



REPORT

ETUI-ETUCE Training Seminar
18-19 November 2021

Together in the Union, for Quality Education -
Trade Union Capacity Building for Renewal beyond COVID-19



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Background

The two-day ETUCE-ETUI training built on the core outcomes of the ["Your Turn!: Teachers for Trade Union Renewal"](#) project and responded to the commitment taken by ETUCE in its [Action Plan on Organising and Renewal](#) (2020) to addressing challenges around recruitment, engagement, organising, and bargaining power, faced by education trade unions across Europe, took place in Brussels on 18-19 November 2021.

For many years, all forms of social dialogue, collective bargaining in particular, have been key instruments to guarantee that the democratic voices of education trade unions as the legitimate representatives of teachers and other education personnel contributed to shaping public policy in education, their world of work, and the respect for their status. At the same time, the public sector has played an important role in counterbalancing the effects of the private, for-profit sector. In recent decades, the dominance of market mechanisms in the education policy debate and in other public services, cuts in public investment, education reforms, digital and green transitions, and demographic trends including ageing among education personnel and activists, have altered the organising environment of education trade unions. In addition, there have been attempts to restrict or avoid social dialogue, the involvement of education personnel through their unions in policy consultations, and to undermine the scope of collective bargaining. These developments have increased burdens on teachers and other education personnel and have increased pressures on the capacity of unions to support members while organisational resources are declining. Many education trade unions have been facing eroding membership and reduced member involvement. This is, in part, related to the changing environment that may weaken the influence and impact of trade unions at the bargaining table and their ability to shape public policy, including the support of decent working conditions and salaries for teachers and other education personnel. The combination of these trends has led several ETUCE member organisations to strengthen their union around the most important force they have: their current and potential membership. In several countries and unions, this has meant refocusing union capacity to meet the needs of those who have not been involved in trade unions, often at the margins of the labour market, to connect with young people and other under-represented groups, to reframe the narrative and to develop a stronger presence in the workplace, but also in the community.

Trade union renewal can be defined as the process of 'building the organisation from within, through the engagement and development of its membership'¹. The [ETUCE Action Plan](#) is built around the following five key themes, which have been identified as priority areas of engagement by ETUCE member organisations:

1. Organising for equalities: mobilising the under-represented
2. Organising around ideas and campaigns: reframing the narrative
3. Organising at the workplace: building at the base
4. Organising around work: connecting the industrial and professional
5. Organising with community: building alliances and coalitions

¹ N. Bascia and H. Stevenson, *Organising teaching: Developing the power of the profession*, 2017, Education International

Therefore, the ETUCE-ETUI training seminar gathered education trade unions representatives from 10 countries across the European region to share knowledge and develop skills around the issue of trade union renewal. More specifically, it sought to promote diversity within union structures (including the involvement of young members); to develop union members' activism and leadership (including on issues such as environmental sustainability); to address teachers' challenges in their work and in their profession; and to promote unions' engagement with the community.

The **training programme objectives** are the following:

- make a **critical reflection** on the elements integral to renewal and the unique circumstances of individual unions;
- identify ways of **organising thinking around renewal** and renewal needs to be adapted to reflect individual contexts;
- **share knowledge and information** in terms of union organising so as to find similarities and establish a common vision and capacity to address organising challenges;
- **develop strategic and analytical thinking skills**;
- build the collective strength of education trade unions by capacity to **organise coalitions and strengthen alliances** with other relevant actors within the education community.

Introduction



Opening the event, **ETUCE European Director Susan Flocken** reasserted the commitment of ETUCE to supporting and monitoring the activities undertaken by its member organisations to make trade union renewal a reality. Moving forward on the implementation of the [ETUCE Action Plan on Organising and Renewal](#) (2020) and on the priorities on renewal set in the [ETUCE Work Programme 2021-2024](#), this event presents participants with an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills on communication, addressing sustainability and attracting young members. Most importantly, this training seminar can help framing the work of the participants' unions around these crucial issues in order to renew their organisations.



