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Elevating the teaching profession: evidence and analysis supporting the EU Teachers Agenda

Accompanying the document

Proposal for a Council Recommendation

on an attractive teaching profession: the EU Teachers Agenda

{COM(2026) 795 final}

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1. Introduction

The Commission Communication 'Stronger education foundations for all in the age of AI' and the proposal for a Council Recommendation on an attractive teaching profession: the EU Teachers Agenda, both part of the Education and Skills Package of 4 November 2026, outline actions to support education systems, schools and the teaching profession.

This Staff Working Document[1] presents evidence and analysis to support the proposal for a Council Recommendation on an attractive teaching profession: the EU Teachers Agenda. Section 1 introduces the topic, and outlines the reasons, scope, and wider policy context for the proposal. Section 2 presents the state of play and problem definition. Section 3 describes the main elements of a comprehensive approach to make the profession attractive. Section 4 covers teacher voice and social dialogue. Section 5 summarises EU support to the teaching profession.

To inform the proposal, the Commission carried out consultations on the state of the teaching profession. From October 2025 to January 2026, education sector social partners, civil society organisations, researchers, international organisations and EU agencies, Member State representatives, teachers and school leaders were consulted to understand expert and firsthand perspectives on challenges affecting teachers, and how best to support them at EU level. Focus group meetings with teachers, school leaders and other educators were also organised. The consultations took a view to grounding the preparation of the proposal in the lived experience of the profession across the different stages of a teaching career, as well as in the specificities of the vocational and educational training (VET) and early childhood education and care (ECEC) sectors.

In June 2026, the Commission organised a hearing of the education sector social partners, an implementation dialogue to discuss European support to the teaching profession, and a workshop in the framework of the Youth Check. A call for evidence was open for public contributions between 30 July and 8 September 2026. An online survey on building attractive teaching careers was also open to the public on the European School Education Platform between September and November 2025. The details and findings of these consultations and the responses to the call for evidence are further explained in the annex.

1.1. Purpose and rationale for the proposal for a Council Recommendation

> "*Teaching should be regarded as a profession: it is a form of public service which requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it also calls for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge*." 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers.
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> *"As a teacher, you can play such an important role in accompanying young people as they discover the world and who they want to be. This makes it a very unique and special profession."* Former teacher, Ireland.

[1] This Staff Working Document draws on the expert support provided by ICF to strengthen the Commission's evidence, including the work of A.L. Milner and H. Grainger-Clemson, as well as the inputs from the participants in the consultations.

> *"The main problem [is] that there is no balance between the workload and the salary of the teachers because here, a teacher that works at upper secondary school officially works for 18 hours. But they have to take part in the afternoon staff meetings, they have to prepare lessons, and they have to revise the school work. So, they work really for a long time, but they are paid only to work for 18 hours a week."* Teacher, Italy.
>
> *"It's not actually the teaching that's the difficult part; it's all the things around teaching."* Teacher, Denmark.

Empirical evidence shows that the educational level of students' parents is among the strongest predictors of their outcomes and that, among school-related factors, teachers have the most decisive influence. Consecutive years of effective teaching can offset learning gaps for disadvantaged students, but evidence shows that in nearly all EU countries, novice teachers are teaching the neediest students (European Commission, 2022) and disadvantaged and rural schools tend to lack fully qualified teachers, especially in certain subject areas.

Teachers are essential for supporting students' learning and socialisation and for fostering critical thinking and civic engagement. The social and relational dimensions of education, particularly teacher-learner interactions, are central to students' development. These relationships are built on professional trust, pedagogical expertise, ethical responsibility and mutual respect. PISA 2025 results suggest that teacher support strengthens the relationship between belonging and curiosity, and between belonging and perseverance (OECD, 2026a). Where students feel that they belong and that teachers are encouraging and responsive, they are more likely to be interested in learning, and more likely to sustain effort when learning becomes difficult. Teachers also play a broader role in fostering resilient communities, connecting students, families, services, and the wider community (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024).

Numerous national, regional and local initiatives support the teaching profession; however, education systems face increasing difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers and ensuring the conditions and preparation needed for teachers to address the challenges of the classroom and support students' learning outcomes. As educational contexts evolve and technological and social transformations accelerate, the demands placed on teachers and schools continue to rise.

Major teacher policy issues include recruitment, retention and shortages. While localised teacher shortages are not new, they are becoming a structural feature of many education systems and concern recruitment of candidates as well as retention in the profession. Nearly all EU countries face shortages of qualified teachers, and patterns of teacher supply and demand vary across subjects, geographical regions and school settings. Early career attrition from the profession, together with low numbers of applicants to initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, and teacher students either not completing programmes, or graduating but not entering the profession, contribute to gaps in the teacher workforce. Furthermore, the age structure of the teacher workforce signals substantial replacement needs.

Teacher shortages tend to reduce the quality, continuity and intensity of instruction (European Commission, 2026d). Shortages may amplify learning deficits, particularly in reading and mathematics, and limit Member States' capacities to provide high quality, inclusive and equitable education (Gambi et de Witte, 2023). They also increase the workload for teachers,

placing additional strain on the workforce, and may be detrimental to the long-term sustainability of the teaching profession. Beside the availability of teachers, ensuring that teachers receive a high-quality level of preparation is key.

Teaching quality is also influenced by the content and quality of initial teacher education and continuing professional development programmes. Teachers generally feel well prepared as regards subject content, but important gaps in professional development remain as regards the skills necessary for addressing contemporary issues. These include use of AI for teaching and learning, as well as to teach students with special education needs, for classroom management, individualised learning and students' social-emotional support, for teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting, and the specialised pedagogical and occupational, up-to-date knowledge required for vocational education and training. Moreover, teachers do not feel that current continuing professional development programmes have a decisive impact on their teaching practice (European Commission, 2026a).

