

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 6 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI represents public and private sector workers, including from trade unions in the education and training sectors.

This position was adopted complementary to CESI's previous Manifesto for the Teaching Profession (2018)¹ and Manifesto for the teaching profession in the era of digital education (2023)².

CESI's Expert Commission 'Education' expects that the announced European Teachers and Trainers Agenda will comprehensively tackle professional challenges in the education sector and raise the valorisation of the teaching profession, improve teachers' employment and working conditions and foster adequate remuneration and training, address teacher shortages, and boost career prospects while strengthening teacher mobility in the EU – and will thus reflect a due implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights' principles 1 on education, training and lifelong learning, 2 on gender equality, 5 on secure and adaptable employment, 6 on wages, 8 on social dialogue and involvement of workers, 9 on work-life balance, and 10 health and safety at work.

Employment trends and professional challenges in the education sector

The European educational sector employs around 10 million workers, according to Cedefop's 2023 report 'Teaching professionals: skills opportunities and challenges'. At the same time, the OECD recommends that EU Member States increase public investment in education to foster economic growth, boost productivity and create a future-ready workforce. While the average expenditure of OECD countries on education is around 4.9% of GDP, the share of that of EU Member States decreased to 4.7% in 2023, Eurostat data reveals.

The OECD emphasises that higher education levels contribute to economic and social advantages, and that effective workforce-job matching is crucial to maximise the return on education investments. Moreover, achieving the EU's ambitions for a green, digital and competitive economic future depends on valuing and promoting education at its core. By recognising and fully supporting the teaching profession through improved conditions and societal status, educators can be empowered as the foundation of a thriving, forward-looking and highly trained and skilled Europe. As a consequence, the well-being of students, future citizens, will also be fostered.

¹ <https://cesi.netvis.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EN-21x21-BD.pdf>

² https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67911412a89ff81c0e28e4d4/67c482a5bbc34cfede997244_2023-Manifesto-for-the-teaching-profession-in-the-era-of-digital-education_WEB.pdf

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The OECD Education at a Glance 2023 report shows that most EU Member States face **staff shortages** in the teaching profession, with several factors influencing teacher recruitment and retention, competitive pay and ageing in the sector. The EU-wide shortfall of teachers is projected to increase due to aging workforce, high attrition rates and the profession's declining attractiveness, the European Commission's 2019 report 'Teachers in Europe: Careers, development and well-being' showcases.

In many EU Member States teaching is **not** seen as a **financially rewarding career**. On average, secondary teachers earn around 10% less than tertiary-educated professionals, and in some countries the gap exceeds 30%, according to Eurydice data. One reason for this disparity is the slow to non-existent growth of teacher salaries. Since 2015, statutory wages for lower secondary teachers have risen by less than 1% per year in real terms in all but six OECD countries. In nearly half of the countries with available data, real wages have actually declined. This comes after a prolonged period of weak or negative wage growth in the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis.

Another reason for low recruitment or even teachers stepping out of the profession is **psychosocial health strains**, as recent information on the European Commission's European School Education Platform and EU-OSHA's 2022 European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) show.

A further particular professional challenge in the education sector pertains to **gender imbalances**: According to Cedefop's 2023 report 'Teaching professionals: Skills opportunities and challenges', the overall education and training workforce is predominantly female, with over 72% of teachers worldwide being women while male teachers predominate in leadership positions, leading to occupational segregation within the sector.

Demands to improve the teaching profession in Europe

CESI puts forward the following demands to EU and national level policy makers to improve the teaching profession in Europe, thus helping implement the European Pillar of Social Rights in the education sector:

1. Raise the status and ensure a **better social recognition of the teaching profession** as a cornerstone of Europe's social fabric, by strengthening public esteem and trust in teachers. This requires public campaigns and consistent policy measures to present teaching as a prestigious, future-oriented career that attracts the best talents. Teaching is a service of general interest - not a business.
2. Guarantee **decent remuneration** and professional stability through competitive wages comparable to other tertiary-educated professionals, secure contracts, and career-long employment prospects. Fair pay and stable employment conditions are essential not only for retention but also for motivating young people to enter the profession.
3. Foster **better working conditions** across the EU, including manageable workloads, flexible and family-friendly working conditions, healthy psychosocial environments, and safe workplaces. Such standards will reduce burnout, absenteeism, and attrition while ensuring teachers can focus on high-quality teaching.
4. Combat **cyberbullying, online harassment**, and any other form of **physical or psychological violence** with strong legal safeguards, awareness-raising and training for both staff and pupils.
5. Ensure **adequate public investments in education**, with earmarked support for digital infrastructure, connectivity, and equal access to IT tools and learning resources for all students and teachers. This helps bridge inequalities between regions and prevent the digital divide from deepening social gaps in education.
6. Strengthen **teaching for pupils with disabilities**, by supporting students, families and teachers themselves so they can benefit from more inclusive and equitable educational systems.
7. Provide **high-quality initial and continuous training** for teachers, ensuring they acquire strong pedagogical, psychological, and digital competences, with training conducted within working hours. Lifelong learning opportunities allow teachers to remain adaptable and effective in fast-changing educational and societal contexts.
8. Integrate in particular **digital competences for teachers** systematically into teacher education and professional development, equipping educators to use digital tools, AI, and hybrid learning models effectively. This empowers teachers to harness technology as a supportive ally rather than a disruptive force in the classroom.
9. Promote **professional mobility** by strengthening EU exchange programmes. Cross-border exchanges enhance professional growth, enrich teaching practices and contribute to a truly European education space.
10. Guarantee **teacher involvement in educational reforms**, ensuring they are developed through genuine social dialogue with trade unions and professionals. Inclusive governance will foster ownership, ensure reforms meet real needs, and reinforce democratic principles in education systems.
11. Address the issue of **curriculum overload and societal expectations**, recognizing the need to protect teachers' core professional roles. A clear distinction between education and other administrative and 'societal' services is needed to counter the ongoing increase of tasks and responsibilities, and to improve working conditions and the quality of education.
12. Establish a **European code of ethics and shared values in education**, centred on respect, tolerance, equality, and the defence of human dignity. This will provide a unifying framework that strengthens trust, cohesion, and solidarity across diverse education systems in Europe.