



ETUCE Statement on the European Commission's Green Paper "Migration and Mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems"

*adopted by the ETUCE Executive Board
in their meeting of 11-12 November 2008*

Preliminary remarks

The ETUCE would like to welcome the European Commission initiative to address one of the most important challenges faced by European education systems today – a growing diversity in classrooms as a result of increased immigration and internal EU migration. Over the last 15 years, the significant rise in numbers of children from a migrant background in schools goes hand in hand with their educational under-achievements and weak socio-economic position. The educational disadvantage of migrant children requires additional consideration, solutions and means.

ETUCE is the European trade union industry federation for education within the ETUC, representing 110 teachers' unions in the EU/EFTA from all levels of the education sector, including primary, secondary, VET and higher education. ETUCE is also an autonomous organisation within the Education International Pan-European Structure.

The Green Paper approach to the issue

The ETUCE agrees with the Green Paper main approach that "schools must play a leading role in creating an inclusive society". In today's rapidly changing environment, education plays a vital role for achieving a successful cultural and social integration of migrants and for overcoming the socio-economic risks of a failure in this field.

Nevertheless, the ETUCE stresses that:

- Although schools are a cornerstone for the promotion of equality in the society, it is important to acknowledge that there are *limitations to what schools can do*. EU societies should admit that they are immigration countries. A big majority of migrants enter the EU with the determination to stay in the host country, looking for an economically more prosperous area. Only a small minority of them are seeking to join back their country of origin. EU member states should therefore better commit themselves and allocate the necessary financial means for improving migrant children education achievements together with their good social integration. A supportive societal context - appropriate employment and housing policies, social and health protection and other integration efforts - is essential for making an opportunity out of the increased societal diversity in Europe.
- Giving children truly equal opportunities regardless of their ethnic, migrant or socio-economic background and reducing early school leaving are - from the point of view of the ETUCE - some of the most significant issues to address. The schools system must therefore be organized in a way that the schools do not reproduce the existing inequalities in society. In the opinion of the ETUCE, this is most effectively achieved in a *free, public and comprehensive school system of uniform high quality*.

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- a holistic EU approach towards the issue of education for migrant children in Europe would take into account the existing EU anti-discrimination legislation applying to the field of education. Indeed, the issue of education and migration is closely linked to the fight against stereotypes and discrimination in the EU. These two phenomena can undermine all integration efforts accomplished. Schoolchildren are extremely sensitive to the existence of racism and discrimination and they are most vulnerable to the effects of them. Alongside the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), a new Proposal for a Council Directive combating discrimination bases on religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation has recently been released by the Commission. These two instruments – the latter one is still a subject for approval by the Council with unanimity – should be considered closely with any other initiative targeting migrants' education. Moreover, the EU should closely follow and ensure the application of EU anti-discrimination legislation. The inclusion of human rights and anti-racism in the teacher training curriculum must be ensured at all levels. Affirmative action and other diversity accompanying policies could equally allow to fully benefiting from the variety of opportunities offered by multicultural societies.
- The absence of provisions on school attendance for illegal migrant children in the newly adopted “Return Directive” could be considered as conflicting with the objectives of the Green Paper. In a former statement, the ETUCE pointed out that absence as a potential violation of the Right to Education (UN Declaration on Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child). Additionally, the right to education of children detained in retention centres is not guaranteed in the Directive, but subordinated to “the length of their stay”. The latter provision thus stands as contradictory to the reference to Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child¹.

The target group of the Green paper

The ETUCE underlines that using a broad concept of “migration”, including third-country nationals and EU citizens, as well as first and second generation migrant students in the target group of the Green Paper, is an accurate approach. However, the ETUCE warns that *excluding Roma and other disadvantaged minorities from the target group of the Green Paper creates confusion*. Indeed, the Commission explains in footnote n°2 that “many aspects of the analysis and of the set of educational challenges” relevant for migrant children are also applicable to minority children education. Many of the policy and structural solutions presented in order to improve migrant children education could certainly apply to Roma and other minority children – language classes, desegregation of schools, early school start, etc. It should therefore be stressed that a holistic approach at EU level is more than necessary in order to avoid confusion and doubling of measures and standards.

The policy responses

In relation to the analysis presented in the Green Paper, the following policy responses are of outmost importance according to the ETUCE:

1. Supporting policies:

¹ See ETUCE Statement on the “Return Directive”, June 2008

Early Childhood Education² (ECE) programmes are a critical factor for successful educational achievements and lifelong learning of all pupils. The ETUCE considers that alongside its social role as childcare, ECE is first and foremost for the child and the child's opportunity to learn, to develop knowledge, skills and values³. The need for *early start in education for all is therefore of paramount importance*. The ETUCE has continuously called for national and EU initiatives to make sure that all children have access to ECE. An ECE that is free of charge will prevent exclusion of children with a poor socio-economic background and is therefore especially relevant, with regard to migrant children. ECE is further particularly important for their acquisition of second language. At national level, efforts should be spread out in order to improve enrolment rates of migrant children in ECE, at very early age.

