ETUCE

European Trade Union Committee for Education

EI European Region

Education International
Internationale de l'Education
Internacional de la Educación

http://www.ei-ie.org

EUROPEAN REGION-ETUCE

President
Christine BLOWER

Vice-Presidents
Odile CORDELIER
Walter DRESSCHER
Paula ENGWALL
Andreas KELLER
Galina MERKULOVA
Branimir STRUKELJ

5, Bd du Roi Albert II, 9th
1210 Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 224 06 91/92
Fax +32 2 224 06 94
secretariat@csee-etuce.org
http://www.csee-etuce.org

European Director

Martin RØMER

Treasurer

Mike JENNINGS

ETUCE MESSAGE
TO THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE NEW COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, and FUTURE GENERAL AFFAIRS and EDUCATION COUNCILS and ITALIAN PRESIDENCY on

Investing in Education

Adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 22 July, 2014

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)[1], which represents 129 teacher unions in Europe, i.e. more than 11 million teachers from all levels of the education sector in 45 countries, **strongly demands that European leaders prioritise investment in education as the sole way to increase potential economic growth in Europe and to reduce social inequalities.**

Education is an investment in the workforce of the future, and as such it has a key role to play in tackling the economic crisis, increasing social well-being and democratic participation in society, as well as in fostering sustainable and quality economic growth prosperity. The ETUCE welcomes the general consensus on the fact that **investment in education**, lifelong learning, skills and training are crucial to achieve smart, inclusive and sustainable growth as **envisaged in the Europe 2020 Strategy**.

Effective social dialogue is imperative to achieve this goal at national and European levels. However, the economic crisis has also severely affected social dialogue. Obviously, countries with a well-established social dialogue have coped better with the crisis than others. This is why **we urge the European Union institutions and the member states to strengthen social dialogue in all fields, in particular in education and training, at European, national, regional and local levels**.

Since the outbreak of the economic crisis, the quality of education and training is deteriorating due to under and reduced investment. PIAAC results prove that there is an extremely high rate of low-skilled adults in Europe, and a high number of people are not in employment, education or training (NEETs). There are also numerous new social challenges, which must be considered, such as **increased nationalism and extremism, EU-scepticism and growing social inequalities**.

---

[1] *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 teacher unions.*

In order to face these challenges derived from the economic crisis, the ETUCE Committee adopted **10 Key Messages on '[What is needed to improve the Quality of Education in Europe?]'** on 23-24 October 2013, which is being a key guideline for ETUCE member organisations.

ETUCE has documented, on several occasions, the serious crisis[2] that the education sector is facing, caused by severe under-financing, and **has long called on the European Council and the European Commission to invite Member States to reverse this trend and to stop considering education as an easy target for fiscal consolidation**.[3]

Recent Eurostat data[4] for the period 2009-2012 illustrate the fact that many countries implemented **deep cuts in their education budget**. The social and economic risks arising from the fact that Member States do not invest enough in education are great. The most recent statistics show that public expenditure on education decreased both at EU average level and in the majority of Member States.

- On the **EU average level,** public spending in education **decreased overall** by 3.6% as a relative share of EU GDP in 2011, and remained constantly low at 5.3% in 2012. With the decrease in GDP in 2012, public expenditure for education fell further in real terms.
- The **share of GDP devoted to education at Member State level was reduced** in 14 out of 27 countries[5], reaching the highest troughs in Romania (-27%) and Portugal (-13%), and remained at the same level as in 2011 in 9 countries[6]. In 2012, the share of GDP invested in education was increased only in 4 countries[7] .

---

[2] For reference, ETUCE Action and Campaign Framework on the Economic Crisis:
- ETUCE Member organization mobilizing for Quality of Education based on 10 Key Messages on 'What is needed to improve Quality of Education in Europe?', *2013-2014*
- ETUCE webpage on Crisis in Education,
- 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*
- ETUCE film documentary: 'Exiting the crisis through quality education', first screening *September 2014*

[3] Recent Positions adopted by the ETUCE Bureau/Committee:
- ETUCE Statement on CSRs 2014 on education and training, *June 2014*
- ETUCE Statement on EU 2020, *June 2014*
- ETUCE Statement on the European Commission proposals in the framework of the European Semester 2012, *June 2012*
- ETUCE Resolution on the Financial and Economic Crisis, *November 2012*
- ETUCE resolutions adopted in November 2012 by the ETUCE Conference

[4] Eurostat data on General government expenditure by function (COFOG):
www.appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=gov_a_exp&lang=en

[5] Namely: BG, CZ, DE, ES, CY, LV, LT HU, PT, RO, SL, SK, FI, UK.

[6] Member States that didn't experience any variation from 2011 to 2012 were: BE, IE, EL, FR, IT, NL, AT, PL, SE. However, all these countries had gone through education cuts in the previous years, with high levels reached by EL (-7.0% variation 2010-2009), IT (-6.7% variation 2011-2012), and SE (-4.2% variation 2010-2009).

[7] Namely: DK, EE, LU, MT.

- Overall, the **education spending per student was reduced** in 7 Member States[8] between 2008 and 2010 for all education levels, and in another 9 Member States spending was decreased for certain education levels only.[9]

ETUCE is greatly concerned about these figures.

This situation could deteriorate if Member States further cut their budgets on education. For this reason, **ETUCE calls on the European Council and European Commission to use all its powers and instruments, including the European Semester governance framework, to urge Member States to protect and increase resources allocated to education, while laying out a clear vision for targeted effective investments that aim to achieve the European long-term strategic objectives**.

ETUCE welcomes the fact that the European Commission has identified, on several occasions, education, training, research and innovation as key areas to boost growth and competitiveness, by recommending, through European Semester tools such as the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and Country Specific Recommendations (CSR), 2014, that Member States prioritise and preserve growth-enhancing expenditure in these areas.

ETUCE affirms that **growth-enhancing investments must target education and training** as the area that has the biggest potential to put the EU on a path towards sustainable economic growth, improve competitiveness and social cohesion, raise citizens' standard of living and well-being, foster redistribution of wealth and provide citizens with the skills and competences they need for coping with labour-market transitions and the repercussions of economic crises.

However, in a framework of continued financial consolidation and, in light of the demands to bring down public debt, it remains a significant challenge for Member States to find the financial resources to invest in education. This is why ETUCE believes that **Europe can only recover from this unprecedented financial, economic and social crisis by ending austerity policies and developing alternative economic policies that target increased investments and job creation**. The latter should include new employment opportunities for graduates with the aim of developing a knowledge-based economy and improving social inclusion. For example, some Member States could transfer excessive military spending to investment in quality education.

ETUCE proposes **that education be excluded from the calculation of public deficit and debt within the European Growth and Stability Pact**, strongly affirming that education has a value to society that goes far beyond issues relating to levels of expenditure and cannot be limited by austerity-driven budgetary policies.

---

[8] This was the case in countries with existing low levels like BG, HR, IT, LV and RO as well as in ES for primary, secondary and tertiary education. Overall education spending per student was also down in EE although the decrease concerned primary education.

[9] This was the case in BE, CZ, CY, NL, AT and SE for tertiary education, in CY, LT, LU and AT for upper secondary education, and in SI for primary and lower secondary education.