According to early childhood education and care principals, absences, shortages of qualified staff and insufficient number of educators often limit capacity to provide quality education and care[2]. Staff shortages may lead to limited availability of (quality) services. Examples include the temporary closure of places, long waiting lists for enrolment, reduced opening hours, inability to welcome children with special educational needs or newly arrived children, as was the case with Ukrainian refugee children in 2022. When staff is limited, it becomes more difficult to effectively supervise and monitor children, which can also raise safety concerns. This affects inclusion as well as children's well-being and learning, since there is not enough time to attend to individual needs (European Commission, 2023a).

VET teachers and trainers often combine a pedagogical role with an industry or craft background and are required to keep pace with evolving occupational standards. Work-based learning arrangements mean VET teachers and in-company trainers must coordinate closely with employers, adding a dimension of engagement beyond the school environment. The pay differential between teaching and working directly in industry, particularly in sectors facing skills shortages, also affects recruitment and retention.

The objective of the proposal is to support Member States in ensuring that enough qualified teachers enter and remain in the profession, across the subjects, regions and schools where they are most needed to ensure quality education for all. It focuses on strengthening the attractiveness of the teaching profession and supporting the attraction, development and retention of qualified teachers.

Working conditions[3] are central to the quality of working life and play a critical role in the recruitment and retention of teachers. A large body of research has examined teachers' satisfaction with their work, illustrating how it is likely shaped by a range of factors including

[2] In the 7 participating EU member states in TALIS Starting Strong 2024. OECD, 2025c.

[3] Teachers' working conditions comprise all features of the workplace that affect their daily work (European Commission, 2022; and Kraft and Lyon, 2024). Following the approach in European Commission (2022), working conditions are defined as encompassing both financial and non-financial features of the workplace and they include: (i) leadership and teacher agency, (ii) collegiality and collaboration, (iii) accountability systems, (iv) career development opportunities, (v) terms of employment, including contractual arrangements and remuneration, (vi) working hours and workload, (vii) continuing professional development, including induction, mentoring, and feedback, (viii) professional trust and recognition.

the degree of respect they are afforded in society, the salaries they earn, the professional autonomy they enjoy, and the conditions under which they work (Kraft and Lyon, 2024).

Supportive working conditions are closely correlated to job satisfaction, well-being and, ultimately, career intentions. More specifically, job resources including induction and mentoring, teacher agency[4], collaborative school environments, and supportive school leadership are positively correlated with teachers' job satisfaction and well-being. In contrast, job demands such as stress related to classroom discipline and administrative workload are consistently correlated with lower job satisfaction, poorer well-being and increased intentions to leave the profession.

1.2. Scope

For the purposes of this Recommendation, a 'teacher' is a person who is acknowledged as having the status of a teacher or early childhood education and care educator (or equivalent) according to national legislation and practice. A 'trainer' is anyone who fulfils one or more activities linked to the (theoretical or practical) training function, either in an institution for education or training or at the workplace. Teachers in higher education are outside the scope of this Recommendation, as they are covered by the Council Recommendation of 25 November 2024 on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education.

1.3. Wider policy context

This proposal builds on the findings of the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic framework[5] that identified basic skills gaps, teacher shortages and weakening democratic engagement among young people as the remaining significant challenges, as well as the need to further support Member States in adapting their education systems to enable students and teachers to thrive. The interim evaluation found more limited progress to enhance the competences and motivation in the education profession, relative to other strategic priorities. This is partly due to the lack of complementary policy frameworks and the fact that, unlike for the other strategic priorities, there were no EU initiatives (in the form of a Council Recommendation). The interim evaluation concluded that the breadth of challenges across all EU Member States in this area, in particular teacher shortages, attractiveness of the profession, and working conditions, underline the need to strengthen efforts.

The Council Resolution on the second cycle of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (2026-2030) of 29 June 2026 set enhancing the attractiveness, competences and motivation in the education and training profession as a strategic priority for European cooperation for the next four years.

This proposal is also aligned with work on evidence-informed policymaking, mutual learning and the exchange of good practices, including activities carried out through the Learning Lab on Investing in Quality Education and Training, the European Education Area (EEA) strategic framework sectoral working groups (that worked, between 2021-2025, notably on early childhood education and care staff and leadership, and various aspects of effective teaching), peer learning and peer counselling activities, and the European School Education

[4] Teacher agency can be defined as teachers' active role in shaping their work and working conditions.
[5] COM (2025) 340 final.

Platform. It seeks to strengthen these efforts by proposing a comprehensive approach to teacher workforce management at Member States' level with strong EU support.

This proposal also considers the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on early childhood education and care and highlights specific challenges for ECEC staff, where applicable[6]. These relate to the lack of recognition of the profession, staff shortages and poor working conditions, the need for further recognition of the educational value of early childhood education and care and therefore for increased professionalisation of staff, in view of research findings on the neurodevelopment of young children.

This proposal is closely connected to key European policy areas, notably:

- The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child[7], which recalled children's right to quality and inclusive education and reiterated that each child has the right to the highest attainable standard of quality education, irrespective of their background and where they live
- The Commission Communication of 29 January 2025 on the Competitiveness Compass[8], the Commission Communications of 5 March 2025 on the Union of Skills[9] and the Council Recommendation of 9 March 2026 on Human Capital in the European Union with emphasis on competitiveness, human capital development and an attractive teaching profession.
- The European Democracy Shield[10], which included the role of schools and other educational institutions in fostering democratic participation, critical thinking, media literacy, active citizenship and resilience against foreign information manipulation and interference and disinformation.
- The principles of the European pillar of Social Rights, notably its first principle on the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning, its eleventh principle on the right of children to quality early childhood education and care and principle eight calling for the consultation of social partners on policies.
- Social policy with emphasis on access to quality education and training and its role in combating and preventing poverty and social exclusion. The Anti-Poverty Strategy[11] with the strengthened European Child Guarantee and the Care Strategy[12], with the acknowledgment that systemic underfunding in deprived areas leads to teacher shortages, higher staff turnover and fewer experienced educators. This in turn results in less individualised support. These conditions are precisely the reverse of those needed by disadvantaged children who cannot draw on compensatory resources at home.
- The Affordable Housing Plan[13] of 16 December 2025, which lists teachers among the essential workers who cannot afford to live in the communities they serve. Essential workers often encounter housing shortages or high costs, particularly in urban areas.

