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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-etuce.org
<http://www.csee-etuce.org>

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Mike JENNINGS

ETUCE Statement on Action Plan on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background

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As part of the priority of promoting our European way of life, the 2020 European Commission Work Programme announced a comprehensive legislative package addressing the issue of migration in Europe. The package includes a recently published [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) which focuses on procedures and legal pathways of admitting migrants and refugees in European countries, and a European Action Plan on integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background which is currently a subject of the [public consultation](#) by European Commission. With this consultation, the European Commission aims to collect stakeholders' views on a key aspect and possible new actions that could be taken at EU level to promote the integration and social inclusion of migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background.

ETUCE welcomes this two-fold approach taken by the European Commission in addressing migration in Europe as in the past years, the migration policy discussions on European and national level focused mainly on attracting the cheap labour force from third countries and designing legal procedures for admitting asylum-seekers. As a result, migrants in Europe are left [vulnerable to direct and indirect discrimination](#), [working the jobs with precarious conditions and significantly below their qualifications](#), and being severely excluded from society, struggling to access education, health and social services¹.

Therefore, we believe it is high time for the EU and all Member States to design and implement **a coherent, unified, and clear policy and a subsequent legislative framework** on integration and inclusion of migrants and citizens with a migrant background with a holistic vision of social inclusion. This policy must consider migration and increased diversity in the society an added value and not a threat, be guided by principles of solidarity, non-discrimination and respect for human rights and human dignity, and include strong tools against racism, xenophobia, and hate speech. It is also crucial that the European integration and inclusion policy includes sustainable and sufficient public funding and builds on a shared responsibility of all relevant authorities, including education, social support, and employment.

It is an obligation for **every Member State** not only to develop a comprehensive strategy for the integration and social inclusion of all migrants and citizens with a migrant background, but also to carry out a **regular monitoring and assessment of its implementation** and systematic evaluation of integration outcomes. Both design and implementation of these strategies must be based on **effective social dialogue** and **consultations with trade unions**, as well as on inclusion of migrants in policymaking.

In the following Statement, ETUCE demands a **prominent and multi-dimensional space for education** as a key aspect of migrants' integration and inclusion in the host country's society providing them with equal opportunities and fair chances for a good life, decent employment, housing and participation in the democratic life of a country, as well as fostering mutual

¹ Fundamental Rights Report 2019, FRA. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-fundamental-rights-report-2019_en.pdf

understanding and respect for others.² **It is crucial that the following points are addressed in the European Action Plan on integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background:**

- High quality, inclusive, culturally and socially diverse public education is provided to everyone regardless of a student's migratory and citizenship status, including adult learning.
- National inclusion strategies in education must be built on the concept of support-based inclusion of migrants, including thorough assessment of their learning needs and relevant initial and continuous professional development of teachers, academics, and other education personnel.
- The European Action Plan should promote the provision of qualified teachers, academics and other education personnel from a migrant background with fast track programmes and enhanced system of the recognition of qualifications.
- The Action Plan should address the issues of racism, xenophobia and 'anti-migrant' discourse in the media and society.
- Effective integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background requires an intersectional dimension which promotes cooperation between all policy areas of equality and non-discrimination.

ETUCE also invites the European Commission to consult the [ETUCE and EFEE Proposal for a Quality Framework for an Effective Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Education and ETUCE-EFEE Joint Practical Guidelines](#) on how to promote effective integration of migrant and refugee learners in the education and socio-economic environment of the host countries through joint social partner initiatives at national, regional and local level.

Access to public inclusive education as a fundamental right

As stipulated in the first principle of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), high quality, inclusive, culturally and socially diverse public education is a fundamental right which must be provided for to everyone regardless of a student's migratory and citizenship status, as well as ethnic origin, language, or socio-economic status. However, numerous studies show that migrants, especially refugees and asylum-seekers, face a lot of serious obstacles in accessing the public education (especially, in pre-school and post-compulsory education), have longer breaks in their education or are pressured to attend vocational education instead of tertiary education³, and are more prone to drop-out early⁴. The **spread of the COVID-19 virus and most European education institutions moving to distance learning** in 2020 exacerbated the situation with children and young adults in refugee camps and poor migrant households having no access to appropriate devices or the necessary online equipment for distance learning, and often lacking the supportive environment needed for learning at home.

