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THE EUROPEAN
FEDERATION OF
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EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE
FOR EDUCATION – COMITE SYNDICAL
EUROPEEN DE L'EDUCATION



Joint ETUCE/EFEE Statement on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on sustainable education systems at times of crisis and beyond¹

Brussels, 26 June 2020

The sudden outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has forced schools and education institutions to suspend face to face activities across all European countries, leaving children and students of all ages out of the classroom. Teachers, academic staff, and other education personnel have shown their professionalism, dedication and commitment in this difficult time to quickly adapt to distance education, often without adequate skills and equipment available to face these extraordinary circumstances. Despite the efforts of education authorities, teachers, trainers, school leaders, academic staff and other education personnel to rapidly adapt to remote education, the disruption caused by this unprecedented pandemic crisis can have a paramount impact on European education systems.

If, on the one side, the urgent need to prepare students and education personnel to cope with the fast changes of our current and future societies can propel innovation in education forward, on the other, fairness and equal opportunities in and through education need to become the hallmark of quality education, to ensure that no one is left behind.

The economic recession following the pandemic will put considerable pressure on public finances. Enhanced investment in education and training, and on an attractive teaching profession, should be considered as an investment in the future that will help economies to recover.

As confinement measures are being eased across the EU, and schools and other institutions are gradually reopening, the European social partners in education, ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education, representing more than 11 million teachers and other education personnel affiliated to 132 education trade unions across Europe and EFEE, the European Federation of Education Employers, representing 50 institutions responsible for management of education systems at all levels from 25 countries, in the wake of their Joint [Work Programme 2020-2021](#), jointly agree to address the following outstanding issues, to further raise awareness on joint concerns, and to propose ways forward to manage future crises for resilient education systems, so that high quality education is provided and accessible for all at times of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

¹ In the context of this Statement, by “education personnel”, we refer to teachers, trainers, school leaders, academic staff and other education personnel. By “education sector” we refer to the whole education sector including early childhood education, primary, secondary education, higher education and research and vocational education and training.

In line with United Nations (UN) [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(1948\)](#), the [ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the status of Teachers \(1966\)](#) the [UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel \(1997\)](#), the [ILO Policy Guidelines on the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel \(2013\)](#), the [UN Sustainable Development Goal-4 Education 2030 Framework for Action](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), EFEE and ETUCE are committing to:

Social dialogue

- Strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining between education trade unions and education employer organisations on all matters related to teachers', trainers', school leaders', employers in education, academic staff and other education personnel's rights and obligations, professional needs and working conditions.
- Call on governments and European institutions to respect and to promote the right of education social partners to be informed and consulted on Covid-19 exit related measures affecting the education sector in order to ensure an effective development, implementation and monitoring of education policies in the context and aftermath of the current crisis situation.
- Oppose any attempt to unilaterally suspend or to overrule social dialogue outcomes or collective bargaining agreements to face extraordinary circumstances, without meaningful consultations and negotiations with education employers and trade unions on emergency measures, providing for the respect of the professional integrity of teachers, school leaders and other education personnel and ensuring quality education.

Employment and working conditions

- Acknowledge, recognise and value the professionalism and extra-burden affecting the profession when transitioning to distance learning and preparing for a potential repetition of lock-down and temporary school closures by upholding the financial sustainability of education institutions, quality jobs and decent working conditions for all education personnel.
- Address the work-life balance issues of education personnel, their right to disconnect, and gender segregation in the profession, by recognising the extra-burden that teachers with caregiving responsibilities in families (mostly women) hold on the one side, and the high-level of work-related stress on the other side, caused amongst other issues by needing to quickly adapt and acquire new teaching practices and online tools.
- Ensure that the experiences gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic with the introduction of digital tools are fairly assessed and used to support quality teaching and learning in the future.

Occupational health and safety

- Provide adequate occupational safety and health (OSH) protection for all education personnel, as schools reopen, especially in terms of personal protective equipment, hygiene supplies, training in and implementation of preventative measures.
- Develop OSH strategies taking into account the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic response measures and the risk of discrimination that education personnel can be exposed to in society, as schools and other education institutions may be perceived as centres of infection. These strategies should include prevention measures to ensure the psycho-social and mental health of all education personnel and appropriate occupational health and safety trainings at the workplace, in accordance to national practices.
- Promote investment in secure, quality, green and sustainable school buildings, digital infrastructure and equipment in schools and other education institutions for all education personnel's online safety and data protection.

