



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale



ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education
Education International - European Region

ETUCE-CSEE

Boulevard Bischoffsheim 15
1000 Brussels | BELGIUM
secretariat@csee-etuce.org

President

John MacGabhann

Vice-Presidents

Lasse Bjerg Jørgensen
Rob Copeland
Julien Farges
Valentina Ilic
Dorota Obidniak
Cuqui Vera Belmonte

European Director

Jelmer Evers

ETUCE's Position on the

Union of Skills and future EU Teachers Agenda

Following discussions in the ETUCE Committee (8-9 April), adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 16 June 2025.

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) is a federation of 123 education trade unions across 51 countries, representing a total of 11 million members throughout Europe. As the social partner for teachers and other education personnel at the European level, ETUCE has carefully examined the education and training policy proposals of the Union of Skills initiative. We were pleased to have engaged in discussions with the European Commission on this initiative, as well as the proposal for an EU Teachers' Agenda.

ETUCE recalls the 59 recommendations of the [2024 ILO/UNESCO High Level Panel on the Teaching profession](#) which offer an international standard, framework and guideline for education and teacher policies while putting teachers and their organisations at the centre of educational development. It underlines that “*All governments should adopt, implement and regularly revise, as needed, comprehensive and holistic national teacher policies, aligned with national priorities and the overall education strategy and plan, through social dialogue with representative teachers' organizations.*”

The highest-performing education systems place teachers at the heart of education policy and provide them with strong, sustained support. They treat teaching as a profession, teachers as professionals, and their representative organisations as trusted co-creators of education systems and practices at all levels. If Europe truly aims to ensure quality education for all, foster an innovative economy, and safeguard democracy and security across the continent, the European Union must be bold and lead by example, integrating these best practices into the design of EU policies and programmes to encourage Member States' to do the same and create coherency across Europe.

ETUCE and its members stand ready to work with the European Commission and Member States to make quality public education for all a reality. Our students and our societies deserve nothing less.



www.etuce-csee.org



@ETUCE_CSEE



@EuropeanTradeUnionCommitteeForEducation

Our views concerning this initiative are the following:

Overall direction of the Union of Skills

1. The European Commission's Union of Skills initiative aims to address the evolving demands of the **labour market** by enhancing skills development across Member States. While the ETUCE acknowledges the importance of equipping individuals with relevant skills and the importance of an innovative economy, we emphasise that **education** must remain a **public good**, a collective responsibility and not just to serve the urgent and always changing needs of the labour market. To ensure the long-term flourishing of our European values and fundamental right, young people of today need to be prepared to be active and informed citizens, with a broad set of knowledge, skills and competences and be aware and practice notably their democratic and labour rights.
2. The Union of Skills initiative underscores the role of education in driving economic **competitiveness**. ETUCE is concerned that an overemphasis on the economy, innovation and the labour market may overshadow education's fundamental roles in fostering **democracy, social inclusion, and equality**. Education should not be viewed merely as a means just to produce a skilled workforce but as a cornerstone for developing well-rounded individuals capable of critical thinking and active citizenship. While economic growth and innovation are vital, Europe must avoid the mistake of replicating the failing economic models of competitor countries. These models that have fuelled rising inequality and poverty, exploited natural resources, and concentrated wealth and power in the hands of a few. Europe must seize this opportunity to invest in developing a distinct model of growth and innovation, firmly rooted in European democratic values and our social model. This primarily means investing in people and placing them at the heart of our approach. Achieving this requires sustained public investment in high-quality, inclusive public education accessible to all. This is the only way to ensure a sustainable and equitable economic, human and social advancement for future generations.
3. Over the last 30 years many European education systems have already prioritised labour market-driven skills over broader holistic, democratic and citizenship education. Many education systems have attempted to limit education to **basic skills**, with ill thought out curricular and pedagogical reforms leading to negative student outcomes. These reforms also had a detrimental effect on the attractiveness of the teaching profession leading to huge shortage shortages. These failed policies are one of the reasons why European education systems are falling behind. A broad, holistic approach to education results in better learning outcomes, including the development of basic skills, better economic outcomes and innovation, more robust democracies and societies and a more attractive teaching profession. Therefore students need:
 - a. Knowledge-rich curricula across many different subject areas, including the arts, literature, history, geography, philosophy and social sciences.
 - b. Qualitative rich books and lesson materials that encourage higher level reading. Which fosters metacognition and cognitive patience, expands our conceptual capacities, trains cognitive empathy and perspective-taking. These social skills are indispensable for informed citizens in a democratic society.