Key obstacles that prevent migrants from enjoying their right to education in Europe include **language barriers, lack of information on enrolment procedures, administrative bureaucracy, limited capacities of schools and shortage of teachers**. The situation is especially challenging for unaccompanied minors who do not have carers to support them. In

² ETUCE [Resolution](#) 'Education Trade Unions on the Refugee Situation in Europe: Promoting Education as the Key to Integration and Inclusion', 2016.

³ FRA [Report](#) "Integration of young refugees in the EU", 2019.

⁴ According to the [briefing paper](#) by UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM on 'Access to education for refugee and migrant children in Europe', currently the number of children and adolescents born outside Europe who leave school early is nearly twice as high compared to native-born children.

order to address these challenges, the European Action Plan on the integration and inclusion of migrants should entail:

- **A better organised systematic and harmonised approach to the collection of data** on migrants and refugees' access to education, including school attendance and learning outcomes of various groups of migrants, on the national and European level;
- The requirement for Member States to develop and implement **a comprehensive legal framework that ensures access to quality education to all**, and use of European mechanisms for the regular monitoring of its implementation (e.g. European Semester);
- **Increased sustainable public investment in education, including early childhood education and post-compulsory education**, to ensure the integration of migrants and refugees in education and to support educational institutions with adequate financial and human resources.
- **Increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession** and addressing the teacher shortage in Europe.

ETUCE also expresses its concern regarding **adult learning** as most migrants arrive to Europe as adults and face such difficulties as the recognition of qualifications, lack of required skills, language barriers, and even discrimination when accessing education and vocational training compared to EU nationals. Therefore, it is crucial that the European Action Plan on the integration and inclusion of migrants includes provisions on ensuring that **adults with a migrant background have access to lifelong learning opportunities, re-skilling and up-skilling, language and integration courses** by securing adequate public funding for life-long learning, as well as on promoting **flexible learning pathways for adults** to match their specific needs and take into account their different age-cohorts⁵. **Publicly provided and funded adult learning** not only enhances the integration of adult migrants and their families in the social and economic life of European countries (especially, in the current context of the COVID-19 impact on the employment), but also has a positive impact on the learning outcomes and life opportunities of the second-born generation of migrants.

Integration and inclusion in the education system

Even when having access to public education, migrants and people with a migrant background are not effectively included and supported in their learning leading to a **significant educational attainment gap** between them and native-born students⁶ and early dropouts. Education systems lack resources to deal with migrants and refugees in an effective and inclusive manner addressing their specific educational needs and providing them with the targeted support, while **education personnel are left alone and unprepared** to deal with the challenges of including migrant students in education, e.g. missing official documents, overcrowded communities that cannot accommodate the number of migrant and refugee students in the local education institutions, previous psychological traumas, language barriers, etc. Furthermore, as found by the [research in the joint ETUCE-EFEE project](#) on 'Promoting effective integration of migrants and refugees in education', migrants and people with a migrant background often find themselves in a form of **housing/residence segregation and the**

⁵ ETUCE-EFEE [Joint Practical Guidelines](#) on how to promote effective integration of migrant and refugee learners in the education and socio-economic environment of the host countries through joint social partner initiatives at national, regional and local level, 2019.

⁶ Report by European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) '[Education as a tool for the economic integration of migrants](#)' prepared for the European Commission, 2016.

attendance zone principle for student distribution due to the way school choice operates, “white flight” and/or national policies of directing newly arrived migrants to certain schools.

In order to lead to the successful and comprehensive inclusion of migrants and people with migrant background in the social and economic life of European countries, the European Action Plan on integration and inclusion of migrants has to adopt a **holistic approach to education that should help to realise the full potential of every student**. This approach entails that **diversity** in the socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students and education personnel **is an added value** and that education systems should help to prepare tolerant, culturally and gender sensitive citizens with solid democratic values and help to tackle extremism, populism, xenophobia, and all kinds of discrimination⁷.

In order to present such a holistic approach to inclusion of migrants in education, the Action Plan has to include the following provisions:

- Enhancing the development of **national inclusion strategies in education** which include systemic and sustainable public funding provisions and mechanisms for regular monitoring of their implementation;
- Ensuring that European and national policies in education adopt the concept of **support-based inclusion of migrants**⁸ (including the promotion of the key role of the first language in understanding, communication and learning) and promoting its comprehensive implementation and assessment at all levels of education;
- Ensuring that support-based inclusion of migrants and people with migrant background in education is based on the **thorough assessment** of their learning needs and previous learning and socio-emotional experiences, and accompanied by **additional resources from the very early age**;
- Supporting Member States in developing **curricula which promote inclusion, diversity and intercultural dialogue** in educational institutions and society, **in consultation with social partners in education**;
- Inclusion of multicultural aspects and competences to deal with the diversity in student body in **initial teacher training and in continuous professional development** courses, and **increasing public investment in continuous professional development for education personnel** to ensure that teachers, academics and other education personnel are better equipped to meet the needs of students with a migrant background;
- Addressing the residential and attendance zones **segregation** while **promoting a positive narrative on diversity and inclusion** in the society and local communities.

