

Joint commitment of the European Trade Union Committee for Education, the European Trade Union Confederation and the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association to combat homophobic bullying in schools, in workplaces and in society

On the 2012 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, the European Region of Education international, the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe), affirm their commitment to strengthen their collaboration at national and European level to prevent and combat jointly homophobia and transphobia at school, in workplaces and in society.

In Europe, the protection of human rights in schools has been a topic of concern both among the public and in education trade unions. Research demonstrates that bullying and harassment prevention initiatives, which address homophobic bullying, improve the ability of students, teachers, school staff and parents to enjoy their human rights in their everyday lives. In this context, we welcome the UNESCO publication *Good Policy and Practice: Addressing Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions*¹.

Homophobic bullying and harassment occurs every day within society: in the streets, at work, in the media and in political life and targets individual children and adults on the basis of their perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It is in this context that schools should reinforce their efforts to create safe working environments where teachers can work and students can learn in an atmosphere of respect.

Everywhere in Europe, many LGBT students drop out of school because of the bullying they suffer from both other students and school staff. Homophobic and transphobic bullying is much more serious than just the “unpleasant part of a teenage culture”. It has potential long-lasting effects in terms of poor mental health, under-achievement and underemployment. But even more importantly, it has an impact on the whole school environment.

These findings and the fact that they reflect a European- wide phenomenon are extremely worrying. However, solutions do exist and rest in the hands of decision makers at national

¹ Review of Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions, Prepared for the International Consultation on Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 6-9 December 2011, 12 March 2012, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002157/215708e.pdf>.

and European level², in civil society organisations and in trade unions representing teachers and school staff. As democratic representative organisations, trade unions play a special role in society and contribute effectively to the development of many aspects of society, including education. Trade unions should continue to be at the forefront in tackling any forms of discrimination, at the workplace and in all their actions and activities. They must be visible and recognized as the workplace actors when it comes to equality. They therefore should be fully involved in the development and implementation of anti-discrimination policies at national and EU level.

Schools must not only reflect but even celebrate society's diversity. Teachers and other members of school communities need to learn from each other. This can be done by improving the contents of curricula and textbooks, removing embedded gender and other stereotypes, and also through social events and improving organizational structures of schools.

To make sure that teachers feel confident to deal with diversity issues in the classroom, materials should be circulated and teachers should have access to relevant pre and in-service quality teacher education and continuing professional development. National authorities must ensure the provision of quality education and health services for all. This process should be sped up with an effective public information campaign that challenges homophobia and negative stereotypes. Schools should adopt and implement anti-bullying policies in collaboration with the whole school community: teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and students.

Good practices have already been initiated at national level by many public authorities, civil society organisations and trade unions. Let's share them and expand them!

ETUC, ETUCE and ILGA-Europe reaffirm today their commitment to work jointly towards those objectives and to seek that, in the future, no one within the school community will be bullied, harassed or discriminated, on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

² Homophobia, transphobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in the EU Member States, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, July 2011,

http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/research/publications/publications_per_year/fra_homophobia_synthesis_en.html;

Factsheet 1, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights in the European Union, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010, http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-Factsheet-Homophobia-Study-2010-FS1_EN.pdf;

(Factsheet 2) Key legal trends in the protection of LGBT rights in the EU (2008-2010), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010, http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-Factsheet-Homophobia-Study-2010-FS2_EN.pdf.

ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation speaks with a single voice on behalf of the common interests of workers, at European level. Founded in 1973, it now represents 85 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 12 industry-based federations. In 2008 ETUC adopted recommendations on promoting equal rights, respect and dignity for workers regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

www.etuc.org

ETUCE, the European Trade Union Committee for Education represents 135 Teacher Unions in Europe and 12.8 million teachers from all levels of the education sector. ETUCE is a Social Partner in education at the EU level and an Industry Federation within ETUC, the European Trade Union Confederation. ETUCE is the European Region of Education International.

www.etuce-csee.org

ILGA Europe, the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association represents 359 LGBTI organisations from 44 countries across the European Region. ILGA-Europe enjoys participative status at the Council of Europe; receives its largest funding from the European Commission; and enjoys consultative status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

www.ilga-europe.org

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Bernadette Ségol

General Secretary, ETUC



Martin Rømer

European Director, ETUCE



Evelyne Paradis

Executive Director ILGA-Europe

