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EUROPEAN TRADE UNION COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION  
COMITE SYNDICAL EUROPEEN DE L'EDUCATION

## Report on the Final Conference of the ETUCE Project

*"Teacher trade unions in solidarity for healthy and  
safe workplaces in the economic crisis"*

Madrid, 10-11 October 2013



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DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.



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## Table of Contents

|     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 1.  | Introduction.....   | 4  |
| 1.1 | Project Description .....   | 4  |
| 1.2 | Words of Welcome and Introduction .....   | 5  |
| 2   | Occupational Health and Safety at the Workplace School .....  | 6  |
| 3   | Keynote speech: Crisis, Social Inequalities and Health and Safety at Workplaces .....                                       | 7  |
| 4   | Results from the Teacher Union Online Survey and Country Interviews .....   | 8  |
| 5   | Good Practice Examples on how to Promote Healthy and Safe Working Conditions in Education in Times of Economic Crisis ..... | 9  |
| 6   | Translating Policy Recommendations into Practice.....   | 11 |
| 7   | Results: The Draft Policy Recommendations .....   | 12 |
| 8   | Acronyms.....   | 14 |

## 1 Introduction

The closing conference of the project *Teacher Trade Unions in Solidarity for Healthy and Safe Workplaces in the Economic Crisis* was held in Madrid on 10-11 October 2013. The conference gathered more than 50 representatives from European teacher trade unions to discuss policy recommendations on how to promote healthy and safe working conditions in Education in times of crisis. The **objective of the conference** was to discuss and amend the draft recommendations in the context of the project results, which derived from an on-line survey, interviews, and two peer learning activities conducted among teacher trade unions in 2013. The final draft recommendations will be presented for adoption to the ETUCE Committee in spring 2014.

### 1.1 Project Description

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE-CSEE) conducted the project *Teacher Trade Unions in Solidarity for Healthy and Safe Workplaces in the Economic Crisis* in order to identify teacher union strategies and good practices on the prevention of psychosocial hazards and on the reconciliation of work and family life in times of crisis.



The Advisory Group (Anders Eklund, Lärarförbundet, Sweden; Rossella Benedetti, UIL Scuola, Italy; Patricio Perez, FECCOO, Spain; Hélène Hemet, UNSA Education International, France; Darren Northcott, NASUWT, UK; Monika Konczyk, Solidarnosc, Poland)

In order to identify the effects of the crisis on teachers' working conditions and to draft practical recommendations on how to promote healthy and safe working conditions in Education in times of crisis, ETUCE member organisations were asked to participate in an online survey in spring 2013. Further, interviews were conducted with trade union representatives in eight countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, France, Poland, the UK, and Sweden) to gather national teacher union strategies and actions. Also, two peer learning activities were organised to share and discuss best practices. All the project activities were planned by the project advisory group.

The insights gained in the project were used to draft the final policy recommendations, which were discussed at the final conference. A final project brochure explaining the whole project and the policy recommendations will be translated into four languages. The results will be published on the ETUCE's OSH website, the project partners' websites, and in the ETUCE newsletter.

## 1.2 Words of Welcome and Introduction

**Susan Flocken, ETUCE Coordinator - Internal Policy Coordination, Occupational Health & Safety**, welcomed the participants to the final project event and provided an introduction to the conference topic with an overview of the preliminary project events. She emphasised ETUCE's and its member organisations' important contribution to the work on teachers' health and safety highlighting, for example, the consultation on a new EU Policy Framework on health and safety. Mrs Flocken linked the conference to the 2013/14 EI/ETUCE campaign [Unite for Quality Education](#), which unites the teacher unions in solidarity to defend quality education as a human right and a public good.

**Francisco García Suárez, General Secretary of FECCOO** (Spain) pointed out that, at present, Spanish schools lack a culture of risk prevention, even though teachers and teachers unions are working towards healthy workplaces. Therefore, educational authorities should reform the education sector with the view of preventing health hazards. Unfortunately, the most recent Spanish education law will not solve the existing problems in the education sector but will increase budget cuts.