- c. Well educated and qualified teachers to both shape and deliver this broad, holistic, knowledge-rich and humanistic education.
- d. Schools as inclusive humane communities that put human relationships at the center.

Governance and policy development

4. ETUCE shares the views with the Council of Education ministers (12 May 2025) that the Union of Skills could - if properly structured - address some challenges of education. Concerning the connection between the Union of Skills and the European Education Area (EEA) process, the Council underlined: *"The Union of Skills and the EEA initiatives share several synergies and common goals, such as boosting skills, lifelong learning and mobility. There is, however, **a need to ensure that the labour market-focused approach of the Union of Skills does not overshadow the broader objective of the EEA, which follows the basic principle of spanning education and training systems as a whole, in an inclusive, holistic and lifelong-learning perspective and with the aim of ensuring that these systems contribute to the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens and promote democratic values, equality, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue.**"* ETUCE agrees with the Council that the EEA needs to remain the overarching framework on policy initiative and implementation. We share the views of the Council that *"the Union of Skills could serve to strengthen and reinforce the EEA by addressing emerging challenges in education and training, and to ensure the efficient use of available resources by preventing any duplication and additional administrative burdens."*
5. We believe that the success of the Union of Skills initiative hinges on meaningful engagement with education trade unions on all levels. Strengthening **social dialogue** will ensure that the voices of educators are heard in policy development and implementation. We remind the European Commission to include the education sector trade unions into **key decision making and advisory bodies** to be established to implement the Union of Skills, namely the High-Level Skills Board and the STEM Executive Panel.
6. For the European ambitions in the EEA and Union of Skills to become a reality, ETUCE also suggests to evaluate the coherence, timeframe, ad hoc nature and impact of the different EU programmes. The **Erasmus+ programme** is partly aimed at the institutional (schools, teacher education institutes) level and the individual level. Teachers can participate through their schools (as employees), or as individuals. The profession itself is mostly not addressed as a separate entry point, or the profession is grouped in with many other private actors. This does not reflect the strength of our organisations in relationship to other actors and the status and position of the profession (a key indicator how the profession is regarded by policy makers). This is why it would be important to re-establish the role of education trade unions, namely ETUCE, in the governance of the EU programmes, in particularly in the Erasmus+ Committee. ETUCE and its members represent millions of European teachers with national coverage, networks, communication channels, reaching teachers in almost every school in Europe. Teacher unions are democratic organisations representing the voice of teachers, and they are both professional associations and industrial unions in one association, covering the whole range of education and teacher policies. This makes us uniquely positioned to create European, national and school impact. **More coherence in the programmes** and a **longer**

structural commitment to work with the profession – through our organisations - would also create the conditions for the bigger impact that we need to turn the ambitions of the EEA and the Union of Skills into a reality.

Right to education

7. ETUCE regrets that the Union of Skills does not place sufficient emphasis on implementing the first principle of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**. The initiative relies on the Draghi report's perspective, shifting the policy focus toward "high-quality skills, irrespective of where and how they were acquired," and skills recognition, rather than ensuring that every individual has the **right to access quality, inclusive initial education and obtain formal qualifications**. With this approach, the European Commission places greater responsibility on individuals - pupils, parents, job seekers, and workers - for their own education and training. ETUCE is concerned that this shift could lead to individuals bearing the cost of their education, ultimately encouraging governments to cut public education budgets. This policy will intensify educational inequality, which remains one of the most pressing challenges in EU education systems, as highlighted in the European Commission's [Education and Training Monitor 2024](#) report of the European Commission. ETUCE Requests the European Commission to shift from this policy and to ensure that the **values of public education** are respected. The initiative should emphasise that companies and employers have a duty to train, upskill, and reskill their workforce, rather than shifting the responsibility entirely onto the education sector.

Investment to education

8. We agree with the Union of Skills that "education and skills are an investment, not a cost". However, rather than engaging employers to take responsibility for upskilling and reskilling their workers, the European Commission's initiative encourages them to use **public investment and EU funds** for this purpose, e.g. under the "EU Invest in Talent" Platform. This raises concerns about the potential commodification of education and the risk of undermining public investment. It is essential that education remains primarily publicly funded and administered to ensure equitable access and to uphold its fundamental role in preparing young people for life and work.
9. EU fiscal constraints that limit Member States' ability to increase public spending pose a threat to adequate funding for essential services, including education. Such restrictions have historically led to **underfunded education systems**, prompting continuous strikes by education trade unions advocating for better resources and conditions. To achieve the objectives outlined in the Union of Skills, it is imperative to revisit the current EU fiscal policies to allow for necessary investments in education.
10. The recommendation by the European Commission to Member States to use "**extended adjustment paths**" under the EU economic governance framework to include reforms and investment in education is **largely insufficient**. Not only public funding to education is not among the priorities in the current political agenda and such recommendation will not revert this trend, but it also submits investments in education to their capacity to enhance growth and increase productivity and labour market participation. The ILO and UNESCO recommend spending 6% of GDP on public education.