It is furthermore necessary to have in place a *formal induction support system for migrant children who arrive in the country*. The lack of such systems leads to schools not knowing if the migrant students have special educational needs, including emotional and behavioural problems. Appropriate accompanying structures, in primary but also in secondary education are also of big importance. For example, homework classes, centres and various tutoring opportunities should be available in order to assist migrant background pupils in their learning. According to the ETUCE, they should be fully integrated into the school time and system. In this sense, one of the findings of the ETUCE project on Roma children education implemented in the period 2004-2006 was that all-day-schools have proved to be far more inclusive and efficient compared to half-day-schools.

School institutional infrastructure providing high level of support and expectation to every student is of vital importance according to the ETUCE. The ETUCE stresses that whatever his or her background, all pupils should have access to intensive mentoring, tutoring and counselling. Such an effort is of particular importance for migrant and other children of disadvantaged backgrounds. There is absolutely no reason to lower any academic standards whatsoever.

In order to teach pupils to be responsible citizens, there must be an emphasis on *democratic process within schools*. Pupils at all stages in schools must have opportunities to be active members of the school community contributing to decision-making within the classroom as well as within the organisation of the school. Extra-curricular activities should also be made available, giving equal access to all pupils and teaching about equality, tolerance and respect for those that are different. This kind of schools and activities are at the heart of future democratic participation of all citizens in social life and are of great importance of migrant children integration.

Public authorities today must recognise and support the rights of children and young people to develop and use their own first language. Moreover, the command of another language than the official one in the country should be valued and recognised as an important supplementary competence. At the same time, the acquisition of the host language is essential for the overall education integration of the child. *Support for students and their parents in learning the language of the immigration country, but also the tongue of their country of origin* is thus particularly necessary. Various programmes for mother-children language classes, language tuition and other so-called "0" classes, together with early language testing have proven their

² ETUCE defines ECE as education taking place before compulsory education, including kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, childcare centres and other similar institutions.

³ See ETUCE response to the European Commission's second stage of consultation of the European Social Partners on reconciliation of professional, private and family life, July 2007.

efficiency and usefulness for improving the educational achievements of migrant children with different language background.

2. Teacher quality⁴ as a key factor for a successful education integration of migrant pupils:

Teacher education programmes are responsible for preparing future teachers to promote meaningful, engaged learning for every student or pupil, regardless of race, gender, ethnic heritage or cultural background. They should therefore address problems of migrants' inclusion and educational under-achievements. The ETUCE has been urging national educational authorities to take action in order to ensure preparedness of teachers to work in multicultural settings. Training for teachers should be guaranteed on how to exert an anti-discriminatory behaviour in the classroom, ensure the inclusion of human rights and anti-racism in teacher training curriculum. Additionally, the appropriate number of multilingual teachers should be educated within the Teacher Education Institutions today.

It is of vital importance to *integrate multicultural education within the teacher education curriculum*. Students in teacher education should be helped to develop a clearer sense of their own ethnic and cultural identities and to examine their attitudes toward other ethno-cultural groups. The teacher education curriculum should also give attention to socio-cultural research and knowledge about the relationships among language, culture and learning. Teacher students should appreciate how to assess the relationship between the methods used in classrooms and the preferred learning and interaction styles in their pupils' homes and communities. They should be taught how to use various instructional strategies and assessment procedures that are sensitive to cultural and linguistic variations, and how to adapt classroom instruction to accommodate the cultural resources that their learners bring with them to school. It is also important that students are exposed to examples of the successful teaching of ethnic, migrant or language minority students.

Education materials are also concerned by the efforts to improve migrant children education achievements and overall integration. As the populations of today's European societies and the student population in schools becomes increasingly diverse, education manuals and textbooks have to meet the needs of all learners and reflect their diversity. Educators must therefore develop curricula that integrate multicultural viewpoints and histories, apply instructional strategies that encourage all learners to achieve.

The ETUCE considers that *recruitment policy should reflect the full spectrum of society*, in terms of gender, class, ethnic origins or beliefs, sexuality, disability and migrant communities. Teaching staff should mirror the society in order to give positive image of the national social reality to all pupils. In order to achieve such a representation respectful to diversity, the teaching profession should be highly valued and attractive. We believe that more should be done to attract and retain teachers from across the social spectrum, particularly men. Governments must be pro-active in promoting inclusive recruitment policies and must remove any barriers, formal or informal, to entry to teacher education arising from racist, sexist or homophobic beliefs and behaviour.

Teacher assistants from the migrant communities are also of outmost importance for today's schools. In order to ensure a good cooperation between home and school -essential for improving migrant children achievements- a strong link is to be built between the school authorities, teachers, parents, migrant communities and pupils. The necessary contact with

⁴ See the ETUCE Policy Paper on Teacher Education in Europe, November 2008.

parents could sometimes be build only with the help of a third person speaking the mother tongue of the parents. During the period when parents and their children do not master the language of the immigration country, the help of the so-called teacher assistants is fundamental. ETUCE strongly supports the recruitment of such personnel within European schools according to the needs of the locality.