**Carlos López Cortiñas, General Secretary of FETE-UGT** (Spain) emphasised that the budget cuts in the field of education have an impact on the health of workers. In Spain, the budget for education was cut by 35 % during the last three years. Because of budget cuts, teachers reaching retirement age were not replaced in schools, families have to support school activities financially, and stress has become an occupational disease for teachers. A lack of investment in schools creates dangers which put the safety of teachers and students at risk.



Salvador Denavent, Susan Flocken, Francisco García Suárez, and Carlos López Cortiñas

**Salvador Denavent, Coordinator of Trade Union Action from STES-I** (Spain) warned that Spanish schools are at risk of falling back to a standard from forty years ago. At present, less investment is made into the Spanish education system than what is considered the average in Europe and OECD countries. Students are taught in overcrowded rooms, university fees are increased, school meal aids are reduced, teachers' salaries and medical leave benefits are reduced, and the supply of staff is decreased. Therefore, the

working situation of education workers is put in indignity.

## 2 Occupational Health and Safety at the Workplace School

**Sarah Copsey** from the **European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA)** explained that - contrary to popular belief- Education is not a sector of low risks. Issues that need to be considered range from building maintenance and accidents, over noise, voice disorders and work-related stress, to violence, harassment and bullying.

The **economic crisis** might have **lasting effects on health and safety in schools**. If less investment in school buildings is made, then more accidents are likely to happen. If training measures are reduced, then employees have fewer options to manage their health and safety. The fear of redundancy may increase stress, bigger classrooms make more noise, and students suffering from the crisis might bring their problems to school. As a result, teachers may experience more stress.

In order to tackle these different issues, a **whole school approach** needs to be applied. This approach emphasises that occupational **health and safety in schools is not an extra, but an integral part of the working environment and of education**. Health and safety issues can be addressed in various subjects, for example in arts and sciences, technology, or economic education. Teachers need to be trained in school safety and risk education not only for their own health and safety but also for successfully teaching risk prevention. As the



Sarah Copsey

European Union is facing demographic changes and workers are asked to work longer in their lives, risk prevention becomes more and more important. School children should already be introduced to the subject of risk prevention because it is a key issue for the health and safety of workers of all ages. For example, teaching school children how to sit and how to lift their bags in a healthy manner increases their awareness of health and safety at a young age and may prevent them from back problems when they grow older.

Mrs Copsey highlighted some examples to show how health and safety issues were included in schools. For example, a national strategy to improve health and safety in schools was implemented in Ireland. As part of preparation for work, health and safety is an integral part of pupils' education at age 14-16. For teachers, free e-learning programmes were designed, so they could study health and safety issues for themselves.

In addition, **European policies**, such as the 2002 strategy, have proven to **encourage member states to fulfil their health and safety objectives** and to implement measures. **Success factors** for healthy and safe schools have proven to be the **involvement of trade unions, teacher training and professional development** on the subject, as well as **networking between schools** to share best practices. To fit schools' needs in support and guidance on the issue of health and safety, **external support** is important, too.

### 3 Keynote speech: Crisis, Social Inequalities and Health and Safety at Workplaces



Joan Benach

**Joan Benach** from **Pompeu Fabra University** (Spain) pointed out that there is a strong correlation between public health and social justice. One of the key findings in the WHO report on health equity is that social injustice is killing the population on a grand scale.<sup>1</sup> The unequal distribution of health-damaging experiences is the result of a combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements, and bad policies. By popular belief, health inequities are seen as the result of differences in diet and lifestyle. However, many factors contribute to health inequities, such as social class, gender, age, ethnicity, and territory. All of these have to be seen in a socioeconomic and political context.

Working conditions and occupational health and safety depend on a number of factors. While working conditions matter for workers' health and safety, it is important to remember that they depend on policies, on power relations and employment. These set the mechanisms by which health inequalities are produced. In other words, every aspect of government and the economy has the potential to affect public health and health equity. Education is one of the vital social goods that can narrow the gap of health inequities.

For this reason, a new political agenda is needed which addresses the current inequalities of global and national income and wealth. It should call for a new economic-ecological model of social progress and for a workplace model with much greater worker participation. Those labour relations which are harmful to health should be eliminated and fair employment should be promoted. Employment policies should be conducted in conjunction with economic, ecological, and demographic aspects.