Gabriela Portela, ETUI Learning & Development Coordinator reminded participants of the importance of training to learn from one another and get stronger as individuals, as a union, and as a collective. One of the goals of this training seminar is to bring education trade unionists together to share their experiences in their activism and work. ETUI's mission is linked to trade union renewal, as training is an integral part of building union capacity.



Trade Union Education And Training Programmes To Develop Member Activism



Christian Chevalier, former General Secretary of the UNSA (France), presented UNSA's successful strategies in the field of trade union renewal. He explained that the weakening of a union and, by extension, the need for renewal are first signalled by a steady decrease in membership. UNSA has been working on its renewal project for 15 years. This has given them the necessary experience to identify seven conditions for success:

1. Valuing collective agreement and involvement in the renewal project.
2. Understanding the long-term nature of the union renewal process.
3. Developing a system for recruitment - UNSA has a 3-tier system: working by objectives, weekly membership monitoring, and training and support for local teams.
4. Union proximity with teachers: regular meetings with teachers at their workplaces to renew the image of the union, gain new members, and rebuilt the link with the profession. UNSA also offers specific teacher trainings on, for example, addressing LGBTI issues in education, or on taking care of students with disabilities.
5. Recruiting young members and leaders.
6. Improving internal and external communication to inform members of the union's actions, and to enhance the image of the union in public opinion.
7. Adapting union activities and work to the COVID-19 pandemic.

How To Improve Communication Strategies To Engage With More Members/Under-Represented Individuals? Addressing Their Needs Within The Union Agenda

Gaëlle David, ETUCE Communication Officer highlighted the importance of improving internal and external communication for union renewal. Trade Union Renewal is about building the organisation from within, through engagement, participation and development of its membership. Therefore, unions need to use communication to reach and engage with members.

1) ORGANISING FOR EQUALITIES

Some groups within the teaching profession, such as young teachers and other education personnel, those in part-time or short-term contracts, migrants, women, minorities, or LGBTI risk being marginalised and under-represented in all aspects of trade union organisation, if unions fail to engage with them. To strengthen the education trade union, marginalised groups who are not unionised need to be connected with and attracted into the union.

2) ORGANISING AROUND IDEAS AND CAMPAIGNS

Traditional trade union campaigns are not enough to shift the balance of power and the dominance of decades-long market-based narratives and ideas. Only strategic and comprehensive narratives based on the needs of communities and accompanied by the mobilisation of the collective resources of trade union members, create a shift in the public discourse.

3) ORGANISING AROUND WORK

Workplace representatives can act as links between members, non-unionised education personnel, and trade union structures. To do so, education trade unions need to develop the communication skills and capacities of their representatives.

4) ORGANISING AROUND PROFESSIONAL ISSUES

Trade unions' engagement around professional issues of teachers and other education personnel is central to build the collective capacity of the organisation. Trade unions' communication should always include the realities and issues of the teaching profession.

Concrete communication strategies that trade unions can implement to better engage with under-represented individuals and foster activism, as outlined in the [Your Turn! handbook for critical reflection](#), were presented:

- Analysing the target audience of messages and adapting language accordingly;
- Collecting and analysing data on the use of ICT communication tools;
- Valuing the exchange of experience and practices regarding communication among trade unions
- Increasing under-represented groups' connection, involvement, and democratic engagement by identifying and communicating on issues relevant to them;
- And encouraging members' participation in global and transnational campaigns through social media.

Working groups then discussed the importance of involving migrants, LGBTI people, teachers with short-term contracts, and staff accompanying students with disabilities into union work and practiced preparing targeted messages for different under-represented groups. Advisory panels and committees, specific trainings, or short news on social media and the union's website were proposed as possible channels for better engagement with vulnerable groups in order to stimulate the union renewal.



Involving Young People In Education Trade Union Work

Valeryia Despaihne, ETUCE Programme Officer, talked on the importance of involving young people in trade union work. She presented the ongoing work around the research study on young members' engagement within education trade unions titled "*Mapping labour market trends and trade union policies for young members*", which includes, among other things, two surveys (one of them still on-going) targeting ETUCE member organisations as well as individual teachers across 51 countries. The study is expected to further support ETUCE member organisations in their work around trade union renewal. The study aims to map the existing structures of ETUCE member organisations for engaging young teachers, but also to analyse young members' engagement and activities within trade unions, ongoing activities of trade unions on behalf of young teachers, and factors enabling, preventing or discouraging young people from joining or becoming active in education trade unions.

