergency responses and environmental issues.