6 OJ C 189, 5.6.2019.
7 COM (2021) 142 final.
8 COM (2025) 30 final.
9 COM/2025/90 final.
10 JOIN/2025/791 final.
11 COM (2026) 538 final.
12 COM (2026)539 final, COM 2022) 440 final.
13 COM (2025) 1025 final.

The revision of State aid rules for affordable housing presented by the Commission will help Member States facilitate support to affordable housing for low- and middle-income households, including essential workers.

- Council Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications, which provides the legal framework for the professional mobility of teachers.
- Council Directive 1999/70/EC of 28 June 1999 concerning the framework agreement on fixed-term work concluded by ETUC, UNICE and CEEP, which prohibits discrimination against fixed-term workers.
- Council Directive 97/81/EC of 15 December 1997 concerning the framework agreement on part-time work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC
- The Quality Jobs Roadmap[14] of 4 December 2025 renewing the commitment to fostering quality jobs and the two-stage consultation of European social partners on the possible direction of EU action to further improve quality jobs.
- The Skills Portability Initiative make it easier to have qualifications understood, verified and, where needed, recognised across borders. It will include a Skills Portability Act address the digitalisation and availability of reliable, comparable and verifiable information on qualifications, a revision of the Professional Qualifications Directive proposing to modernise the procedures for recognition of professional qualifications to access regulated professions, in particular by introducing a new digital workflow in all EU Member States and by shortening ; and a Directive on recognition of qualifications of third-country nationals, proposing to introduce common EU rules for recognising such qualifications.
- The Communication of from the Commission of 12 November 2025 on a Culture Compass for Europe[15] to strengthen the provision of arts and cultural education and improve its quality, promotes stronger cooperation between culture and education policies, and foster partnerships among artists, cultural institutions, community cultural organisations, schools and non-formal education providers, and encourage grassroots arts and cultural education projects.
- Multilingualism, which promotes language awareness and language sensitive teaching as a key skill for all teachers and identifies the quality of language teaching and better training of language teachers as key challenges.
- The European VET Strategy of 4 November 2026 focusing on key actions at European level to support Member States in strengthening the quality, agility, attractiveness and strategic relevance and openness of VET. Teachers, trainers and VET leaders are central to the quality and agility of VET systems.
- The Union of Equality strategies, which create the conditions for everyone to live, thrive and lead, regardless of differences based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics: the Anti-racism strategy 2026-2030; the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 and the Communication ‘Enhancing the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities up to 2030’; the Gender equality strategy 2026-2030; the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (2021-2030), the LGBTIQ+ equality strategy 2026-2030.

[14] COM (2025) 944 final.
[15] COM/2025/785 final.

- The Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027[16], which identifies education and training a main sectoral area and underscores that schools have the potential to be hubs of integration for children and their families.
- The EU Preparedness Union Strategy[17] with action 29 to include preparedness in school education curricula and training of educational staff.
- The Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness[18], which highlights the unique role of teachers in supporting the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, values and competences, while helping young people develop the foundational skills and dispositions needed to thrive as lifelong learners.
- The upcoming Right to Stay strategy to ensure can ensure people live, work and thrive in the place they call home.

This proposal is aligned with the Commission's use of all instruments for implementation and enforcement, including infringement proceedings. The Commission decided to refer Italy to the Court of Justice of the European Union on 3 October 2024 for discriminatory employment conditions of fixed-term teachers working in public schools, who are not entitled to incremental salary progression based on previous periods of service, and for failing to prevent the abusive use of successive fixed-term contracts, as confirmed by the Court in its judgment of 13 May 2026 in Case C-155/25.

1.4. EU added value

Member States face common challenges relating to teacher shortages and the attractiveness of the teaching profession, and relating to democracy, misinformation and online manipulation, as well as digitalisation. This is compounded by a sense among teachers of being less prepared for certain issues and of being undervalued by society and policymakers.

This proposal provides a framework for voluntary Union cooperation and evidence-informed action, in line with the principle of subsidiarity and different national requirements. EU cooperation on the teacher workforce could help Member States share what works, make best use of EU funding to support national reforms, and support efficient and effective investment in teacher recruitment, retention, teacher development and working conditions.

Good practices exist but they are scattered, and the differences across systems provide opportunities for policy dialogue, peer learning and mutual support. EU action is required to address this key policy gap to identify, compare, evaluate and disseminate effective approaches at European scale. Member States are responsible for the content of teaching and the organisation of their education systems (Article 165 TFEU), and many industrial and professional issues such as pay, pay progression and pensions; job security and precarity; work-time arrangements; workload and well-being; teacher professionalism, accountability and collaborative governance; and teacher voice are conditioned by national, local (regional or municipal), and school-level policy, and sectoral social dialogue. Ministries of Education and social partners, namely teacher unions and employer or school leader organisations, are the primary actors setting and negotiating these conditions through collective bargaining,

[16] COM/2020/758 final.
[17] JOIN (2025) 130 final.
[18] COM/2026/110 final

sectoral social dialogue and national reform processes. The EU's role is to support and complement these national and local efforts, within the bounds of subsidiarity.

Teachers are among the professionals who make the most use of recognition of qualifications following the rules set out in the Professional Qualifications Directive[19]. Secondary school teachers are the second most mobile (regulated) profession, with 4953 recognition decisions in 2024[20]. This is particularly relevant in border regions, where teachers may live in one Member State and work in another. Teacher mobility can help match supply and demand, provided it does not deepen shortages in sending Member States. A Council recommendation is an appropriate instrument in the field of education and training where the Union has a supporting responsibility. As a legal instrument, it signals the commitment of Member States and provides a strong political basis for cooperation in this area.

