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European Trade Union Committee for Education

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ETUCE Position on

the proposal of the European Commission on the 2014-2015 Country Specific Recommendations of the European Semester

EUROPEAN REGION-

ETUCE

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On 2 June, the European Commission published its [Country Specific Recommendations](#) (CSRs) addressed to the Member States on their National Reform Programmes and convergence/stability programmes for the period 2014-2015 with a view to boost growth and increase competitiveness. The recommendations are based on an assessment of every Member State's fiscal plans for 2014-2015 to boost growth and jobs.

ETUCE, which represents 132 teachers' trade union in 45 countries, welcomes the fact that Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) 2014-2015 were provided to improve quality in education and training. To this end, almost all the EU Member States ¹ have received targeted recommendations to improve education and training.

The ETUCE believes that profound changes should be made by national strategies to reach quality education and training. The two **strategic objectives of EU2020** on education and training, concerning higher education and early school leaving, and targets in **ET2020 strategy**, have not been addressed considerably, since the CSRs' main focus is on essential issues to tackle unemployment and increase employability in Europe. We believe that CSRs have a broader influence on the education sector and on teachers. ETUCE believes that the national objectives identified by the CSRs should focus also on the implementation of essential European-level initiatives, such as the European Alliance for Apprenticeship, the Youth Guarantee and the Quality Framework of Traineeship.

We strongly welcome that the European Commission rightly identifies that education, training, research and innovation as key areas to boost growth and competitiveness, by recommending Member States to **priorities and preserve growth-enhancing expenditure in this area**. The European Commission recognises that some countries (BG, IT, SK, RO) cut public spending for education in the past years, and that others will do so in the course of next years. In a framework of continued financial consolidation and demands to bring down the public debt, it is hard to believe that Member States could find the financial resources to implement these Recommendations. The ETUCE has documented in several



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¹ With the exception of Greece and Cyprus, which are under EU/IMF financial assistance programmes

occasions the **serious crisis**² in the education sector, due to severe under-financing of education. This situation could only worsen if Member States would further cut their budgets on education. For this reason, we call the European Council and European Commission to use all the tools of the European Semester governance framework, here included CSRs, to urge Member States to protect and increase resources allocated to education, while laying out a clear vision for **targeted effective investments** aiming at the European long term strategic objectives. We believe that CSRs targeting education and training should go hand in hand with appropriate **sustainable public funding**, with a stronger focus on quality of education, and we oppose to any performance related funding of education³.

We welcome the fact that the European Commission addresses extensively the need to **tackle unemployment**. ETUCE strongly considers that more support is needed for young people, and that students' performances should be addressed. We therefore strongly welcome that most of the countries received recommendations to enhance better employment and labour market relevance in education, to tackle skills mismatches, youth unemployment and high rate of NEETs⁴.

Yet, we are greatly concerned about the fact that CSRs identify education and training as the primary tool to tackle the problem of record youth unemployment and of the high rate of young people not in education or training (NEET). We believe that Europe can only recover from this unprecedented job crisis by **ending austerity policy and developing alternative economic policies targeting investments**, job creation, including fresh jobs for graduates helping developing a knowledge-based economy, and social inclusion.

Numerous countries received recommendations to link **education and training to labour market need**. We strongly oppose to considering labour market needs are the primary aim of education. Education is a public service conceived to give the opportunity to all citizens to receive quality training and to get a chance to improve their life and to get employment. In this view, education and training is a long-term process and cannot serve the continuously changing immediate needs of the labour market.

We believe that other actors must be taken into deeper consideration to implement consistent and coordinated CSRs' objectives. **Teachers**, who stand at the core of the school environment, thus bearing bigger responsibility for education outcomes, are hardly mentioned throughout these CSRs⁵. **High quality teaching and training of teachers**

² For reference, ETUCE Action and Campaign Framework on the Economic Crisis:

- [ETUCE survey - The continued impact of the crisis on teachers in Europe, 2013](#)
- [Analysis of a mini-survey on the impact of the economic crisis on teacher education in the European Union, 2012](#)
- [ETUCE action and campaign framework on the economic crisis - Analysis of the mini-survey, 2012](#)

³ Recommendation to CZ.

⁴ Recommendation to BE, BG, CZ, DK, FI, FR, DE, HU, IE, LV, LT, LX, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, SW, UK.

⁵ Assessments for BG, IT and SK but there is no specific related CSR; CSR only mention training for trainers and tutors in Spain.

affecting recruitment and retention cannot be underrated, especially given the destructive effect of the crisis on the teachers' personal and professional well-being.

Motivated and motivating teachers are one of the essential conditions to reduce dropouts at any level. We welcome that early school leaving and dropouts are presented as an important target for some countries⁶. Nevertheless, the European Commission fails to recognise quality teaching as one of the basic condition to tackle the problem.

We believe that it is essential to have more CSRs on **adult learning**⁷ to improve basic skills of adults, workers, and unemployed people, taking into consideration the PIAAC results. According to the OECD, 20% of the EU workforce still has a serious lack of basic skills, including low literacy and low numeracy skills. 25% of adults also lack the skills to effectively make use of ICT. This creates bottlenecks and mismatches for a number of jobs and professions. We urge the European Commission to use the instrument of CSRs to pledge Member States to increase investment into learning of the adults and low skilled.

We support that the European Commission highlighted the need of **inclusiveness** in education to reduce poverty and inequalities in Europe. An enhanced and inclusive access to quality **early childhood education** for disadvantaged children is mentioned in some Recommendations⁸ as the key driver to exit poverty and exclusion. Nonetheless, CSRs limit this target to very few countries addressing the integration of migrant children. We believe that the scope of inclusive education must be extended to **all socially and economically disadvantaged people**, and should be present in each CSR.

Moreover, we welcome that numerous countries were recommended to **improve VET, apprenticeship** and work-based learning⁹. It is essential to touch upon the issue of the modernisation of education and training systems, to increase the availability of good quality traineeships or apprenticeships and the permeability between higher education and VET in all EU countries¹⁰.

Regrettably, the modernisation of education and training is only foreseen in light of a strengthened **partnership with business and employers**. We strongly believe that **European and national social partners, particularly the teachers trade union**, should be included in any partnership affecting quality education and the transition from education to the labour market. Proper social dialogue should be set to guarantee the full and beneficial implementation Country Specific Recommendations.

Social partners' contribution in designing, implementing and monitoring education and training policies embedded into the Recommendations is a key issue, which should be explicitly mentioned in the Country Specific Recommendations. ETUCE believes that only through this effective partnership the implementation of CSRs will be successful.

⁶ Recommendation to: AT, BE, BG, FR, HU, IT, MT, PT, TO, ES

⁷ Recommendation to : BG, ET, FR, PL, IE, LT, LUX, RO

⁸ Recommendation to: AT, BG, CZ, RO, SK and HU to some extent

⁹ Recommendation to: BG, HR, DK, EST, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SK, SI, ES, SW, UK

¹⁰ Recommendation to: IT.