

## Resolution on

# Shaping The Future of Europe: The Role of Education Trade Unions

Adopted by the ETUCE Special Conference, the Regional Special Conference of Education International, meeting in Athens on 27-28 November 2018

Further to and consistent with the Resolutions adopted by the 7th EI Congress in Ottawa in 2015, the Resolutions adopted at the ETUCE Conference in Belgrade in 2016, this ETUCE Special Conference

Acknowledges that:

### **1. Education and the future of Europe**

The accelerated need to counterbalance economic and social priorities across Europe has resulted in intensified efforts by education trade unions to ensure that European policy initiatives targeting education, fair and sustainable employment and social policies are in line with and respect the view of teachers and other education personnel at all levels of education. This is reflected in the commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nation (UN), to make the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality for all citizens of Europe and to shape the European Education Area post-2020. To this end, education trade unions have been amplifying their call to ensure an effective and meaningful involvement of education social partners in the design and implementation of education and investment policies including through the European Semester;

### **2. Education – a vital prerequisite for democracy**

Free universal public education, which is of high quality in its provision and ensures access to all; which tackles the level of inequality, enabling the poorest in society to move out of poverty; which challenges stereotypes related to economic-social criteria gender, ethnic origin, migration status, sexual orientation, religion, special needs, age or other strands of discrimination; which promotes the principles of inclusion by encompassing critical thinking and universal values as well as social and active citizenship competencies, contributes to more equitable, fair and democratic societies;

### **3. Education – a fundamental right and a public good**

Across Europe, the public sector has for many decades played a positive and important role in counterbalancing the effects of the private, for-profit sector. In recent years, the prevailing dogma of free and unrestrained market mechanisms and thinking in the education policy debate and other public services, cuts in public investments, and labour market deregulation have undermined the quality of education as a public good, thus jeopardizing the concept of fair societies and challenging freedom and democracy.

Considers that:

### **4. Social dialogue and collective bargaining**

Attempts to restrict or to deny social dialogue, involvement in policy consultation and to limit or undermine the scope of collective bargaining, including through the direct intervention of international and European financial institutions to introduce regulatory changes which seek to restrict or impose modifications on the rights to organise and bargain and to replace trade unions at the negotiating table with NGOs or other actors, as well as attempts to restrict education union activities, constitute a direct attack on unions and their members and, as such, on democratic voices in the education sector at all levels;

## Shaping The Future of Europe: The Role of Education Trade Unions

**5. Education trade unions and the effective exercise of rights**

Respect for the status of teachers and educators and the recognition of education trade unions as the legitimate representatives of education personnel is a vital element of quality education and of democracy. Trade unions are institutions without which democracy cannot function. The legitimate collective power of education trade unions gives them a voice and a democratic mandate which cannot be replaced by other actors in society. A deterioration in the institutional and social legitimacy of unions endangers their future as collective organisations whose existence allows individual teachers and educators to organise in order to assert control over all aspects of their work and of their profession;

**6. Defending education against privatisation and commercialisation**

Education systems should be publicly funded and regulated. Across Europe, they are being increasingly exposed to privatisation and commercialisation. This appears in multiple forms, including the contracting-out of educational services; the growing transfer of costs to students who are increasingly treated as consumers rather than learners; the development and implementation of standardised testing; the adoption of 'business-like' management practices in the direction of education institutions; increasing reliance on commercial imperatives, narrowing the core of education to those skills or educational outcomes that are relevant for the needs of the labour market and of businesses. In some cases, countries are even privatising education or parts of it and loosening or breaking the vital link between education and democracy, thus jeopardizing the public mission of education and its value for democracy and society;

**7. Broader societal challenges: reinforcing solidarity against fragmentation**

A decade of economic crisis and the rhetoric and lasting effects of austerity which emphasises the role of the individual and of personal ambition as opposed to social aspirations and collective actions, are eroding traditional forms of social solidarity, breaking societies apart, leading to social exclusion, alienation and widespread impoverishment. Teachers and other education personnel's power is enshrined in the notion of collective purpose and collective action through trade unions, of strengthening each one to strengthening all. The wide-spread societal discontent has provided opportunities for education trade unions to build support and closer links with and among teachers and other education personnel, parents, students and the community as a whole around fundamental issues. These include the defence of democracy and the public interest including by intensifying organising and servicing efforts amongst the most marginalised and/or underrepresented, as well as by solidarity actions with education trade unions from other countries.