2. State of play

2.1. Teacher shortages

Most EU countries face challenges in sustaining a sufficient teaching workforce, and experience **shortages**[21] of qualified teachers especially in certain subject areas, such as STEM[22], languages and special education needs (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023a). Teacher shortages can undermine equitable access to high-quality education, particularly when difficulties to recruit and retain qualified teachers disrupt instructional continuity. The effects of teacher shortages can also be seen through increased reliance on teachers who are not fully qualified[23], difficulties replacing absent staff and

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19 Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications.

20 https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof. Teachers working in pre-primary and primary education are also among the fifteen most mobile professions in 2024. The study supporting the impact assessment of the Skills Portability Initiative presents analysis for secondary school teachers. The most mobile teachers appear to be 'foreign languages' teachers, especially English, German, French and Spanish, followed by teachers of STEM subjects. The Commission Staff Working Document SWD(2026) 64 final presents information collected from competent authorities for secondary school teacher about fees for the recognition of professional qualifications, length of the procedure for examining an application for recognition, documents required, use of electronic procedures

21 A shortage occurs when the number of available teachers is insufficient to meet the demand in schools (for example due to unattractive working conditions), and when employed teachers lack qualifications or competences necessary for their roles (Van Breukelen and Theelen, 2026). No single indicator can fully capture the scale or nature of teacher shortages, nor the ways in which teachers are distributed across schools. Data on teacher shortages remain limited at both national and EU level, and the data that exist are not fully comparable. For example, the data may refer to vacant teaching positions, positions filled by teachers who are not fully qualified, or school leaders' reports of shortages (OECD, 2026b). The forthcoming Eurydice report on teachers and school leaders will investigate which countries monitor teacher shortages and how.

22 See also European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022a and European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2022b. The difficulties to attract qualified graduates to the education sector are likely to increase, as high-tech and STEM related industries are expected to have the highest employment growth in the EU over the coming decade, and they generally offer more competitive salaries than teaching (for more details, see https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-forecast).

23 Non-fully qualified teachers refers to teachers entering the profession through alternative pathways; they either hold the required academic qualifications but lack mandatory certification or teacher training, have completed teacher training but lack the required academic qualifications, or lack both. In a few countries, the category also includes fully qualified teachers who teach subjects or education levels other than those for which they were originally trained or certified. The share of non-fully qualified teachers in primary and secondary education increased by 2.1 percentage points between 2017/18 and 2024/25 on average in the

reduced selectivity in teacher recruitment, leading to recruiting candidates with lower levels of preparation, experience or subject-specific expertise than would otherwise be expected (OECD, 2026b).

The 2024 Global Status of Teachers[24] report emphasises that teacher shortages are a global issue, and teacher unions in Europe perceive severe shortages in mathematics, sciences, information technology and special education (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024). Schools in some locations, such as rural or remote areas or big cities, and schools with higher concentrations of disadvantaged learners often have more difficulties to attract and retain qualified teachers (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2023a). Persistent teacher shortages disproportionately affect disadvantaged learners, as well as rural and remote communities (OECD, 2026b). During the consultations[25] carried out to prepare the proposal, it was noted that teacher shortages tend to be localised, and vary across subjects, regions and school settings. The consultations also highlighted specific challenges in the VET and early childhood education and care sectors.

PISA data show that the percentage of students in schools whose principal reported that the school's capacity to provide instruction is hindered 'to some extent or a lot' by a lack of teaching staff is considerably higher in 2025 (40.2%) than before the pandemic (28.3% in 2018)[26]. Responses to the survey on building attractive teaching careers[27] also point to a widespread perception of teacher shortages.

Consultation participants indicated that teacher shortages can result in unfilled teaching positions, out-of-field teaching, larger class sizes and increased workloads for teachers, further undermining teacher retention, and negatively affecting efforts to ensure the provision of quality education for all. PISA data point to only a weak negative association between teacher shortages and students' science results, once socio-economic background is taken into account. Even so, the coefficient on the PISA index of shortage of education staff stays negative for the EU on average, as well as in 9 Member States, indicating that the relationship between shortages and performance is not fully explained by socio-economic factors. Leaders of early childhood education and care settings also report that absences, shortage of qualified staff and insufficient staff can hinder capacity to provide a quality environment for children (OECD 2025c).

EU, suggesting a growing use of alternative staffing arrangements in response to recruitment difficulties (OECD, 2026b).

24 The Global Status of Teachers report is commissioned by Education International, the major global federation of teacher unions. It provides an analysis of the status and conditions of the teaching profession drawing on survey data from 204 senior union representatives across 121 countries. This report builds on previous reports from 2015, 2018, and 2021 with the aim of highlighting the key issues facing teachers in 2024.

25 See details in the annex.

26 One in five teachers work in schools whose principals report that the shortage of qualified teachers hinders quality instruction, EU-22 average, TALIS 2024, table 1.17.

27 Results can be found here: https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/expert-views/survey-building-attractive-teaching-careers-results. To note that the number of responses from some countries is higher than from others. Also, given the promotion of the survey among the European School Education Platform users and eTwinning community, the respondents are likely to be more experienced in international projects and mobility activities. Therefore, the overall results should not be considered fully representative.

The age structure of the teacher workforce signals substantial **future replacement needs**[28]. In 2023, 11 % of primary and secondary teachers were aged 60 or above, and 40 % were aged 50 or above, while only 8.0% were under the age of 30[29]. (European Commission, 2026a). The share of teachers aged 50 or older has increased from 39% to 42% over the period between 2013 and 2023[30]. Additionally, the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2024) results suggest that 43 % of teachers aged over 50 intend to leave the profession within the next five years (OECD, 2025a, table 7.1)[31]. This data signals a high risk of both impending retirements and early departures[32], which can further undermine the ability to ensure an adequate supply of teachers. Cedefop (2026) reports a need for qualified teachers in VET systems across all EU countries, also driven by an ageing workforce, declining numbers of new entrants and growing difficulties to retain teachers.

