



Promoting Public Sector Education in an Age of Austerity

Women's Caucus

Economic Empowerment of Women and Equal Pay

Priority Issues and achievements 2010 – 2012

The activity report covers the different activities that ETUCE has carried out from 2010 to 2012. The chapter entitled *Equal opportunities* sums up the different areas on which ETUCE with its member organisations has worked over the past two years. The starting point is certainly a good knowledge and understanding of the EU policies on equality, as well as EU inclusion policies and the necessity for ETUCE to undertake active steps to promote the development of equality between men and women in the labour market and in trade unions.

One of the focal points and priority areas in the European Union is the 2010-2015 Strategy for equality between men and women, which covers in particular equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; gender equality in external actions as well as horizontal issues.

The achievements of ETUCE in the past three years have been made in a particular economic and political context in Europe: the social impact of the crisis. ETUCE addressed in particular the four issues: impact of the economic crisis on women and gender equality; reconciliation of work / union and family responsibilities; gender equality and non-discrimination in unions; non-discrimination in schools – challenging gender stereotypes.

Based on these achievements, ETUCE has identified with its member organisations the most important issues and challenges for teacher trade unions. They now have to seek and delineate ways to work on these priorities at local, regional and national level and consider the different possibilities of interaction with the European level.

Women's Economic Empowerment in the Context of Education: Addressing Practical Needs, Setting Strategic Goals

Many of the gains made during the twentieth century around gender equality in education and linked to civil, human and social rights are being challenged now by governments committed to neo-liberal policies¹. Women's participation in education, both as learners and as teachers, has long been identified as central to changing women's unequal position in society, including their lack of economic resources. In fact, according to the OECD, up to half of the economic growth that has occurred in OECD countries over the last 50 years is due to increased education within those populations. This can be traced directly to the fact that more girls have entered higher levels of education and to having achieved more equality between men and women in terms of the number of years they spend in education². Of course, these gender gains in education are by no means comprehensive, and boys and girls are affected in different ways. For example, there is still the issue of gender stereotyping within education³, which is closely linked to the fact that girls are still heavily

¹ <http://www.genderandeducation.com/resources/contexts/legislative-frameworks/>

² *Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship*, 2012:3.

³ ETUCE has recently completed their gender stereotyping project and are in the process of compiling their final report.



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under-represented in the so-called 'hard' subjects of science, technology and maths, and the increasing drop-out rates amongst boys before they complete secondary education.

Translating those equality gains that have been made within education into economic empowerment for women has not been so easy; even in the most 'women-friendly' countries women's equal access to economic power has not yet been achieved. In fact, the transition from education to employment is a critical stage because this is when the foundations are laid for most of the inequalities that women face in their working lives⁴. More women than ever are entering the labour market, but they tend to experience many difficulties in obtaining their first job, they are more likely than men to work part-time, and, as we all know, they earn less than men. According to statistics gathered in 2009, the pay gap between men and women in OECD countries remains stubbornly high: women earn an average 16% less than men and female top-earners are paid on average 21% less⁵. What we face is a situation where, even when we manage to make advances and get more girls into school for longer and they are able to make great achievements at the highest levels of education, when they enter the labour market all of those advances risk being lost.

It may, therefore, be useful for us, as education unions, to think about the distinction between women's practical needs and their strategic goals⁶, when it comes to ensuring equal access to and equal experiences within education, as well as greater economic equality with men. Practical needs should be met through concrete and immediate responses, while strategic goals should take into account more long term transformation in women's lives.

In the current climate, and as a matter of urgency in many of our countries, women's practical needs include developing strategies and tools that can be used to convince governments that policy responses to the crisis should 'build women's roles as economic agents'⁷, because this will in fact contribute to lessening the negative effects of the economic crisis. One way this could be done is by closely monitoring the implementation of existing gender equality legislation, especially when stimulus packages are introduced to provide an economic boost, to ensure that women do not lose their (often precarious) jobs or see their salaries reduced in greater numbers compared to men. In high- and middle- income countries, migrant women, in particular, are at great risk of losing their jobs⁸.

⁴ *Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship*, 2012:4.