Professional development and access to training

- Recognise the professional autonomy of all education personnel, in particular during distance teaching periods, and in the transition back to physical classroom settings. In such exceptional teaching circumstances, acknowledge their need to make pedagogical, educational decisions within the framework of the school's vision.
- Support all education personnel with adequate tools, resources, equipment, and initial and continuous digital training to foster innovative and inclusive teaching and learning taking into account experiences and challenges gathered during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Ensure equal access of all education personnel to relevant and sustainable professional development and professional support, especially regarding inclusive education and the mitigation of the negative impact of the distance teaching and learning on the educational community, relationships, and quality education.

Equality and inclusion

- There is every likelihood that temporary school and other education institutions' closure might have expanded the achievement gaps between students from disadvantaged socio-economic background thus causing significant restriction to social mobility and widening inequality in society.
- Promote supportive learning and teaching environments for students, teachers, trainers, school leaders, academics and other education support personnel with access to appropriate digital and communication devices and tools necessary to tackle the consequences of COVID-19 and to promote resilient education systems for the future.
- Elaborate, in consultation with education employers and trade unions, comprehensive policies to address the digital skills gap, and ensure that all students have access to the necessary quality digital material and education.
- Ensure that measures and policies to prevent the spread of the virus while coming back to physical classroom teaching and learning, take into account specific and special education needs of vulnerable social groups, including migrants and refugees, people with disabilities, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, and others, and provide them with targeted support.
- Engage to avert the impact of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on equality and inclusion in the education sector; and support the promotion of social mobility for future generation of students with a view to narrow inequality gaps, including gender equality in the female-dominated education sector.
- Implement a holistic perspective on education that aims to prepare active and responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and obligations, and preserve principles of democracy, solidarity, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination even in crises situations.

Vocational Education and Training

- Promote supportive working environments for online or blended teaching, enabling students to engage in learning processes that are meaningful and ensuring expectations for high-quality education and training.
- Work towards the continuation of international mobility/exchanges, where possible and even through the use of digital tools.
- Promote the development of strong links between the VET sector and the labour market, for example through a system of apprenticeships and by upholding the implementation of the European Framework for Quality Apprenticeship.

- Address the impact of the economic recession on job perspectives for students from vocational education and training in particular by integrating this impact in upcoming European initiatives, such as the youth support package.

Higher Education and Research

- Enhance quality working environments for online or blended teaching, thereby enabling students to engage in learning processes that are meaningful and support high-quality education.
- Acknowledge and recognize the large contribution that researchers and academic staff, and early career researchers in particular, are giving to research, development, and innovation.
- Promote academic freedom and institutional autonomy to ensure the ability of universities as collegial bodies to foster basic research, including in such areas as health, the environment, and social sciences, with the potential to curb long-term benefits for society and the economy.
- Work towards the continuation of international mobility/exchanges, where possible and even through the use of digital tools.
- Support investment in educational research on the impact of COVID-19 on learning outcomes and digitalization of education with the use of European funding programmes.

Opportunity for innovation

- Despite the undeniable pressures originating from the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector, the experience may contribute to fostering innovation. During the COVID-19 lockdown, education institutions were forced to set up emergency remote teaching approaches. Gathering the social partners' experience from this extraordinary period with a view to develop jointly a sustainable approach to digitalisation in education as regards the use of digital tools, innovative and inclusive teaching and learning methodologies and competences as well as infrastructure and working time management is paramount.

The European social partners in education are committed to actively promote this statement at European, national, regional and local level, respecting national and regional structures in the education sector.

The European Social Partners in Education are together calling on the European institutions and policy makers to give priority to education both at EU and at national level, and to commit to an extraordinary public investment plan in high quality education, training, and research through large-scale fiscal stimulus measures, needed during the recovery phase with a view to uphold democratic principles and equal opportunities for all.

This statement has been adopted by the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education on 26 June 2020.

Brussels, 26 June 2020



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