Some EU countries also struggle to **retain young teachers**. The share of teachers under 30 who intend to leave the profession within five years has risen since 2018, reaching 15 % in 2024 (European Commission, 2026a). These teachers most frequently cite job opportunities outside education, and personal or family reasons. In the four countries[33] with data on seniority, at least 30% of those resigning had been teaching for less than five years (OECD, 2025b). The consultations also highlighted the early attrition of qualified teachers who are attracted to other sectors with acute labour shortages.

In some countries, retention issues are compounded by increasing difficulties to sustain **enrolment in initial teacher education programmes** and ensure that **graduation rates** meet workforce demands (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021). Despite falling enrolment of student teachers in many systems, growing expectations for inclusive education, personalised learning and student well-being continue to increase demand for teaching personnel (OECD, 2025b). The consultations[34] also highlighted that not all graduates from initial teacher education enter the profession.

2.2. Declining attractiveness of the teaching profession

Social recognition

The challenges to retain the existing workforce and recruit new teachers are an indication of a decline in the prestige and attractiveness of the teaching profession. Teachers who feel that society appreciates their work are less likely to consider leaving the profession. According to TALIS 2024, teachers often feel valued by parents or guardians, but their perception of how society values their profession remains very low in many countries with 15.4% of teachers reporting they feel valued by society, on average (European Commission, 2026a). In some countries, perceived social recognition is higher amongst early childhood education and care

[28] The evolution of teacher shortages depends on trends in student numbers and the age distribution of the teacher workforce, as well as effective retirement ages, trends in the number of graduates from initial teacher education, attrition rates, and policy parameters such as class sizes, support staff, and subject allocation. Most Member States do not undertake regular workforce forecasting, with some (e.g. Austria, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal) having invested in forecasting models (Sorensen, 2026).

[29] Eurostat, online data code: educ_uoe_perp01.

[30] Data for the EU25. OECD, 2026b, Education at a Glance, Table D8.1.

[31] TALIS 2024, table 7.1.

[32] 17.9% of teachers over the age 50 intend to leave, excluding those who are about to retire.

[33] Austria, Estonia, Poland and the Slovak Republic.

[34] Details on the inputs from the consultations are presented in section 3 and the annex.

staff compared to staff working in other levels of education. Cedefop pilot survey data[35] suggest that only 9% of VET teachers feel valued in their countries (Psifidou et al., 2026).

Perceptions of being valued vary depending on the source of that recognition. Teachers tend to feel considerably more valued by their immediate school community, students and parents, than by the broader community, including the media and policymakers. This suggests that the erosion of prestige has less to do with day-to-day relationships in schools and more with how the profession is portrayed and treated at societal and political level.

Salaries and terms of employment

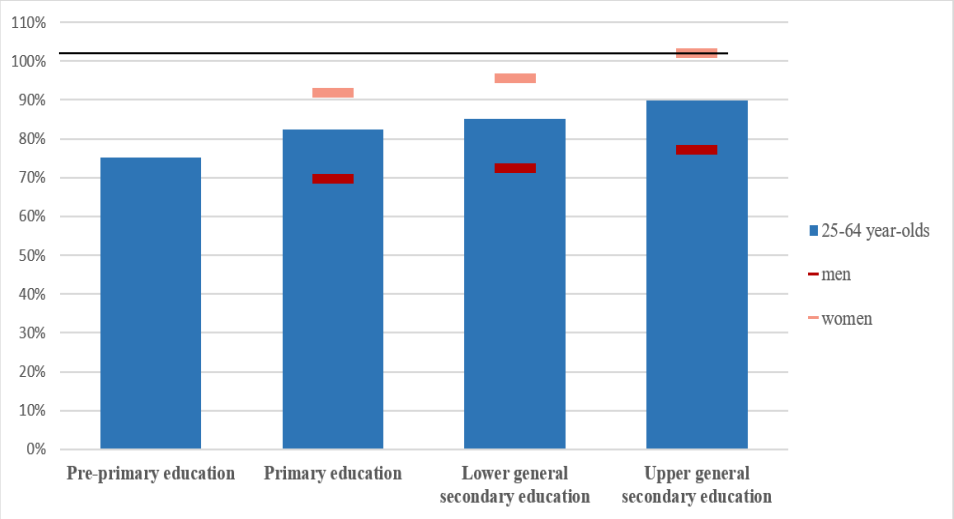
Around two in five teachers in lower secondary education report that they are satisfied with their **salaries**. This is in contrast with about 90% of teachers who report being satisfied with the profession and their current work environment, and about 70% with their terms of employment, excluding salaries.

Although teaching is a large employer of graduate labour, the salaries of lower secondary teachers are 15 % lower than the average earnings of tertiary-educated workers in the EU (European Commission, 2026a). Pay gaps tend to be even more pronounced for primary and especially for pre-primary teachers.

The teaching profession is highly feminised, partly due to gender stereotypes and a long-held perception that being a teacher is compatible with family life (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). To some extent, this "occupational advantage" has been considered a trade-off for lower pay. Nonetheless, working life has changed considerably, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many employers offer policies to attract the best graduates, such as flexible working arrangements with hybrid and telework options. In contrast, the school day is based around rigid timetables which demand physical presence and restrict opportunities for time off during term time. At the same time, teachers' work has become increasingly demanding. For these reasons, a reliance on what made teaching attractive in the past may be less effective at filling the teacher gap in the future.

Teachers' actual salaries relative to earnings of tertiary-educated workers, EU average, by gender (2024)

[35] Preliminary findings from the European Vocational Teacher Survey are based on responses from 735 teachers across 23 EU Member States.