⁵ See the OECD report on *Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship*, May 2012. Available at - <http://www.oecd.org/employment/50423364.pdf>

⁶ See Molyneux, M. (1985) 'Mobilisation without emancipation? Women's interests, states and revolution in Nicaragua', *Feminist Studies* 11: 227-54.

⁷ Sabarwal S et al. (2009) *The global financial crisis: assessing vulnerability for women and children*.

Washington, DC, World Bank, 2009 – available at: <http://worldbank.org/financialcrisis/pdf/Women-Children-Vulnerability-March09.pdf>

⁸ UNAIDS Discussion Paper (2012) *Impact of the global economic crisis on women, girls and gender equality* – available at:

http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/document/2012/discussionpapers/JC2368_impact-economic-crisis-women_en.pdf



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In terms of women's strategic goals during this time of crisis, we need to ensure that policy makers invest in long-term social protection mechanisms and protection of the sectors in which women are disproportionately employed – experiences from previous economic crises have shown this to be a necessity⁹. Women are the first to feel the impact of many of the austerity measures that are being put in place now, especially spending cuts on social and health services and education. Therefore, austerity measures need to be continuously assessed to see to what extent they may be perpetuating or alleviating gender inequalities¹⁰.

Clearly, the relationship between practical and strategic goals is a close one; it may not always be possible or even desirable to distinguish between women's needs and goals in this way. Nonetheless, it might be useful for us, as advocates for women's rights in education and for their economic empowerment, to make this distinction in context-specific ways. It allows us to make our lobbying efforts and advocacy more streamlined, and ensures that we target the right institutions and individuals at the right time and in the most effective manner.

Violence against women and workplace rights

Violence against women affects all groups of women regardless their age, racial and ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation and physical or mental abilities. Gender-based violence can be physical and/or psychological and/or sexual as well as economic. Different forms and acts of gender violence reflect and create gender inequalities at personal and structural levels; they can occur within public and private life in physical as well as in virtual online spaces (cyber-harassment). Teachers and other education personnel are key to the process of gender transformation and the prevention of gender violence in particular in the education environment and in society in general. It is therefore incumbent on schools to take action aimed at preventing violence in schools and the harassment of staff; teachers must be able to teach, and students must be able to learn in positive, healthy and safe environments¹¹. To do this, more public investment is needed to provide teachers and other education personnel, both male and female, training on how to address gender-based violence, including also men and boys in the work on the prevention of violence in education.

In line with the [ETUC Action Programme on Gender Equality](#) which addresses the link between domestic violence and workplace rights as one of the five ETUC priorities in this area and the [EI Resolution on Education and the Elimination of Violence against Women](#), adopted at the EI Congress in Cape Town in 2011, ETUCE has been working on this crucial topic in the frame of several projects, notably on the prevention of [cyber-harassment](#) against teachers and other education personnel and most recently on the prevention of [third-party violence](#).

⁹ UNAIDS Discussion Paper (2012) *Impact of the global economic crisis on women, girls and gender equality* – available at:
http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/document/2012/discussionpapers/JC2368_impact-economic-crisis-women_en.pdf

¹⁰ UNAIDS Discussion Paper (2012) *Impact of the global economic crisis on women, girls and gender equality* – available at:
http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/document/2012/discussionpapers/JC2368_impact-economic-crisis-women_en.pdf

¹¹ See updated ETUCE Action Plan on Preventing and Tackling Violence in Schools 2010.



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Trade unions play an important role in reducing the impact of domestic violence on workers by achieving better workplace rights, including such methods as, raising knowledge on domestic violence and why and how it affects workplaces; sharing trade union practices to prevent and deal with domestic violence; developing strategies of how to handle violence and harassment in the workplace and adopting recommendations to member organisations and their respective affiliates.

As teacher unions we wish to further raise awareness on the impact of domestic violence and violence against women in general and to education as an essential requirement for achieving fair and equal development in society. There is a need to collect and share good practices that can help teachers and their unions prevent violence against women and ensure workers' rights. As teacher unions we need to support teachers and education personnel in fighting the reproduction of gender inequalities that contribute to a continued culture of violence. The role of national teacher unions must be to lobby the respective national governments and education authorities to introduce gender equality into the school curricula in a transversal way and at all levels with the aim to eradicate any kind of discrimination or sexism and to end gender-based violence.

