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PRIORITIES FOR A NEW EU TEACHERS' AND TRAINERS AGENDA

CONTRIBUTION TO A CALL FOR EVIDENCE CONSULTATION

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. Among CESI's members are teacher trade unions from across Europe, with a cumulative total of several hundred thousand affiliates, representing education professionals in early childhood education and care, school education, vocational education and training (VET), higher education and adult learning.

This position was developed in complement to CESI's previous position on a European Teachers' and Trainers' of September 25 2025 and CESI's Manifesto for the Teaching Profession of 2023, both available on CESI's website.¹ It also reflects a previous contribution of CEI to an ad-hoc social partner consultation on a new EU Teachers' and Trainers' Agenda.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

CESI welcomes the European Commission's initiative to develop a new EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda. Europe cannot achieve its ambitions under the Union of Skills, the Basic Skills Action Plan, the STEM Education Strategic Plan or the broader Education Package without an attractive, well-supported and adequately staffed teaching profession.

Teachers are the foundation of high-quality, inclusive and equitable education. They foster basic skills, democratic values, critical thinking, social cohesion and innovation. They are also indispensable for Europe's economic competitiveness, resilience and preparedness. However, almost every Member State is confronted with structural teacher shortages, increasing workloads, declining attractiveness of the profession and changing expectations towards teachers.

CESI therefore strongly supports a comprehensive European Agenda centred on improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession, strengthening professional autonomy, investing in teachers' working conditions, supporting lifelong professional development, and ensuring that digitalisation and artificial intelligence serve teachers rather than replace or control them.

¹ https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67911412a89ff81c0e28e4d4/68dfd225a7b7cff600e6b7dd_2025_EDUC_teaching_position_September%202025.pdf; https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67911412a89ff81c0e28e4d4/67c482a5bbc34cfede997244_2023-Manifesto-for-the-teaching-profession-in-the-era-of-digital-education_WEB.pdf

MAIN CHALLENGES FOR AN ATTRACTIVE TEACHING PROFESSION AND SECTOR-SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

CESI considers that Europe faces several structural challenges that increasingly undermine the attractiveness and sustainability of the teaching profession and which need to be emphasised by a new EU Teachers' and Trainer's Agenda.

1. Teacher shortages have become systemic across Europe

Many Member States experience persistent shortages caused by demographic change, retirement, insufficient recruitment into initial teacher education and high early-career attrition. These shortages further increase workloads, creating a vicious circle that discourages both new entrants and experienced teachers from remaining in the profession.

2. Working conditions must become significantly more attractive

High administrative burdens, excessive workload, insufficient staffing, deteriorating work-life balance and growing psychosocial risks increasingly affect teachers' health and safety. Violence, harassment and abuse against teacher, including online harassment, must be addressed through stronger prevention measures and occupational health and safety policies.

3. Teachers' professional status and autonomy require renewed political support

Teachers should be recognised by society and politics as highly qualified professionals exercising pedagogical judgement. Educational reforms should strengthen rather than undermine professional autonomy, while ensuring meaningful participation of teachers and their representative organisations in policy design and implementation.

4. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence create both opportunities and challenges

Teachers increasingly require advanced digital and AI competences. At the same time, AI must remain a supporting tool. It should reduce administrative burdens, improve access to educational resources and support inclusive teaching without replacing teachers' professional judgement or introducing algorithmic management, surveillance or excessive data collection.

5. Continuous professional development remains unevenly accessible

High-quality professional learning for teacher should be regarded as both a right and a responsibility throughout teachers' careers. Professional development must be accessible during working time, adequately funded and closely linked to classroom realities rather than adding further workload.

Sector-specific considerations

While many challenges are common across education sectors, CESI highlights several specific issues:

- **Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)** continues to suffer from comparatively low salaries, limited career progression and insufficient recognition despite its crucial contribution to children's development.

- **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** faces particular recruitment difficulties in attracting professionals with industry experience, requiring more flexible career pathways and stronger links between education providers and labour markets.
- **STEM, digital and special needs education** continue to experience acute teacher shortages requiring targeted recruitment and retention measures.
- **Teachers in disadvantaged, rural and remote areas** require additional support through incentives, mentoring and improved access to professional development.

PRIORITIES OF THE EU TEACHERS AND TRAINERS AGENDA AND SUPPORT AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

CESI calls for an ambitious Agenda centred on quality education, public investment and social dialogue. In particular, CESI recommends the following priorities:

1. Make teaching an attractive lifelong career

The Agenda should support Member States in improving salaries, work conditions, career progression, mentoring for beginning teachers and retention strategies. Career pathways should recognise additional responsibilities including mentoring, leadership and cooperation with local communities.

Particular attention should be given to reducing excessive administrative burdens and allowing teachers to focus on their core educational mission.

2. Invest in teachers through high-quality initial education and continuous professional development

Europe should promote excellence in teacher education while respecting national competences. Initial teacher education should better prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms, multilingual environments, digital education, AI, sustainability, democratic citizenship and pupils' social-emotional development.

Professional development should be available throughout teachers' careers, funded through public investment and undertaken during working time.

Greater use should also be made of Erasmus+ mobility and European cooperation networks for teachers, school leaders and teacher educators.

3. Ensure digitalisation strengthens rather than weakens teaching

CESI strongly supports building teachers' AI literacy while safeguarding professional autonomy. Digital transformation must remain pedagogy-driven rather than technology-driven. The Agenda should therefore:

- support trustworthy, transparent and human-centred AI in teaching and learning.
- guarantee that teachers retain final responsibility for pedagogical decisions.
- prohibit algorithmic management and surveillance of teachers.
- promote secure and sovereign European digital infrastructures.
- reduce administrative burdens through responsible AI deployment.
- strengthen digital inclusion and accessibility for both teachers and learners.

4. Improve working environments and support structures

Teachers cannot succeed alone. Schools require multidisciplinary teams including teaching assistants, psychologists, social workers, special educational needs professionals and administrative staff. Strong school leadership, collaborative cultures and peer learning should be systematically promoted.

Safe, inclusive and healthy workplaces, including support for teachers' mental health, must become a central pillar of the Agenda.

5. Increase public investment

The success of the EU Teachers' and Trainers' Agenda will ultimately depend on sustained public investment.

CESI therefore calls for stronger use of EU programmes, including Erasmus+, the ESF+ and future Multiannual Financial Framework instruments to support teacher mobility, professional development, digital infrastructure, inclusive education and innovation in teacher education.

EUROPEAN COOPERATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PARTNERS

CESI considers that successful implementation requires strong European coordination while fully respecting Member States' competences for education systems.

The Agenda should be accompanied by clear implementation mechanisms, including measurable objectives, regular monitoring and structured exchanges of good practice among Member States.

European cooperation should support evidence-based national policymaking, comparative research, pilot projects and peer learning.

Most importantly, inclusive and pluralist social dialogue and the involvement of all teacher representative organisations must be a cornerstone of the implementation and roll out of the Agenda.

Teachers and their representative trade unions possess unique expertise regarding working conditions, professional development, educational quality and classroom realities. Moreover, meaningful teacher participation strengthens both the legitimacy and effectiveness of education reforms. All European teacher trade union organisations and their members should therefore be systematically involved in:

- designing the EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda including through this consultation.
- co-developing national implementation measures.
- monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes.
- identifying emerging challenges linked to digitalisation, artificial intelligence, demographic change and teacher shortages.