Unions can contribute by spreading the message, and by giving people access to information and knowledge. Unions should form alliances with other unions, people in teaching, scientists, and interest groups. Most definite, unions should keep moving towards the mobilisation of groups and the implementation of collective agreements.

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<sup>1</sup> CSDH (2008). *Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health. Final Report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health*. Geneva, World Health Organization.

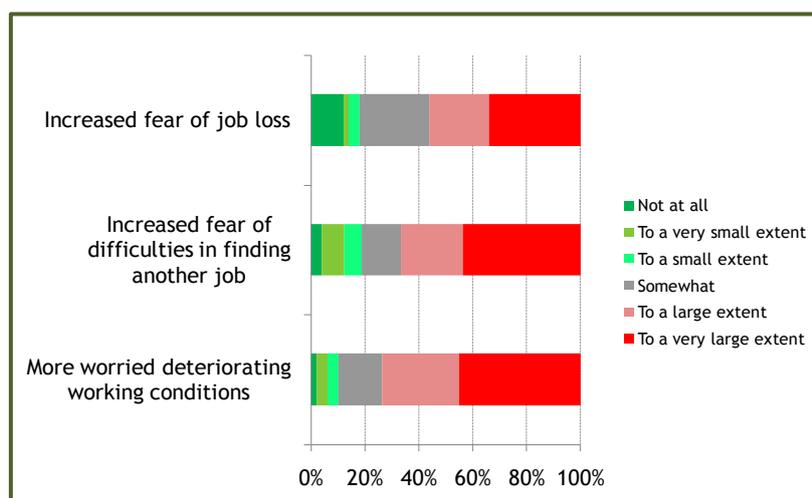
## 4 Results from the Teacher Union Online Survey and Country Interviews

**Salvador Moncada, project expert from ISTAS** (Spain), summarised the main results of the online survey and interviews conducted in spring 2013 among ETUCE member organisations. The online survey aimed at describing how budget cuts in education have been implemented across EU countries since 2008, and how these budget cuts affected teachers' working conditions and their exposure to psychosocial hazards. The survey further sought to describe the actions taken by unions from 2008 to date in an effort to curb such policies. In total, 55 ETUCE member organisations in 33 countries participated.



Salvador Moncada

More than half of the participants in the survey stated that **budget cuts in public education were conducted to a large extent**. Reductions in education budgets have been implemented through diverse mechanisms, the most frequent being the **freezing of salaries, a lack of replacement of retired workers, closure and merger of schools, lowering capital expenditures, no renewal of temporary workers and less support to deal with pupils' special needs. Decreased professional development and more precariousness among teachers** and other non-teaching staff were the two more common effects on working conditions of budget cuts. In the interviews, teacher union representatives confirmed that budget cuts have affected teachers' working conditions as well as students' learning environment.



Regarding **psychosocial hazards at the workplace**, the most visible effect is the **increase of job insecurity**. Since 2008, job insecurity has increased in all three areas (fear of losing the job, fear of facing difficulties to find another job in case of being dismissed, and concerns about deteriorating working

conditions). Insecurity has also brought about difficulties in organising action. People with short contracts are afraid to speak out loud because they might lose their job and there is the insecurity of effects on students and families.

To oppose education cutback policies, teacher unions have been involved in a clear increase of actions since 2008, especially with regard to demonstrations and mobilisation. In the UK, the short of strike action was implemented as a strategy to stop the increase of workload for teachers and the privatisation of education. In Poland, teacher unions stopped the closure of 22 schools in Krakowiak. Still, the example of Greece and Spain shows that strikes and demonstrations could not stop budget cuts in education. However, union actions in Greece and Spain fostered solidarity among teachers and encouraged solidarity mechanisms in society.

## 5 Good Practice Examples on how to Promote Healthy and Safe Working Conditions in Education in Times of Economic Crisis



Sarah Lyons

**Sarah Lyons, NUT (UK)**, introduced the *Short of Strike Action*, a teacher union strategy from England and Wales. The strategy takes place while teachers continue teaching but it opposes unreasonable working demands. The union developed 25 instructions which aim for reducing the workload and defending teachers' rights. The strategy is necessary because teachers in England and Wales have a weekly work load of 50 hours, according to government statistics. Some examples of actions which are taking place in schools, academies, and colleges are:

- Refusal to hand in short term planning (lesson plans)
- Limiting work-related emails to directed times.
- Refusal to cover for any absence.