Source: European Commission calculations based on Table D3.5 Education at a Glance 2025. ***Note***: The figure shows the average actual salaries (including bonuses and allowances) of full-time teachers aged 25-64 in public institutions as a percentage of the earnings of full-time, full-year workers aged 25-64 with tertiary educational attainment. The values represent the average for EU Member States excluding Bulgaria, Croatia, Spain and Luxembourg, where there is no data available, Cyprus and Malta. At pre-primary level, there is no data available for Austria, Germany and Ireland. Breakdown by gender is not available for Estonia, Germany, Romania, Lithuania and Slovakia.

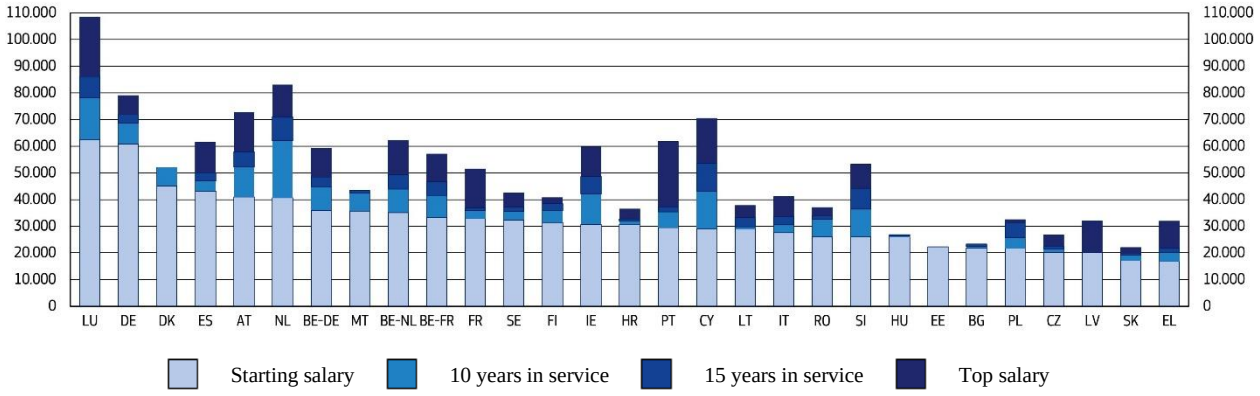
Persistent gender pay gaps in the private sector make it comparatively hard to attract men to teaching, where wages are not subject to the same discrimination. On average, male teachers earn 30 % less than other tertiary-educated men at primary level, 28 % at lower secondary level and 23 % at upper secondary level, while female teachers earn close or similar salaries to those received by other tertiary-educated women.

Lower salaries relative to those of similarly educated professionals affect teachers' living standards and career choices and more generally, they contribute to broad perceptions of the status of the teaching profession. While several Member States have implemented across-the-board salary increases, these have not kept pace with the rising costs of inflation (European Commission, 2023b). Consultations also highlighted that in some countries, salaries are still lagging.

There are stark differences across EU countries in teachers' statutory starting salaries and pay progression over time[36]. Two aspects are particularly relevant when assessing to which extent salary progression is attractive for teachers: first, the size of the salary increases linked to length in service; and second, how early in their career the increases are awarded.

[36] Half of the education systems were organising their career structures in formal ascending career levels, with each step representing a greater complexity of tasks and responsibility, and teachers typically receiving a salary raise as they move to a higher level in the career structure (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

Statutory salaries of lower secondary teachers with the minimum qualification (in PPS), 2024/2025



% increase compared to starting salaries	BEfr	BEde	BEnl	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE
After 10 years	25	25	25	3	6	15	13	a	37	20	9	9	4	10	49	a	3	25	2	19	53	28	19	20	25	40	12	15	10
After 15 years	41	35	41	7	11	15	18	a	59	30	16	12	7	21	85	a	15	38	4	22	75	41	44	27	30	69	15	23	15
At the top of the range	72	65	77	a	32	15	30	a	95	90	43	57	19	49	143	60	31	74	4	22	104	78	50	110	42	105	29	30	31
Average No years to reach the top	27	26	36	a	32	12	a	a	35	36	39	34	40	35	24	a	25	30	15	12	12	32	20	34	25	18	40	20	a

Source: Based on data from Eurydice's Teachers' and School Heads' Salaries and Allowances 2024-2025 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2026b).

Note: Annual gross statutory salary of full-time, fully qualified lower secondary school teachers, as adjusted for differences in purchasing power, using purchasing power parities (PPPs) for actual individual consumption from Eurostat [prc_ppp_ind_1]. The period of reference for teachers' salaries is from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025. The reference date for PPPs is 2025. Countries are shown in descending order according to the starting salaries. In Bulgaria, the data correspond to salaries of teachers, senior teachers and chief teachers respectively. In Estonia, the starting salary refers to the minimum wage applicable to teachers, there are no salaries statutorily defined for the different stages in the career. In Latvia, the education authority only defines the minimum and maximum salaries. For other country notes, see the Eurydice's webtool.

In some countries, the teaching career is conceived primarily in terms of salary progression, with pay increases linked to years of service. However, it can also be structured as a career ladder with successive steps leading to greater responsibilities and higher pay. In both career models, teachers may also take on horizontal responsibilities or roles, for example subject-related, or digital, pedagogical or sustainability coordinators, although these do not always come with fair economic compensation or reduced teaching load (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

Regarding their professional status, fully qualified teachers can be: (i) employees subject to general employment legislation, (ii) employees subject to special employment legislation governing contractual relations in the public sector without civil servant status, or (iii) employees with civil servant status, which usually affords teachers higher job security. Teachers are employed as civil servants in 11 EU countries, as non-civil servant public employees in 5 EU countries, and under contracts subject to general employment legislation in 10 EU countries (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). However, there are additional distinctions in certain EU countries[37].

