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Draft ETUCE Statement on the road to recovery from the COVID-19 crisis

(for adoption by the ETUCE Committee on 16 June 2020)

The COVID-19 pandemic is a health, social, and economic crisis. Its repercussions will impact the more vulnerable the hardest, and education is a key sector to address its negative consequences, and recover. Education trade unions across Europe have, since the beginning of the pandemic, mobilised to provide support to education personnel at all stages of the pandemic, from the transition to distance teaching, to the reopening of schools strategies, and will continue to do so, on the long road to recovery from this crisis. The economic costs of the pandemic will linger even after the imminent threat to public health has passed. As the EU economy is expected to contract by about 7.5% in 2020¹, far deeper than at the time of the economic and financial crisis in 2009, government deficits are expected to surge. Hit by a deep recession, without the necessary fiscal space and an uncertain recovery, governments may be reluctant to commit to boosting lagging investment in education and willing to open the doors to a mix of private and public financing in education and training to allow for rapid injections of investment. This approach will have the potential to create lasting inequalities and injustices for generations to come. In taking stock of lessons learnt from the past, and in keeping with the fact that a big number of countries are gradually relaxing restrictive measures through the elaboration and implementation of exit strategies across Europe,

we call governments to:

- Comply with and fulfil European and international obligations and responsibilities with regard to a safeguard and respect for fundamental trade union rights and freedoms;
- Further promote, preserve and cherish fundamental principles and values, among other things, of the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the [ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the status of Teachers \(1966\)](#) and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997), the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#);
- Commit to effective social dialogue and collective bargaining in all matters related to teachers and other education personnel, as well as to guarantee effective elaboration, implementation and monitoring of the COVID-19 exit related measures at all levels of education in a climate of transparency and accountability;
- Respect the right of education social partners to be informed and consulted in all matters relevant to them, in particular on education policies, teachers and other education personnel's issues, by means of constructive consultations and timely information at all levels;

¹ European Commission, 'European Economic Forecast, Spring 2020', Institutional Paper 125, May 2020

- Commit to boosting public investment in high quality public education for all, to address growing inequalities in access and provision of quality education and training, to secure school and other education institutions' infrastructures, and to provide teachers and other education personnel with resources, tools, and professional space to make the profession more rewarding;

Distance education and digitalisation in education

- Respect, in all matters pertaining to the provision of education, and as an overarching principle the professional autonomy of teaching personnel, in particular in the transition back to traditional classroom settings;
- Address the pressing issues of education personnel's' in-service digital training, both initial and continuous, and equally invest in secure, quality, digital infrastructure in education institutions;
- Elaborate in consultation with education 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;
- Refrain from unduly relying on private ed-tech companies in the provision of digital material in education, in view to preserve the public education sectors' independence from private interests;

Inclusion and equality in education during and after the COVID-19 crisis

- Ensure that no learner or teacher is left behind during and after the time of the COVID-19 crisis because of not having access to appropriate digital and communication devices and tools or because of facing specific individual and/or social barriers;
- Ensure that measures and policies to prevent the spread of the virus in the return to school-based education and the re-launch of the economy in Europe, take into account specific 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;
- Guarantee a safe and supportive physical and social learning and working environment both during the distance learning period and school-based learning;
- Ensure equal access of all teachers, academics, and other education personnel to relevant and sustainable professional development and professional support, especially regarding inclusive education and mitigation of the negative impact of distance teaching and learning on the education community, relationships and quality of education;
- Prevent the magnifying impact of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on equality and inclusion in the education sector and in society as a whole;
- Implement a holistic perspective on education that aims to prepare active and responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and preserve principles of democracy, solidarity, equality and non-discrimination even in the crisis situations.

Investment in education

- Safeguard the public provision and governance of education systems from the influence and grasp of private sector investment and actors and increase public

investment in high quality public education for all at all levels of education so as to ensure equal access and provision of quality education and training

- Strengthen the control of tax fraud, corporate tax evasion and enforce new rules to reduce fiscal dumping and financial speculation across Europe and beyond, with a view to expand the public revenue base according to the principles of redistribution.
- Revise the Stability and Growth Pact rules to allow for an EU fiscal framework that excludes future-oriented public education, training and research investment from the calculation of the deficit and debts levels;
- Commit to an increased EU budget to respond to the challenges of increasing inequalities in educational access and to back the implementation of the fiscal capacity of the EU.
- Adapt the EU Multiannual Financial Framework to raising challenges of increasing inequalities in educational access and opportunities according to the principles of solidarity between countries;

**The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 132 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.*