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ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education
Education International - European Region

ETUCE recommendations to address the Long COVID-19 syndrome in the education sector

Adopted by the ETUCE Committee on 7-8 November 2022

The [ETUCE study](#) on the impact of the COVID-19 Omicron variant (March 2022) showed that the spread of the Long COVID-19 syndrome is increasingly threatening the health and ability to work of teachers, academics, and other education personnel across Europe, posing new challenges for education trade unions.

According to the [clinical case definition](#) by the World Health Organisation (WHO), Post COVID-19/ Long COVID-19 condition 'occurs in individuals with a history of probable or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, usually 3 months from the onset of COVID-19 with symptoms that last for at least 2 months and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis.'

On 20 September 2022, ETUCE organised an [Online Seminar](#) on Long COVID-19 with more than 50 education trade unionists to shed light on the scientific evidence regarding the Long COVID-19 condition and its labour-market impact on the education sector.

Based on the outcomes of the ETUCE Seminar, the following document is a collection of trade union actions and good practices regarding the Long COVID-19 syndrome in the education sector. It is intended as an agile supportive tool for education trade unions to address the challenges of the Long COVID-19 syndrome.

Possible education trade union actions to be implemented at a national and European level include:

At European level:

1. Raising awareness on the **high exposure** of teachers, academics, and other education personnel **to the contraction of the COVID-19 virus** due to the contact-intensive nature of their profession.
2. Lobbying the implementation of the Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) calling for **adding COVID-19 to Annex I of the [Commission Recommendation 2003/670/EC](#)** concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases, which promotes the prevention, recognition and compensation of causal agents and occupational diseases directly linked to relevant occupations.
3. Requiring concrete **social dialogue and cooperation** with education trade unions in **preventing and combatting (Long) COVID-19**, including through the introduction of the Long COVID-19 syndrome within **European tools for risk assessment** for the education sector.

4. Raising awareness on the **disproportionate impact** of Long COVID-19 **on women**, who represent the majority of the workforce in the education sector, as well as **on people with special needs**.
5. Demanding meaningful comparable **research on Long COVID-19 at European level** in consistency with the clinical WHO definition of Long COVID-19 to acquire a deep understanding of the impact of the Long COVID-19 syndrome on education workers with a holistic approach.
6. Continuing to **share knowledge and good practices** among education trade unions to build capacity in supporting and protecting education workers affected by Long COVID-19.

At national level:

1. Lobbying the **recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease** for the education sector in the national regulatory systems.¹
2. Raising awareness on the **underreporting of and social stigma** around Long COVID-19 cases as well as **unequal access to treatments** across and within countries.
3. Calling on national governments to ratify the [ILO Convention C121](#) on Employment Injury Benefits which establishes workers' right to compensation in relation to occupational diseases.²
4. Advocating meaningful social dialogue to develop **workplace preventive measures** tailored to the needs of the education sector beyond the pandemic period, through regular **risk assessment** in education institutions and at the individual level.
5. Engaging in effective social dialogue and reinforced collective bargaining to develop **protective strategies** and **adequate return-to-work**, including through adaptation of the workload and tasks, to better protect education workers affected by the Long COVID-19 syndrome.
6. Supporting education workers in **legal procedures** to encourage the development of jurisprudence and media attention around cases of Long COVID-19.

Collection of good practices shared by ETUCE member organisations:

- Engaging in social dialogue with employer representatives to negotiate an **extension of sick-leave periods and more time for reintegration, recovery, provision for additional payments** (extra income, compensation for medical expenses) and demanding the set-up of a **specific fund** for people suffering from Long COVID-19.

¹ See [Eurostat Report](#) (2021) providing a detailed review of countries and respective economic sectors where COVID-19 is recognised as an occupational disease and/or an accident at work.

² See the [ETUCE table](#) on the list of ratifications of the ILO Convention 121 in the European Region.

- Opening **hotlines for employees affected by Long COVID-19** in the education sector³.
- Increasing **income security in case of long-term illness** caused by the Long COVID-19 condition.
- Seeking cooperation with **Social Labour Inspectors** to assess the impact of Long COVID-19 in the education sector.
- Provide **legal and social support** to members affected by the Long COVID-19 syndrome.
- Developing **guidance for local branches**⁴ and a **joint union protocol** as a basis for negotiation with employers to develop a consistent approach to management at the workplace of education workers affected by Long COVID⁵
- Advocating the **inclusion of Long COVID-19 within the disability law** to ensure better protection to education worker affected by the Long COVID-19 syndrome.
- Conducting **surveys among members** to shed light on the gap between data provided by the national authorities and the real cases of Long COVID-19 and investigate the reasons for underreporting.

Other useful resources:

- [Report of the ETUCE Online Seminar on Long COVID-19.](#)
- [WHO website on Long COVID-19/Post Covid syndrome.](#)
- EU-OSHA guides for [workers](#) and [managers](#).

³ Link to the hotline on Long COVID-19 by AOb (the Netherlands) <https://rb.gv/yonyiw>

⁴ Guidance on Long COVI developed by UCU (The United Kingdom) https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13189/Long-Covid-branch-bargaining-guide/pdf/UCU_Long_Covid_guidance_Sep_22.pdf

⁵ Joint Protocol by education trade unions in the United Kingdom <https://rb.gv/vf1ttw>