3. Structural adaptations in European educational systems⁵:

The ETUCE stresses that a comprehensive school system at the compulsory level, from early childhood onwards should be freed of segregation. From ETUCES' perspective, *school desegregation* is one of the most important issues to tackle with regards migrant children education. Desegregation of schools should take into account the large diversity of migrants and minorities present at national level, together with their very often low socio-economic background. Action taken toward desegregation of schools – also *de facto* segregation because of housing or different kinds of ability grouping-tracking – is urgent. However, desegregation process is successful only under certain conditions. ETUCE thus wants to warn education authorities at national level on the dangers created by desegregation policies for the attractiveness of schools left in ghetto areas. A joint action with a coherent approach is needed from different levels of policy making - school level, regional and city levels, together with the educational authorities. Additionally, in some countries, teacher positions in the desegregated schools are simply cut off, while the teaching experience among minority or other disadvantaged pupils should be valued and used in consequence.

School system permeability has also proved to have positive effects on children with educational difficulties. More flexibility is equally needed in order to provide more opportunities to move between Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education for example. The ETUCE strongly supports the individual and flexible paths to upper secondary level vocational education for those in need of special support. The practice in some countries of demanding a large number of failing students to re-do the school year is ineffective and should be replaced with possibilities for more individualised learning paths. Thus a core national curriculum must define broadly the key competences to be achieved, but there must be flexibility built into it to enable teachers to respond to the needs of the individual pupils and the community.

According to the ETUCE, educational achievements of pupils depend highly on the availability of teachers to respond to their immediate demands. It should therefore be ensured that *class sizes are sufficiently limited* and that they allow the teachers' classroom practice to move away from traditional didactic teaching methods to ones which allow for greater student engagement, creative thinking and problem-solving skills. In countries where the class sizes are large, a reduction of class sizes would have the most immediate effect across the system for better providing all students with the key competences. Large classes make it more problematic for the teacher to maintain an adequate disciplinary climate and the consequent heavy workload undermines their capacity for innovation. ETUCE urges national policy-makers to take the appropriate steps to reduce the upper threshold on the number of pupils in one class.

The ETUCE also wants to stress that *significant additional resources are needed for the education systems in Europe*, in general. There is a need to see greater public investments in the education sector. In the EU member states, current levels of investment are too low, with 7 countries spending just around 4% of their GDP on education and a total of 12 countries

⁵ See ETUCE Statement in response to the European Commission's consultation on *Schools for the 21st Century*, November 2007

spending below 5%. The ETUCE is further convinced that ensuring quality and equity education for all citizens is a public responsibility. Education is a fundamental human right, and it must be publically funded and publically regulated. This is, in the understanding of the ETUCE, a precondition for ensuring that all students have an equal access to education and are provided with key competences for lifelong learning.

4. EU level action:

A particular attention has been paid – in the 2008 Council and Commission Joint progress report on the implementation of Education and training 2010 – to the specific disadvantages which pupils of migrant background face. Therefore, the current Green Paper initiative of the European Commission rightly addresses the question of migrant children education and the contribution of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) to the improvement of their educational achievements.

In relation to the Green paper question on how the EU could impact positively on the education of children from a migrant background, the ETUCE would like to underline that:

- Migrant children education should remain a key priority in the future strategic framework on education and training beyond 2010⁶.
- At European level, the EU should take the appropriate steps in order to motivate national governments to become more pro-active on migrant and other children from disadvantaged background educational achievements.
- The EU should continue to financially support national and local initiatives on migrant children education and thus support good practices via its funding programmes like the lifelong learning one.
- Via the OMC, a frame for cooperation should be set up, on possible ways to enhance migrant children education. In this relation, the EU should continue to act as a facilitator for information and experiences exchange. However, as far as the Clusters and Peer Learning Activities are concerned, the ETUCE recommends that the clusters are given a clear mandate, a timeframe and aim. It appears to be even more important that a closer link between the clusters activities and the political level is established if their efficiency is to be enhanced. An improved dissemination plan for the results of the clusters activities should also be planned.

On the concrete questions raised by the Commission in its Green paper, the ETUCE considers that:

- In order to improve national and EU level policies and measures towards a successful educational integration of migrant students, *the appropriateness of establishing indicators on closing the education gaps should be explored* by the OMC.
- Within the limits of its role and competences in the education sector, the EU should also explore the ways to revise the Directive 77/486. In its actual formulation, the Directive does not correspond to the social reality in EU and provides for misunderstanding. *The ETUCE would support a revised Directive if its revision is made in*

⁶ See also the ETUCE Statement on priorities for the new strategic framework for EU cooperation on education and training beyond 2010, May 2008.

accordance to new social realities and needs of migrant pupils and their families. In this sense, a broader approach to education of migrant children should be undertaken. The issue should be seen from the wider context as it is very often closely linked to social exclusion, labour and housing disadvantages and cultural segregation of migrants' families.

The ETUCE urges the Commission to take the above mentioned issues into account and to continue informing and involving the ETUCE, as the social partner for teachers, in its future work on the issue of education and migration.