[37] For example, in Luxembourg, the employment status of teachers depends on the type of school or the teacher's nationality, while, in Italy, teachers are public employees with private contracts (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

Teachers in EU education systems are commonly employed on contracts with an indefinite duration. Temporary contracts are used under specific conditions, such as for substitute teachers or to respond to changes in school demographics (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). However, the use of temporary and fixed-term contracts has become more widespread.

One in five teachers (17.7%) in the EU report that they work on a **fixed-term** contract. Contracts of one year or less are more prevalent than fixed contracts longer than one year (14.2% compared to 3.5%). More precarious employment conditions are largely concentrated among young and novice teachers. One in two teachers under 30 (48.6%) is employed on a fixed-term contract, compared to 9.3% of teachers over 50[38]. The share stands at 52.7% for **novice teachers** and 7.5% for experienced teachers (European Commission, 2026a). Education is one of the economic sectors where the share of temporary employment is highest[39], together with the commerce, hospitality and health sectors.

Most teachers are employed on **full-time** contracts, with 25.4% of teachers employed part-time in 2023, and much higher proportions in some EU countries[40]. According to TALIS 2024 (OECD, 2025a), teachers employed on **part-time** contracts are much more likely to work in multiple schools compared with their full-time colleagues.

Job demands

> "*There are times when work is overwhelming and interferes with private life. Sometimes parents (or kids) need my help outside working hours, even during weekends. Correcting papers, writing and answering emails, documentation are tasks most often done after working hours*". *Teacher, country not specified*
>
> *"In Lithuania, we have a problem that it's a lack of teachers and most of the teachers have more than one full workload…So, we have lots of contact lessons per week… I stay after my lessons…other teachers work till 6pm because of lack of teachers…." Teacher, Lithuania.*
>
> *"I teach English in a rural area…in a small school… So, my challenge here in my school [concerns] too many classes. I have nine classes…It has been demanding and normally most of my [work]time is at home…School is not enough, the time we use to prepare everything. And the bureaucratic part…. I have around 200 [students]. So, for one teacher, I think it's too much." Teacher, Portugal.*
>
> *"Things happen between the lessons, during the lessons, and so on. Our work, now, we have three things that are very much on top: relations, relations, relations. We have to build the relations all the time with the parents and the students and among us teachers as well… If I don't talk with [the parents], I get a lot of emails." Teacher, Sweden.*

Working beyond contractual hours is more common among those working in education (26 % of men and 19 % of women) compared to other sectors (Eurofound, 2026). Work-life balance has deteriorated due to heavier workloads outside school hours, driven by increasingly complex and diverse learning needs. The boundaries between work and personal

[38] In Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal and Romania, more than two thirds of teachers under the age of 30 are on fixed-term contracts.

[39] Eurofound reports a share of temporary employment in education at around 11%, a figure roughly 6 percentage points lower than the fixed-term contract rate reported in TALIS.

[40] In Belgium (47.1%), Germany (45.1%), Lithuania (45.9%), Latvia (47.3%), Croatia (48.5%), Netherlands (61.6%) and Estonia (63.5%). Eurostat, online data code: educ_uoe_perp03.

life have also become blurred with increasing use of digital technologies for communication and collaboration.

Several studies show how time pressure and excessive workload, heavy administrative burden and highly regulated environments, as well as unstable precarious employment contracts all contribute to teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction (Kozina, A. and Nairz-Wirth, E., 2026).

The largest component of teachers' work is classroom instruction, although this accounts for less than half of their **working time** on average across the EU[41]. Lesson preparation and assessment account for about one quarter of their time, and communication and collaboration with other teachers, students and parents, school management, professional learning and administrative tasks make up the remaining quarter (European Commission, 2026a). However, the teachers who report the longest working hours devote most of their time to tasks other than teaching (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021).

Teacher **workload** can be difficult to analyse as contractual requirements (statutory hours) often differ from the actual hours worked (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). The project 'Teaching Around the Clock – Unveiling the Reality of Working Time and Compensation for Teachers in Europe' is carrying out a comparative analysis of working time models, highlighting teaching and non-teaching tasks and the extent to which actual working hours are effectively compensated[42].

Teachers who participated in focus groups during the preparations of the proposal identified large class sizes and inadequate support for students with special educational needs as major challenges. They reported that their work routinely extended into evenings, weekends and holidays. School trips and after-school events were highly valued, but largely unrecognised as part of teachers' workload. Teachers reported that their main workload challenges concerned documentation, parent communications, student pastoral care, covering for sick colleagues, meetings, and reporting. Early childhood education and care professionals reported unpaid preparation time, high child-to-teacher ratios and settings that remain open year-round, all of which intensified their work strain. Some teachers noted that shortages of teachers and high administrative workload expanded their working hours, which were not always remunerated.

The early childhood education and care sector presents specific challenges, notably around non-contact time, meaning the paid time dedicated to tasks not involving direct contact with children, such as liaising with parents, preparing for teaching, documenting and assessing children's learning progress, planning activities, discussing pedagogical and organisational approaches with colleagues, and engaging in continuing professional development (CPD). Where this non-contact time is limited or poorly protected, it adds to workload pressures already affecting the workforce.

The OECD is conducting work on teacher workload and how digital tools may enhance the effectiveness of different tasks, as part of the 'Resourcing School Education: Policies for the Digital Transformation of Education and Future-readiness of Teachers' project of the Education Policy Committee Programme of Work.

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41 Only in Finland and Belgium (French Community) does classroom instruction account for at least 50% of teachers' working time.

42 https://etuce.org/en/projects/139:teaching-around-the-clock.

Workers in education are those who most experienced a degradation in **work intensity**[43] across all economic sectors (Eurofound, 2026). Consultations also noted an intensification of teachers' work that concerns both the quantity and higher complexity of everyday tasks.