Integration and inclusion in the education sector

ETUCE highlights that while European education systems are struggling with the lack of education personnel prepared for a support-based inclusion of migrants in education, **migrant teachers, academics, and other education personnel** who could help to solve this issue, in fact, face many obstacles in entering the sector, including language barriers, recognition of qualifications, and the lack of defined pathways to enter into the teaching profession. Therefore, the European Action Plan on integration of migrants should promote the provision of qualified teachers, academics and other education personnel from a migrant background

⁷ ETUCE [Resolution](#) on Setting the priorities to develop the ETUCE Action Plan for Equality. 2018.

⁸ ETUCE-EFEE project [research report](#) on ‘Promoting effective integration of migrants and refugees in education’, 2019.

with **fast track programmes and necessary continuous professional development (including job-specific or on-the-job language training courses)** with a view to qualify them to work in education systems of their host countries as quickly as possible. Inclusion of migrant teachers, academics and other education personnel in the labour market should be based on the **meaningful social dialogue** and consultation with education trade unions on teachers' needs. ETUCE also reminds that there is a need for more EU action on **assessing and recognising foreign academic qualifications** from outside of the EU that would account for national differences in education and migration policies.⁹

Racism, xenophobia and hate speech

Despite of all EU Member States having anti-discrimination laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, nationality and/or ethnicity, the 2019 European Commission's [study](#) on 'Trade unions' practices non-discrimination and diversity' shows that discrimination and harassment based on ethnic and immigrant background (skin colour, first and last names) is on the rise in Europe. In the **political context of populism and xenophobia** presenting migration as a controversial issue, attitudes of the society including local communities and parents often make it challenging to manage the inclusion of migrant students and to discuss the topic of migration in the classroom. The European Action Plan on integration of migrants should promote the development of anti-racist and anti-xenophobic campaigns and policies while raising awareness that stereotypes, racism, xenophobia and populism are present in Europe and are being propagated by right-wing and populist movements. The Action Plan should also encourage **national and European policies and media** to enhance diversity and promote democracy leading by example.

In regard to education, in particular, ETUCE reminds that truly inclusive education is based on **safe physical and social learning environments** where there is no place for bullying and hate speech and where the freedoms of opinion and expression are respected.¹⁰ Furthermore, the **cooperation between education institutions and students' families, as well as the local and wider community** is crucial for promoting mutual understanding, respect for diverse opinions and intercultural dialogue as regards migrants' inclusion in education and society as a whole.

Intersectional approach to inclusion: specific groups of migrants

Effective integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background requires **an intersectional dimension considering the heterogeneity of migrant population** and the fact that their identities and life experiences are shaped by the variety of factors among others race, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, class, nationality, and faith. Furthermore, **asylum-seekers and refugees** often face more difficulties on the road to inclusion and have unique needs that should be addressed in the integration and inclusion policies and practices. Therefore, European and national strategies of integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background should promote **cooperation and cross-cutting work among all relevant authorities** (e.g. home affairs and integration, education and training, employment and social affairs, housing and health care) **and all policy areas of equality and non-discrimination** (gender equality, people with disabilities, socio-economic background, ethnic minorities, etc.).

⁹ ETUCE's [views](#) on Public consultation on "Legal migration by non-EU citizens", 2017.

¹⁰ ETUCE-EFEE-ESHA [Joint Statement](#) on Inclusive Schools Within the Context of Diverse Societies, 2019.

According to [EIGE](#) and [FRA](#) studies, migrant women are often 'double-discriminated' in access to education and employment. Considering that women are 50% more likely to migrate for family reasons and often have to work on low-paid jobs, access to education (including language courses) and re-skilling/up-skilling is especially crucial for them. It is therefore essential that the European Action Plan on integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background incorporate a **gender perspective** in suggested policies and actions, in particular demanding the provision of **free and accessible early childhood education** to allow migrant women to study and work. The Action Plan should also ensure that a dual approach on gender equality, combining gender mainstreaming and specific actions, is also reflected in policies or programmes for the **inclusion of migrants through education**.

**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.*