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ETUCE Position on the Autumn Package 2023 of the European Semester

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1. Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2023 and Joint Employment Report
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Background

The yearly cycle of the European Semester 2023 has opened with the publication of the [Autumn Package](#), notably composed by the [Annual Sustainable Growth Survey \(ASGS\) 2023](#), the [Joint Employment Report \(JER\)](#) and the [Social Scoreboard](#) (annex to the JER). ETUCE presents here its views on the messages conveyed by the European Commission in the Autumn Package – having in mind the [crucial link](#) between the European Semester and the national Recovery and Resilience Plans – with particular regards to the assessment of the performance and challenges faced by the education sector across members states and their impact on the internal labour market. The positions expressed by ETUCE build on its [“Position on the Spring 2022 of the European Semester”](#) published earlier this year.

1. Annual Sustainable Growth Survey 2023 and Joint Employment Report

This year Annual Sustainable Growth Survey focuses on the modernisation of the education and training sectors and highlights how, during the current economic conjuncture, increased productivity levels require more workforce with the relevant skills. ETUCE notes that the overall vision proposed by the European Commission in the ASGS 2023 regarding education and training remains limited to the immediate provision of skilled workers to the labour market, without proposing any forward-looking strategy to solve the long existing problems that affect the education sector. The lasting effect of severe investment cutbacks in education throughout the last decade, and the economic shock created by the COVID-19 pandemic, have negatively impacted the working conditions of education personnel, vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantaged people, as well as the state of education and training

infrastructures. On the contrary, equitable and quality, all-inclusive education and training systems can be achieved through targeted measures focusing on the most disadvantaged, including migrant and refugee children.

Along the same lines, the announced [European Year of Skills](#) in 2023 includes a structured dialogue on digital education and skills, but it does not mention any specific measure in support of the education sector and its workers. ETUCE believes that it is urgent to take action to reverse the current trend in the European education system and counter the decreasing level of attractiveness of the teaching profession as the result of a constant reduction of public investments in education ([here](#) more on ETUCE views about the European Year of Skills). The current trend has produced a dramatic shortage of teachers in many Member States that, in turn, has worsened working conditions of teachers and other education personnel.

As described in the Joint Employment Report of this year, Member States are facing increasing teacher shortages, especially in STEM subjects and in socio-economically disadvantaged localities. This reflects on a low number of candidates entering initial teacher education and many novice teachers leaving the profession in the first years. In addition, the [Education and Training Monitor 2022](#) (ETM) indicates that often experienced schoolteachers tend to be clustered in socio-economically advantaged schools, thus reinforcing social, economic, and geographical inequalities in the society. The JER 2023 rightly recognises that teacher shortages negatively affect the quality of education at all levels, including in early childhood education and care and universities. Nevertheless ETUCE deems the efforts done by some Member States, as noted by the Commission in the JER, as still insufficient to strengthen the teaching profession and address worsening teacher shortages.

Europe needs to develop a future-oriented, sustainable approach to skills, knowledge and competencies, which requires the urgent upskilling and reskilling of the working population, both employed and unemployed. Even though the digital transformation of education and training is receiving important support coming from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, much needs to be done in order to close the digital divide in Europe. The JER points out that adults' participation in learning is still too low, and how this applies especially to the low-skilled and to digital skills.

The Social Scoreboard 2023 shows that the share of youth NEETs (aged 15-29) has increased over the period 2019-2021, thus negatively impacting the group of Member States performing below the EU-average, and that exist dramatic differences among Member States in the number of individuals who have "basic or above basic overall digital skills". However the Commission's approach to this issue does not provide reassurance about the ambiguous role that private investment can play in the education sector. In fact, the JER invites Member States to boost the digital competences of pupils and adults and to increase the digital talent pool in the labour market by mainly relying on the support furnished by "key enablers" to develop digital education and training ecosystems, including teacher training. The ETM 2022 also states the importance of pre-service teacher education and training as a major driver of teachers' adoption of digital technology for their teaching activities. It is therefore essential to guarantee transparent and accountable training to teachers to integrate technology and to tailor technology use to their own teaching.

ETUCE thus welcomes the call of the European Commission in the ASGS 2023 to take action to "increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, particularly in subjects and regions most affected by teacher shortages". However, the ASGS does not provide any indication that the

Commission intends to support public investment in education to increase working conditions, salaries, access to initial and continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers. All these measures are key to make the teaching profession more attractive and contribute to the development of new skills in young people, particularly looking at the twin transition, and to the impact of the socio-economic background on the learning outcomes of disadvantaged pupils and students. Moreover, ETUCE warns about the risks of internal and external privatisation trends – often linked to the process of digitalisation in the sector – as result of budgetary constraints, reform and new public management models, with detrimental effects on teachers’ working environment and conditions.

