



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación

<http://www.ei-ie.org>

ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education EI European Region

ETUCE priorities on the AGS 2017

September 2016

EUROPEAN REGION- ETUCE

President

Christine BLOWER

Vice-Presidents

Odile CORDELIER
Walter DRESSCHER
Paula ENGWALL
Andreas KELLER
Galina MERKULOVA
Branimir STRUKELJ

The following paper outlines the policy challenges and priorities for the education sector in the 2017 Annual Growth Survey (AGS). The paper is in line and follows on the ETUC priorities on the AGS 2017.

- a. The need to **increase public investment to boost universal and high-quality education** is urgent, especially in those countries where drastic cuts in public investment in education have caused the merger and closure of education institutions; reduced central or local level expenditure on construction, maintenance and the renovation of educational buildings; reduced funding of ICT resources and specific programmes for educational support; restricted financial assistances schemes for pupil/students; increased tuition fees at tertiary level and in parental contributions to cover costs at the pre-primary and school level; decreased expenditure allocated to human resources and reduced opportunities for professional development of teachers and educators across Europe.
- b. Education reforms should be based on an holistic, rather than fragmented, view on education and training. General education should provide the full basis of knowledge, skills and competences which should be further improved during life in and beyond the contingent labour market's interests. Europe's capacity to fully recover strongly relies on the ability of Member States to increase the level of educational outcomes of its population, and to reduce inequalities. It is recognised that inequalities are detrimental to growth, and that the only way to tackle their intergenerational transmission is to invest in equitable, public, high-quality education for all. The education sector and the teaching professionals experience a large variety of challenges related to increasing societal demands for educational effectiveness. This calls for increased emphasis on the **teaching profession, its status, initial training and continuous professional development**.



5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92
Fax +32 2 224 06 94
secretariat@csee-etu.org
<http://www.csee-etu.org>

European Director

Martin RØMER

Treasurer

Mike JENNINGS

Challenges to public investment in education

The budgetary framework of the Growth and Stability Pact (GSP) has brought a reduction in budget deficits in the Euro area. However, education investment have been the affected by persistent negative trends, mainly found in the same group of countries across Europe. In parallel, a very diverse treatment of European countries has emerged from the most recent Country Specific Recommendations, which contradicts the aim of convergence across the board. Those countries with available fiscal space have been recommended to use it to secure growth-enhancing public investment in education. On the other hand, countries at risk of breaching the rules of the SGP have been largely encouraged to provide incentives for private investments (e.g. public-private partnerships), for performance-based funding, and for enhancing business-education partnerships in all sectors of education.

Increasing privatisation of potentially profitable education services and/or performance-based funding mechanism jeopardize the public provision of education, in particular for the socio-economic disadvantaged. Wealth, gender, ethnic and geographical inequalities are deepened by privatisation in and of education, further marginalizing and excluding groups from access to and participation in education. Such funding systems rarely take into account the different micro-economic environment of schools, for example poverty rate; the existence of local industries; qualification level and rate of low-skilled as well unemployment rate of parents; and so on; which might impact the performance of students.

Policy priority on Funding of public education

A more positive narrative of high quality public education is the basis for providing the opportunity to all children and young people to learn, regardless of their socio-economic background. Equity must be the hallmark of education quality. It is crucial that public investment in education are excluded from the calculation of deficit and debt levels within the Growth and Stability Pact's rules. Education authorities and education institutions should emphasise that private market opportunities are not necessarily compatible with quality public

education, they should critically assess the benefits and drawbacks of public-private partnerships and ensure that the education system does not fall prey to lobbying interests in an extremely competitive new segment for the private market.

Public-private partnerships did not raise management standards and proved to be even more costly for public finances in the longer term. Even from an economic perspective, thus, **education must be publicly funded and regulated**. States should take all necessary measures to ensure they have sufficient revenue to fund their public education systems. This includes by diverting incentives, subsidies and other forms of corporate welfare to public services, including education, by fighting tax evasion, avoidance and tax fraud, as well as by increasing transparency and cooperation between the various national tax administrations.

Challenges to inclusive education and equality

Cuts in education budgets in many countries and increased trends towards unilateral decision-making by governments at the expense of social dialogue have seriously undermined the salaries, working conditions, and job security of teaching professionals, thus jeopardizing the attractiveness and future of the profession, as well as the democratic and sustainable development of high-quality education services. These developments, and the related problem of shortages of qualified teachers¹, are key factors to widen the equity gaps in access and learning, thus having a far-reaching impact on the quality of education and training.

Moreover, education and the teaching personnel are confronted with a rising number of challenges related to increasing societal demands for educational effectiveness:

- The considerable and sudden **flow of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers** due to wars, conflicts and persecution in some parts of the world has exacerbated phenomena like racial, religious, cultural and gender-related discrimination, and brought to the surface many more learning and inclusion difficulties that cause inequality among pupils and students;
- The terrorist attacks of 2015-2016 underlined the failure of pressing education to a one-side direction of fulfilling companies' needs while social values, democratic citizenship, and critical thinking are equally important to fight against extremist reactions, including far-right radicalism, **fundamentalism and all sorts of radicalism** as well as to prevent the marginalisation of young people. Critical thinking and media literacy are to be fully embedded in the learning/teaching environment. To integrate the use of technology into the curriculum, and to assume a leading role in shaping **the use of ICT in education**, teachers require many different skills and competences;
- According to PIAAC survey² of OECD, about 70 million Europeans lack sufficient **reading, writing and numeracy skills**, and 40% of EU population lacks digital skills. Language learning competences, competence on cultural awareness and expression, and soft competences are hardly emphasized. Teaching key competences and **focusing on learning outcomes** (knowledge, skills and competences) have contributed to many positive developments in the education systems. However, this focus has not been integrated in all the initial and continuous professional development of the teachers at national levels.

Policy priority on inclusive education and equality

Education systems and education personnel are key for creating more equal environments and better living conditions that benefit learning and life chances in a diverse society; a society that welcomes people of all ages, genders, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, cultural or ethnic origin or religion. In order to tackle the growing risk of a shortage of qualified and experienced education personnel, having to cope, at the same time, with growing societal challenges and demands, initial **teacher training and continuous professional development** should receive greater emphasis and resources. With a view to provide stronger support for teachers and pupils, more effective focus is needed on the recruitment of qualified teachers, training for early childhood education, special education needs and education for migrants and refugees, access to integrated high quality initial training and continuous professional development for the pedagogical use of ICT, as well as for decent salaries and pensions.

¹ As indicated also by EURYDICE in [The Teaching Profession in Europe: Practices, Perceptions, and Policies](#) (2015) and in [Key Data on Education in Europe](#) (2012).

² OECD: [The Survey of Adult Skills \(PIAAC\): Implications for education and training policies in Europe](#), 2013