These and further actions were taken by members of NUT and NASUWT since the 2012 autumn term. The strategy has proved to work best where there is a strong union representation.

**Sandi Modrijan** from **ESTUS** (Slovenia) explained that previous ETUCE projects encouraged ESTUS to conduct a survey among their members and to create a brochure on work-related stress. Key stressors named by ESTUS members working in kindergartens and schools were:

- difficult relations with colleagues and management
- pressure from parents
- unacceptable behaviour of pupils
- additional workload.



Sandi Modrijan, Sarah Lyons, and Susan Flocken

In order to protect teachers' well-being, ESTUS tries to react to every single act of violence in schools or kindergartens. The union has set up an anonymous helpline through which victims of violence receive professional help. In addition, ESTUS organises seminars for shop stewards and creates posters on how to deal with cases of violence in the workplace.



Jacques Drouet

**Jacques Drouet** from **UNSA** (France) spoke about how unions can take measures against psychosocial risks and work-related stress. UNSA believes that the organisation of work needs to be restructured because it causes problems that can lead to serious disorders, some of the being suicide attempts. In May 2012, UNSA organised a colloquium on work-related illness. The union organised a theatre play before the discussion to draw attention to the consequences of stress, which the university community found extremely interesting. Further, a framework agreement on the prevention of psychosocial risks was drafted. The nine principles underlying the agreement are assessing and avoiding risks, instructing workers and adapting work to the individual, preventing hazards, considering the state of technical development, and giving collective measures priority over individual protective measures.



Fernando Álvarez

**Fernando Álvarez** from **FETE-UGT** (Spain) reported from a survey on violence as a psychosocial risk in educational workers. FETE-UGT asked 1200 teachers to which kind of violent behaviour they were exposed to. One third of all teachers had been threatened with violence at least once in their career. In a survey on stress, FETE-UGT found that the fear of physical violence caused the highest stress levels in teachers. High levels of stress were further caused by conflicts between students, large groups, being insulted by students and keeping discipline in class. The union created a guide on stress which includes measures against stress. Further, they created an online tool which can be used to address psychosocial risk assessment in Education and to measure one's general health and the individual burnout risk.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The online tool can be found under [www.prl-sectoreducativo.es](http://www.prl-sectoreducativo.es).



Stavroula Leka

## 6 Translating Policy Recommendations into Practice

**Stavroula Leka** from the **University of Nottingham** (UK) presented some practical approaches that can be used in the European education sector. At present, there is a gap between policy and practice in the field of health and safety, especially as concerns psychosocial risks.

Although there is both legislative and voluntary policy framework at European level, it is certain that all policies will fail unless working conditions are improved. If both policymakers and businesses do not prioritise the development of a working environment that is conducive to longer and healthier working lives, then public policies will fail at keeping people longer in employment.

At present, health and safety strategies tend to focus too much on negative results, such as ill health, accidents, employees' behaviour, and work design and organisation. The issue of work-related stress shows, however, that it is necessary to turn towards preventive measures, this includes looking at the sources and forecasting.

One of the key findings of the WHO report on psychosocial hazards at work was that only good work is good for people's health.<sup>3</sup> Those employees with the poorest quality of work have an even greater risk of having a bad mental health than people who are unemployed.

Guidance on psychosocial risk assessment was developed in the project PRIMA-EF. This project has produced guidance sheets, a book and a guide available in 12 languages, as well as an online platform.<sup>4</sup> All these materials can be used to learn about psychosocial risks at the workplace and to take measures. Another initiative which seeks to translate policy into practice is the WHO Healthy Workplace Model which puts ethics and values in its centre. While this tool has been developed for bigger or smaller companies, it could be translated to the education sector, too. When translating policies into practice, a sectoral approach has been proven to work best.



Plenary Discussion

<sup>3</sup> WHO (2010). Authored by S. Leka & A. Jain, *Health Impact of Psychosocial Hazards at Work: An Overview*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

<sup>4</sup> Website of the project *European Framework for Psychosocial Risk Management*: [www.prima-ef.org](http://www.prima-ef.org).