11. The European Commission's commitment to investing €1.3 billion in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and digital skills through the Digital Europe Programme is a positive step towards enhancing Europe's technological capabilities. However, ETUCE emphasises that such investments must be complemented by corresponding investments in teacher training and support to effectively integrate these technologies into educational settings.

Digitalisation and AI in education

12. The Union of Skills includes several initiatives focused on digitalisation and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education. While these technologies are often promoted as transformative, their integration raises fundamental questions about the role of teachers in the classroom, how we teach, and the very purpose of education. ETUCE firmly stresses that the Union of Skills must not promote the adoption of digital technologies simply for the sake of modernisation or to serve industry interests. This risks reinforcing market-driven agendas that benefit the private sector while disadvantaging educators and students. Instead, **ETUCE calls for:**

- **A needs-based approach to technology:** The integration of AI must be guided by the concrete, bottom-up needs of teachers, students, academics, and researchers, not by the demands of industry. AI should only be implemented when it serves a clearly defined pedagogical purpose that cannot be better addressed through other means.
- **No additional burden on teachers:** For AI to be effective and ethical, it must not add to the already heavy workload of teachers. The long-standing promise that technology would ease teachers' burdens has yet to be realised. Educators need time, training, and professional support to engage meaningfully with AI tools.
- **EU support for non-profit, European-based EdTech:** The European Union should prioritise funding for not-for-profit EdTech initiatives based in Europe, which adhere to European tools, values, and democratic standards. These projects must involve teachers from the outset, including in the design and development of AI tools. Good practice examples, such as NOLAI in the Netherlands, where teachers are given time away from regular duties to act as co-designers, should be replicated and scaled across Europe.
- **Protection of fundamental values and rights:** Europe's regulatory framework on AI is the most advanced in the world and is essential for upholding European democratic values. While parts of the tech industry claim regulation stifles innovation, these rules provide vital safeguards. ETUCE is deeply concerned by recent announcements suggesting a "simplification" of the regulatory framework, which we fear may lead to harmful **deregulation**. These protections must not be weakened.
- **Ethical implementation of AI:** When addressing ethical use of AI, the implementation of Union of Skills should not confuse ethics with legal compliance or universal human rights protections, which are mandatory. Instead, ethics should prioritise AI use and approaches that align with the core purpose and mission of education. AI must not be used to replace the human capacities of

teachers or students, but rather to enhance and complement them. In this context, the EU should support the development of supportive frameworks for both teachers and students.

- **Digital and AI literacy for all:** The EU should actively support programmes that empower teachers and students to critically understand and ethically use AI. This includes education on both the potential and the limitations of AI, as well as its social and ethical implications.

EU Teachers' Agenda

13. ETUCE understands the emphasis of the Union of Skills on lifelong learning and continuous professional development. However, it is essential that such opportunities are also accessible to all educators and are adequately funded. Teachers should have the **right to quality training during working hours** without additional personal costs, ensuring that they can effectively respond to evolving educational demands.
14. While supporting efforts to increase accessibility to higher education, ETUCE stresses the importance of **equitable career development for academic staff**, including early-career researchers. Improving working conditions and addressing precarity in academic careers must be a priority to ensure high-quality teaching and research in Europe.
15. ETUCE believes that the upcoming **EU Teachers' Agenda** could be – if structured in accordance with this position paper – a significant opportunity to enhance the attractiveness of the teaching profession. ETUCE believes that a Council recommendation on the EU Teachers' Agenda would be an excellent tool to drive change at the national level. Based on our policy paper on [Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession](#), we require a comprehensive approach, focusing on:
 - **Ensuring professional autonomy and academic freedom:** empowering educators to exercise their professional judgement fosters innovation and enhances the quality of education.
 - **Delivering decent salaries and sustainable working conditions:** Competitive and attractive remuneration and manageable workloads are essential to attract and retain skilled teachers, education staff and education support personnel and to make the teaching profession attractive for all high-skilled students. Effective **investment** to education systems are key to ensure the working conditions of the staff.
 - **Providing high quality initial education and continuous professional development:** To ensure to be well-prepared and continuously updated to meet evolving educational needs, all teachers should receive high-quality and inclusive initial teacher education. They should also have the right to free and high-quality continuous professional development (CPD) **during working hours**.
 - **Respecting qualification standards and professional recognition:** Education policies should ensure that qualification requirements for teachers remain respected across Member States and are not undermined by short-term solutions to address teacher shortages. Ministries need to be reminded to practice effective

