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## ETUCE statement on the impact of the energy crisis on the education sector

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 resulted in concerted efforts by the Kremlin to use energy as a political weapon. This, combined with a renewed demand for energy, a decline in the productivity of energy supplies, and a longer heating season, pushed gas and electricity prices to record levels. These increases in the cost of gas and electricity have come at a time when economies throughout Europe are still fragile as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, putting the provision of adequate public services, such as education, under threat. The effects of increasingly restrained government fiscal policy will most likely disproportionately impact Europe's most disadvantaged communities who in the midst of multiple intersecting global crisis already find themselves struggling to survive. This rise in the price of gas and electricity is further proliferating into a cost-of-living crisis that pushes many workers into precarity as basic goods become unaffordable to millions. The energy crisis additionally threatens the support and confidence needed to drive a just energy transition. In order to overcome this confluence of challenges, governments should put into place policy measures that allow for public services to respond and surmount the threat posed by the rise in gas and electricity prices. These policy measures, in line with the European Trade Union Confederation's [recommendations](#), include making targeted payments for individuals who are struggling to pay their energy bills, introducing a price cap on the cost of energy bills, creating a tax on the excessive profits of energy companies, and implementing anti-crisis support measures that have been co-designed with trade unions.

ETUCE believes that the current trajectory of countries throughout Europe choosing to implement austerity measures in response to the energy crisis jeopardises the public provision of the common good of education as well as the quality of education and therefore threatens the fundamental human right to education. Already, [some countries](#) in Europe are considering making fiscal savings by not allowing in-person learning in education institutions because they cannot be heated, proposing switching back to distance learning. In [other countries](#) across the continent, education institutions have had to make cuts to spending on support staff, maintenance and school equipment to pay their energy bills. ETUCE strongly condemns these assertions and urges governments to pull out of these attempts, which undermine the working conditions of teachers and the human right to education. Ultimately, this not only has a negative pedagogical impact on students, especially the most disadvantaged, but also a social impact as it would deprive students of a welcoming and warm learning environment and the opportunity to receive at least one proper daily meal. At the same time, this strongly affects the working conditions of teachers, increasing psycho-social risks and work-related stress.

Indeed, the emergency teaching and learning during the COVID-19 crisis has shown the detrimental effects of online and remote education on the quality of education and mental health and well-being in education. ETUCE further recalls that ensuring that teachers, academics, and other education personnel have access to safe and healthy working environments is a fundamental right at work. This entails the duty of governments to provide access to education institutions, with adequate heating to protect the physical safety of teachers, academics, other education personnel and students, particularly in those countries which are more exposed to low temperatures in wintertime.

In order to fulfil the European Pillar of Social Rights and work to realise the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, governments throughout Europe must therefore commit to introducing adequate actions to curb the energy price rise, to sustainably invest public funding in education and to raising teachers' salaries in line with inflation. The European Parliament has already in its [5<sup>th</sup> of October resolution](#) on the EU's response to the increase in energy prices in Europe called on member states to 'urgently maintain and reinforce' public services, such as education institutions, that find themselves jeopardised by the rising energy prices. Additionally, the European Commission has highlighted its discussion paper in preparation of the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) 2023 that energy prices and affordability will have a considerable impact on the labour market, with the risk of increasing the number of the so-called 'working poor'. ETUCE therefore considers crucial to address these issues in the upcoming ASGS and in the Employment Guidelines 2023, also reinforcing the financial support provided under the REPowerEU plan that integrates the essential funding opportunities provided by the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Furthermore, ETUCE advocates for the proposed recast European directive on the energy performance of buildings to facilitate the renovation of public premises, such as education institutions, also underlined in the final report of the European Commission expert group "Investing in our future: quality investment in education and training".

Supporting and expressing solidarity with its member organisations who are taking actions to raise pay and improve the working conditions of teachers, academics and other education personnel in these challenging socio-economic circumstances, ETUCE reiterates that education is a crucial investment for the present and future wellbeing of Europe. Fair and inclusive social dialogue remains the only way to ensure effective solutions to the needs of education workers and to provide a quality service to all students. The underfunding of education during this period of energy upheaval is not only unfair but also deepens the crisis and causes long-term damage to the fabric of our society.

ETUCE condemns any policy response by governments across Europe that threatens the fundamental human right to the public good of quality education through choosing to make cuts to crucial public services.

*\*The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) represents 125 Education Trade Unions and more than 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.*