## 7 Results: The Draft Policy Recommendations

**Monika Konczyk, project advisory group member**, introduced the draft policy recommendations. In the following working groups and during the plenary debate, the participants pointed out that teachers' health and safety is often considered from an individual perspective in the context of teachers taking protective measures for themselves. A collective perspective seems more promising because **health and safety issues are connected to the organisation of work**. For this reason, it is important for teacher unions to strengthen the collective perspective of workers in education institutions. Workers in education need to feel that they are part of a strong community acting for their rights.

Just as any other workers, **teachers have the right to work in a healthy way and to retire healthy**. Working conditions in education should protect the health and safety of teachers and all employees in education. In order to strengthen the line of argument, teacher unions could prepare a list of stress factors and occupational diseases that can be used for lobbying and collective bargaining.

In order to win public support, teacher trade unions should work towards improving the public perception of the teaching profession and **raise awareness on the importance of teachers' health and safety**. It is important to **foster collaboration in education on health and safety issues**. Parents and students should be included because health and safety issues matter for the students' learning environment and for their future working lives.

Teacher unions should point out the **link between teachers' health and safety and quality education** to the wider public. It is important to highlight that **budget cuts in education** not only harm teachers' working conditions but also **put at risk the education of future generations**. At European level, teacher unions should draw attention to the lack of investment into education.



Plenary Discussion

Teacher unions should **stand together in solidarity, support sister organisations** and **work towards sustainable outcomes** from actions and projects. They **should share and exchange information** and enter a systematic internal teacher union debate on the state of teachers' health and safety throughout Europe. Teacher unions could

connect their strategy to the work which is done by trade unions in other branches and build a common health and safety strategy for all sectors. For example, teacher unions could join the EU-OSHA campaign in 2014 to cooperate with others on the issue of psychosocial risks at work.

Looking at the **implementation of the policy recommendations**, it was suggested that **every teacher union and every education institution** should have **one health and**

**safety representative.** Teachers should be trained on health and safety, and representatives should exchange best practices. Health and safety representatives could also encourage a dialogue within the institution about what is demanded from teachers and educational employees and support preventive measures.

At national level, teacher unions should work towards the **implementation of existing health and safety legislation.** Teachers need to be informed about existing legislation and about their rights, so health and safety should be a continuous topic for them, beginning in initial teachers' training. Teacher unions could lobby for better legislation to reduce stress and to even the effects of budgets cuts at national and European level.

At institutional level, **risks should be assessed systematically** and good examples should be highlighted. Risk assessment should also include the risks which derive from budget cuts, the management of bio-hazards, and the way to and from education institutions. It might be useful to have an online risk assessment tool to be used by teachers and schools. Teacher unions should **include health and safety issues when (re-)negotiating collective agreements.**





## 8 Acronyms

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUCE                   | European Trade Union Committee for Education  |
| EI                      | Education International   |
| EU-OSHA                 | European Agency for Safety and Health at Work   |
| EU OSH Policy Framework | Occupational Health and Safety Policy Framework of the European Union                       |
| ESTUS                   | Education and Science Trade Union (Slovenia)  |
| FECCOO                  | Federation of Education Workers of <i>Comisiones Obreras</i> , Workers' Commissions (Spain) |
| FETE-UGT                | Federation of Education Workers of the General Union of Workers (Spain)                     |
| FFAS                    | Freiburg Research Centre Occupational and Social Medicine (Germany)                         |
| ISTAS                   | Union Institute of Work, Environment and Health (Spain)                                     |
| Läraryförbundet         | Union for Teachers and Heads of Schools (Sweden)  |
| NASUWT                  | National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (UK)                          |
| NUT                     | National Union of Teachers (UK)   |
| PRIMA-EF                | Psychosocial Risk Management Excellence Framework   |
| SKOiW NSZZ Solidarność  | National Education Section of Solidarność (Poland)  |
| STES-I                  | Confederation of Trade Unions in Education (Spain)  |
| UIL Scuola              | Labour Union for Education (Italy)  |
| UNSA Education          | Federation of Education Professions (France)  |
| WHO                     | World Health Organisation   |



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Final Conference



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