social dialogue with education trade unions to work together to improve requirements and recognition processes to access the teacher profession.

- **Improved governance and effective social dialogue:** Strengthening social dialogue with education trade unions is essential for shaping effective education policies and reducing governance fragmentation. Educators' voices must be heard in policymaking to ensure that reforms address real classroom needs and professional challenges while also making teachers' working conditions and salaries attractive enough to sustain a sufficient workforce.

Conclusions and proposals

Concerning further steps, ETUCE:

- Calls for cooperation and social dialogue with the education trade unions in **drafting the EU Teachers Agenda**. We ask to shape the EU Teachers Agenda based on the [2024 ILO/UNESCO recommendations on the teaching profession](#) and [ETUCE's Raising the Status and Improving the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession](#).
- Calls for making **synergies between the governance of the EEA and the Union of Skills** by ensuring representation of **ministries and teachers** in all the decision making and advisory process on education and skills;
- Requests, while supporting the views of the Education Council, to ensure a balanced and complementary **governance on the EEA and the Union of Skills** by strengthening the role of ministries and educators in advising on and contributing to the development of EU education policy. We ask to include representative of teachers' trade unions in the Union of Skills governance, namely to the High-Level Skills Board and STEM Panel.
- Proposes, drawing inspiration from the tripartite Advisory Committee for Vocational Education and Training (ACVT), to **simplify and streamline the governance of the EEA** by establishing a **high-level Advisory Committee for Education**. This committee could bring together national representatives from education ministries and teachers' trade unions (from the EU, EEA, EFTA, EU-candidate countries) to advise the European Commission on education policy initiatives and to propose actions and policies relevant to both general education and sectoral matters. ETUCE further recommends that this Advisory Group on Education maintain a regular and structured dialogue with the ACVT to ensure coherence and complementarity.
- Calls for focusing the **EU Teachers Agenda on teachers and not on trainers**, which could be discussed in a separate Council Recommendation focusing on school-based and company-based trainers and mentors.
- Requests that the EU Teachers' Agenda shall reflect the strong language on **social partnership and collective agreements** found in recent [EU Council Recommendations on academic careers](#).
- Requests to establish an **Advisory Group on the Teaching Profession** with national representatives of ministers and teachers' trade unions from the EU, EEA, EFTA, EU-candidate countries to provide policy advice on improving the attractiveness of the Teaching Profession, to prepare a **European Summit on the Teaching Profession**, and to assist national implementation of teachers-related EU policies and the [UNESCO/ILO Recommendation on the Teaching Profession](#).

- Calls for the establishment of an **“Education Scoreboard”**, an **independent monitoring programme and indicators** for the EU Teachers Agenda. This should cover key areas of teacher and education policies, for example: funding, social dialogue (on all relevant levels), professional autonomy, professional development, teacher education and qualifications, occupational health and safety, workload, class size, lessons, preparation time and salaries. Such indicators should be included among the analytical documents part of the **European Semester** cycle, such as the existing Social Scoreboard, and developed in consultation with European social partners.
- Calls for the establishment of an **European Summit on the Teaching Profession**, modelled after the yearly International Summit on the Teaching Profession, jointly organised by OECD and Education International, where ministries and teachers' trade unions have equal roles and voices to support the attractiveness of the teaching profession.
- Requests developing the **future Erasmus+ programme for teachers** together with ETUCE and teachers' organisations to support teacher exchange, teacher leadership, union cooperation, and innovation in pedagogical practice. We also ask to ensure that the [European School Education Platform](#) supports teachers by sharing training webinars, research, best practices and materials in all EU languages especially on democratic values, citizenship, and education about the EU. One outcome could be to develop a more structural and coherent approach resulting in a **European Teacher Institute**, by and for the teaching profession.

ETUCE remains committed to collaborating with the European Commission and Member States to advance the quality and inclusiveness of education across Europe.