**8. Organising is a right**

Teachers and other education personnel have the right to organise and to protect themselves, to share a common vision and to articulate their own demands on quality education. Education trade unions can play a key role in building the capacity, commitment, confidence and hope of individual members to act collectively within their trade union, to define their interests, to assert influence over their work and the context in which their work is organised and to achieve progress. The right to organise, to bargain, to participate in negotiations and in collective actions, like the right to quality education, is a fundamental right, as it enables members to acquire other rights and protect their profession;

**9. Educational reforms changing the world of work**

Professional and working conditions are inevitably interdependent. Legislative changes and shifts in education policy debates globally and at local level, including on the effective use of ICT in education, change the context and organisation of the work of teachers and other education personnel. The working lives of teachers, educators and education support personnel are increasingly threatened by fixed-term contracts and precarious employment, by the erosion of the status and security of teachers, by de-professionalisation, limited autonomy and influence over curriculum and teaching practises, and by unrewarding working conditions in increasingly competitive working environments characterised by stress, instability and isolation. Young teachers and female educators are particularly affected by the proliferation of fixed-term contracts, increases in working time and the deterioration of work-life balance which intensify precariousness in their life and fuels inequality and fragmentation;

**10. Education and the digital transformation**

Major changes generated through digital transformation in industries and services and the transition from traditional employment to digital jobs require innovative learning and teaching approaches. A successful use and integration of new technologies to help deliver quality education for all depends largely on highly-qualified and well-trained teachers. However, the use of new technologies and new teaching competencies regarding the pedagogical use of ICT at all levels of education

## Shaping The Future of Europe: The Role of Education Trade Unions

can have a negative impact on the professional prerogatives of teachers and other education personnel, causing distress, uncertainty and isolation. Education trade unions have a key role in encouraging and identifying the ICT and digital training needs of teachers.

Therefore, calls on ETUCE and its member organisations:

- 11.** To give priority to strategic discussions and decisions on organising and development, membership recruitment and retention and leadership training on the main features of trade union renewal with full respect for national differences in legal frameworks, structures and traditions;
- 12.** To monitor and to analyse tendencies in education trade union membership composition, including union density, age, gender, and ethnic group composition and to encourage common initiatives in the areas which are already a priority in EI/ETUCE actions to link policies with organising efforts including in such areas as precarious employment and the campaign for decent work, quality terms and conditions of employment in education, equality, and in campaigns against privatisation and commercialisation;
- 13.** To seek cooperation from, and joint action with, the broader union movement, other trade union federations and other groups at European, national, regional and local levels, including the school community and society at large, to build awareness and support on wider challenges and to amplify the arguments for public investment and quality education for all;
- 14.** To support teachers' and education personnel's capacity to organise themselves by contributing with unions' expertise, experience and leverage to develop leadership in schools and education institutions;
- 15.** To increase members' connection, involvement and democratic engagement in union structures of teachers and education personnel; to build the commitment and confidence of individual members to act collectively, coherently, effectively, to mobilise and to defend the teaching profession including through formal and informal networks and communication strategies and tools;
- 16.** To develop the skills and capacities of members, advocates and activists through professional learning and trade union education and to engage the education skills of teachers to better communicate the values and role of education and public services within the education community and the larger society;
- 17.** To increase efforts to enrich the public debate and to organise around ideas and values that can inspire the mobilisation of members and resources with a long-term vision with a clarity of message and enhanced communication within the education community and the wider society on education as a public good;
- 18.** To build on progress in effective solidarity actions to defend the trade union rights and the professional interests of teachers and education personnel in order to reduce fear and to make it possible for those teachers and educators suffering from violations of human rights, or from actions to freeze or limit the exercise of those rights, to be free to join and become active in trade unions;
- 19.** To re-enforce efforts to build the capacity for effective social dialogue and collective bargaining to secure the best outcomes for members on salaries, pensions, working conditions and professional needs, as well as to oppose the detrimental effects of neo-liberal reforms on the environment in which education trade unions operate;
- 20.** To favour and to encourage the exchange of information, strategies and practices on organising and servicing among education trade unions across Europe;
- 21.** To use the ETUCE campaign "Shape the future of Europe with teachers" as a tool to formulate clear demands to politicians, making the voice of teachers and educators heard and raise awareness on the issues at stake.