Promoting the combination of work, family and private life

Since the ETUCE General Assembly in 2009, the Equality Committee and its Working Group have tried to develop and monitor the results of all the initiatives regarding Reconciliation of Work and Family Responsibilities. This issue is directly connected with the other issues at the centre of the work of the ETUCE Standing Committee for Equality. For instance, the eradication of gender stereotypes has been identified as one of the possible strategies to reduce inequality in family care burdens. Empowerment depends on the time that we can devote to work or union responsibilities. Women with care responsibilities are automatically excluded. We know from surveys and data collection that in Europe 75% of the part-time workers are women and that the impact of parenthood on labour market participation is higher on women than on men. The crisis has worsened this situation. During our meetings we agreed on a series of measures to be implemented both at ETUCE level and at political level. In the aforementioned project on Teacher trade union actions challenging gender stereotypes and gender segregation in the labour market¹², ETUCE encouraged member organisations to present and exchange good practices to learn from each other's experiences. Furthermore, the work on data and information sharing has been continuous.

Another activity consistent with the scope of improving the reconciliation was the ETUCE conference on Early Childhood Education in Budapest on 20 -21 February 2012, which stressed the importance of childcare facilities for women. In many countries the [Barcelona target](#) is still far from being reached and women are thus obliged to work part-time or even stop working in order to take care of their children aged 0-3.

ETUCE has always said that teachers and education personnel who take time off for elder care or child care should not be penalised in terms of pension and professional development opportunities

¹² The final conference took place in Warsaw on 11-12 September 2012.



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and that we needed to lobby governments to invest in public quality childcare and early childhood education systems, free of charge and accessible to all, and to provide high quality professional training and appropriate salaries for teachers and other education personnel. But in most European countries, governments have decided to reduce investments in education and social services, allegedly for over-expenditure. The European teacher unions can easily affirm that in most of the European countries no real effort is being made to foster the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities and, that women still face therefore a big dilemma: working or taking care of the family. Even the [revision of the Maternity leave Directive](#) has come to a halt and men going on parental leave are still a minority.

For the ETUCE Standing Committee for Equality meeting in March 2012 ETUCE collected examples of actions undertaken by member organisations that help women to better reconcile work and family duties. Only seven unions replied but they showed great commitment to this issue: their activities varied from giving advice on parental leave or part-time work to affiliates to using social dialogue in order to change current legislation. Some have also contributed to the creation of kindergartens at workplaces.

However, a lot still remains to be done in this field: women are underrepresented in unions' decision-making bodies; they have fewer career opportunities than men. Both at workplaces and in the union women's work schedules should be more flexible so that they can take part to the most challenging activities. This might be a topic for ETUCE to suggest for discussion in the framework of the social dialogue activities for instance.

To sum up we can clearly see that ETUCE and its member organisations are making great efforts to grant better working conditions to women, but on the other hand the crisis is severely affecting social services and especially those meant to help reconcile work and family duties. If we want to reach the Europe 2020 goals on female employment rate and on growth, ETUCE and its member organisations have to boost social dialogue and put pressure on national governments to prevent them from reducing the investment on childcare facilities and training.

Eliminating gender representation gap in decision making bodies

One of the most important goals of teacher trade unions should be taking action in order to eliminate the gender representation gap in decision-making bodies.

There are many significant reasons why this issue should be taken care of, such as,

- increasing the credibility of the actions carried out by teacher trade unions in favour of equal access to education for girls;
- increasing the awareness of the fact that teachers and other education personnel play a crucial role in eliminating stereotypes in education;
- more effective cooperation with other unions and social movements, including women movements, in favour of improving the situation of women on the job market;
- counteracting mobbing effectively – according to international reports, schools, because of their structure, are particularly exposed to mobbing.



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Initiated by the ETUCE Standing Committee for Equality and the ETUCE Status of Women Committee, the European project *Teacher trade union actions challenging gender stereotypes and gender segregation in the labour market*, concluded in the preparation of guidelines on how teacher unions can contribute to mitigating and tackling gender stereotypes in education and gender segregation in the labour market. These include suggestions on how to prepare actions related to increasing the representation of women.