Preliminary findings of the 2020 ETUCE Survey "Education Trade Unions and Young Members" show that:

- The rate of young members ranges from 1 % (UED, Denmark) to 72% (NTUESCWU, Uzbekistan)
- 32% of the responding education trade unions have no structures for young members in place
- Of those who do have one or several structures,
 - 20% have a Youth Committee or Council
 - 13% have Youth Working Group
 - 9% have a Youth Coordinator
 - 7% have a Youth Representative at the Statutory body/bodies

Participants believed that obstacles to recruiting and retaining young people are both on the demand and supply side: on the one hand, trade unions need to respond to young peoples' priorities, such as environmental sustainability, or work-life balance issues; on the other hand, there is often a poor understanding of the history and benefits of trade unions among the general population, and trade unions are sometimes painted in a bad light by the media which affects their reputation and attractiveness.

How To Open The Trade Union Agenda To New Societal Challenges: Environmental Sustainability

Ekaterina Efimenko, ETUCE Coordinator on Working Conditions, Human Rights, Equality and Environment, gave participants some tools to help open the trade union agenda to topics of sustainable development and climate emergency.

The link between environmental sustainability and renewal might not seem self-evident at first, yet addressing societal challenges is an integral part of ensuring that education trade unions address societal challenges, so they stay politically relevant and continue engaging and attracting members. Climate emergency and environmental destruction are crucial topics for young people and new generations. There are some concrete actions that trade unions can take to address these issues and foster their renewal:

- lobby for an interdisciplinary learning and holistic approach to environmental sustainability in education;
- ensure adequate guidance and support to teachers and other education personnel (initial and continuous professional training) on teaching about environmental sustainability;
- advocate for sufficient public funding for 'green skills';
- advocate for environmentally-friendly infrastructures in education institutions;
- seek alliances between different stakeholders and actors, and strong partnership and networking among the education trade unions for implementing the education for environmental sustainability;
- and promote 'green' practices within the organisational culture of the trade union itself.