In this regards, ETUCE supports the European Commission calling in the JER 2023 on Member States to take action in several policy areas and, specifically, to:

- promote wage developments that mitigate the loss in purchasing power;
- ensure the availability of short-time work schemes and other job retention measures designed in a way to preserve human capital;
- ensure gender equality and strengthen the labour market participation of women and young people;
- foster equal opportunities and improve learning outcomes by addressing early school leaving;
- support upskilling and reskilling of adults;
- provide all children at risk of poverty or social exclusion with free and effective access to healthcare, early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities, effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

ETUCE considers that, to promote the professional well-being of teachers and trainers, as well as the attractiveness of the teaching profession, the ASGS 2023 should prioritise:

- public funding for modern equipment in schools and higher education institutions;
- full digital literacy of teachers, trainers, and all workers to ensure an equitable digital transition and the quality of education in the post-pandemic period;
- decent working hours, decent salaries, and paid leave for teachers and trainers;
- access to occupational health and safety services for teachers and trainers;
- increased professional autonomy and involvement in policymaking of educational institutions and staff;
- and access to continuous professional development including formal, informal and non-formal learning for teachers and trainers.

Finally, **efficient and inclusive social dialogue** processes rely on the real **participation and consultation of education trade unions in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education policy**. ETUCE fully supports the recommendation from the Commission to Member States to promote collective bargaining, social dialogue and timely and meaningful social partners’ involvement, including in relation to the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans as well as the European Semester process.

2. ETUCE key messages

In line with its statement on the Spring Package 2022, ETUCE reiterates the call to the European Commission and to Member States to:

- **Promoting collective bargaining, social dialogue and social partners’ involvement as a golden rule**, involving social partners in education in the design and implementation process of and

National Reform Programmes, Country Reports, Country Specific Recommendations, and national Recovery and Resilience Plans.

- **Supporting teachers and other education personnel in Ukraine and across Europe** in their effort to ensure quality education to children and students fleeing the war zones to EU Member States, and offering help to colleagues in Ukraine and to refugees and displaced Ukrainian residents in the EU under the Temporary Protection Directive.³
- **Increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession** by ensuring professional autonomy, academic freedom, collaborative and collegial leadership, and by delivering decent salaries and addressing any pay inequalities. It is also necessary to promote sustainable working conditions and teachers well-being, by limiting excessive workload and working hours, to establish quality entry pathways and retention practices, and to entitle to quality and inclusive initial education and continuous professional development.
- **Reversing the lasting trend of privatisation in the education sector** that has allowed an increasing number of private actors to access the education system, therefore fostering the commodification of the sector. The recent Final Report (October 2022) of the Commission expert group on quality investment in education and training has not taken in due consideration the requests of education trade unions to develop a comprehensive overview of effective education policies following a needs-based approach.
- **Enhancing the labour market prospects of young people by promoting inclusive and quality vocational education and training and tertiary education**, offering targeted employment services' support (including mentoring, guidance and counselling) as well as supporting quality apprenticeships and traineeships (particularly in SMEs), in line with the reinforced Youth Guarantee.
- **Improving learning outcomes and reducing inequalities in education and training** through the expanded access to tertiary education (particularly for disadvantaged groups), the prevention of early school leaving, the increased participation in the labour market relevance of tertiary education, with a special focus on sectors such as ICT and STEM. Individual learning accounts⁴ and micro-credentials⁵ should always abide by quality standards, and be provided by trusted and quality assured training providers.
- **Investing in reskilling and upskilling of adults**, notably in skills needed for the digital and green transitions. Providing greater incentives to workers to engage in upskilling and reskilling, investing in eco-efficient infrastructures and digital equipment, without encouraging a commodification of training paths and its detriment as a social and human right.
- **Boosting the digital competences of pupils and adults**, increasing the digital talent pool by developing digital education and training ecosystems supported by key enablers such as high-speed connectivity for schools, equipment, and teacher training; support institutions with expertise on digitalisation with a special focus on inclusion and on reducing the digital divide.
- **Providing all children at risk of poverty or social exclusion with free and effective access** to early childhood education, and education and school-based activities, in line with the Recommendation establishing a Child Guarantee (EU/2021/1004).
- Equitable and quality, inclusive education and training systems can be achieved through **targeted measures focusing on the most disadvantaged, including migrant and refugee children.**

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