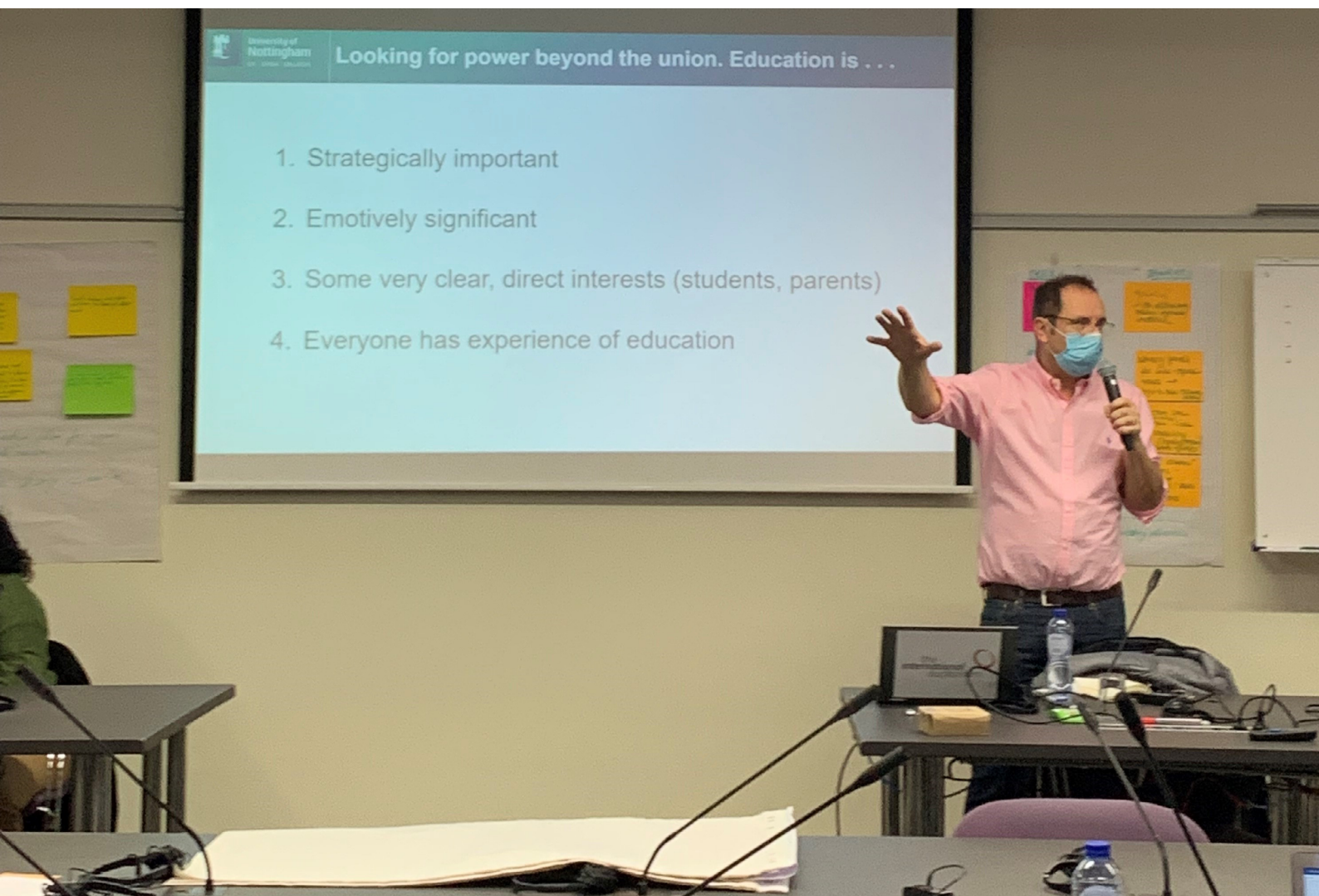
Training participants had an opportunity to present examples of actions that can be integrated in the trade union agenda to tackle sustainability and climate emergency. Three sets of union actions were highlighted: first, demanding that curricula at all levels of education address climate change and environmental issues; second, developing more union activities on these topics; and third, making work settings more environmentally friendly.

Organising With Community: Education Trade Unions' Ability To Build Alliances



Howard Stevenson, professor at the University of Nottingham and researcher for the Your Turn! Project, spoke on the link between the union's capacity building and coalition building. He explained that trade union renewal relies in part on the union's ability to organise with community and build alliances, as this is crucial to amplify their voice and enhance their power. A simple model of union power relies on three pillars: members have common interests, members have common views, and members can act collectively in a way that impacts the employer.

Smaller working groups provided training participants with the space to discuss trade unions' needs in organising and recruitment of new members, as well as possible alliances that they can make at all levels (international, national, regional and local) to maximize their bargaining power. Participants mentioned students' unions, scientists and research institutions, civil society, families, trade unions from other sectors, and media among possible allies.



Conclusion

As emerged during the training seminar, many ETUCE member organisations have faced declining membership, uneven engagement among members, and a lack of representation of certain social groups (i.e., young, migrant, or LGBTI teachers) in the past few years. These worrisome trends have contributed to weaken their bargaining power and influence on education policy in their respective countries. ETUCE member organisations brought together national experiences and common challenges during the two-day event. Concrete ideas and proposals were put forward on what education trade unions can do to promote renewal within their organisational structure:

- Developing training programmes for union members and education personnel
- Developing a clear, long-term recruitment strategy
- Improving internal and external communication
- Involving young people in trade union work through consultation in special bodies/platforms
- Opening the trade union agenda to salient societal challenges such as environmental sustainability
- Building alliances with civil society organisations and the wider education community

Seminar participants expressed their determination to renew and re-organise into trade unions to be more in touch with a diversity of interests, to build alliances with civil society, and to be able to address today's societal challenges.



Abbreviations

UNSA	National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (France)
ETUI	European Trade Union Institute
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education