According to TALIS 2024, teachers under 30 report the highest levels of **work-related stress**. The most common sources of stress for teachers are administrative work, changing requirements from authorities, and maintaining classroom discipline (European Commission, 2026a). The prevalence of maintaining classroom discipline as a source of stress has increased in more than a dozen EU countries since 2018. In nearly all countries, novice teachers feel stressed for this reason and report classroom disruptions and disorder more frequently than their experienced colleagues. ECEC educators report that requirements to carry out too many tasks simultaneously and to take on other colleagues' tasks (due to high sickness absence rates) are the most significant sources of stress (OECD, 2025c). Nearly half of VET teachers (49%) report that they feel overburdened by taking on additional responsibilities due to staff shortages, and physical exhaustion and emotional strain are widespread (Psifidou, I., et al., 2026).

Other studies have corroborated that difficulties in classroom management and discipline problems are associated to teacher burnout, lower satisfaction and premature attrition, particularly among early-career and early childhood education and care teachers (Kozina, A. and Nairz-Wirth, E., 2026). The education sector has a considerable share of workers (24 %) worrying about work (Eurofound, 2026).

Verbal abuse is most reported in the public administration sector (17 %), followed closely by the education, health, and transport sectors, all 15 % (Eurofound, 2026). Cyberbullying is most prevalent in the education sector (4 %), while bullying is an issue across all three public sectors, with public administration, health and education recording equally high prevalence rates of 7 % each.

Teacher agency and autonomy

> *"A profession that is not making its own decisions is not very attractive"* Trade union, Czechia, June 2026.

Fewer than one in five teachers (18.3%) believe that they can **influence education policy** (OECD, 2025a, table 5.28), even though those who do report higher levels of job satisfaction. Teachers who feel that their views are valued by policymakers are also less likely to intend to leave the profession (European Commission, 2026a).

In contrast, around four in five teachers report to be involved in **school decision-making** and lead collaborative activities, on average in the EU. However, only around two in five teachers work in schools whose principals report that teachers have a significant responsibility in defining school improvement priorities, student disciplinary procedures and assessment policies. Involvement is lower as concerns deciding student diversity policies, facilitating

[43] Across sectors, the degradation in work intensity was experienced most by workers in education (– 7 points), followed by commerce and hospitality (– 6 points) and health (– 3 points). The difficulty in taking a break from work is particularly prevalent among those working in the education (50 %), followed by the health (40 %) and commerce and hospitality (35 %) sectors. Education is also the sector with the highest share of workers affected by persistent emotional exhaustion (18 %).

professional development activities to support students' social and emotional development, and, particularly, staffing and budget decisions (OECD, 2025a, table 5.2).

Globally, teacher unions report that governments consult with teachers' organisations only to some extent on key areas affecting teachers such as curriculum, professional development and teacher evaluation (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024). The consultations identified professional autonomy as fundamental, noting that teachers are often positioned as the 'implementers' of decisions taken far away from the classroom and underscoring that teachers need the ability to take and implement decisions, and contribute to shaping professional standards, pedagogy and professional development.

Instructional autonomy is widespread: in most EU countries, over 90% of teachers report having substantial autonomy in designing and planning lessons and selecting teaching methods. However, teachers report lower levels of autonomy to choose assessment activities, and particularly to implement the curriculum in a flexible way and select learning objectives, with EU averages below 80% and cross-country differences much more pronounced (European Commission, 2026a). Furthermore, instructional autonomy can be constrained if teachers need to cover a large, mandated curricula and prepare students for standardised assessments too frequently (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024).

Diversity of the teaching profession

Classrooms have become increasingly diverse with students with special or distinct learning needs, neurodiverse learners, from migrant or disadvantaged backgrounds and students whose home language(s) differs from the language of instruction. Research evidence suggests that schools can better serve their communities when the workforce reflects the student population because teachers can serve as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators (Egalite et al., 2015). The consultations also suggested that students who see themselves represented in the classroom are more likely to be encouraged to become teachers. Having more men in the teaching profession is also about role models for both girls and boys, in the context of the higher rates of underachievement among boys,

However, only eight Member States have policies or measures to promote the recruitment of teachers with diverse backgrounds, and these primarily focus on the recruitment of migrants or persons with disabilities. While there are national policy legislation, strategies and action plans on equality, diversity, inclusion and non-discrimination in employment, there is little evidence of their implementation and impact in practice (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023b).

A 2016 European Commission study showed that persons of migrant or minority backgrounds were significantly underrepresented in initial teacher education and the teacher workforce (Donlevy et al., 2026). A case study of a fast-track teacher education programme for recently immigrated teachers and pre-school teachers in Sweden illustrates the complexities of professional entry for migrant teachers[44]. During the consultation,

[44] Six universities developed the programme, in collaboration with teacher unions, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and the Swedish Public Employment Service. Starting in 2016, it had enrolled more than 1200 students within five years. Alongside knowledge of the Swedish school system, school law and the curriculum, the programme included Swedish language instruction and supervised school-based training; however, it did not lead to formal teacher certification. The analysis highlighted several key challenges faced by participants: language and communication issues, which affected

stakeholders also pointed to barriers for migrant/refugee teachers with third country teaching qualifications (insufficient support for language learning and pedagogical adaptation, short term roles, length of procedures for the recognition of qualifications) and the need for sustained mentoring and professional socialisation. The integration of teachers with third country qualifications into the profession could also be supported through the provision of affordable bridging programmes or courses in case of partial recognition of professional qualifications.

Limited research on teachers with disabilities reveals attitudinal and physical barriers to entering the profession. In their review, Neca et al. (2022) noted that many teachers with disabilities lacked recognition of their competence. This underlines the need for disability awareness training to challenge stereotypes and ensure that the specific needs of teacher candidates are understood so reasonable accommodations can be made. Moreover, disability representation in social dialogue is essential to ensuring the full and meaningful participation of teachers with disabilities in education systems (Milner et al., 2026) The European Disability Forum (2026) reports that many teachers do not receive enough training on disability, inclusive teaching methods, or the human rights approach promoted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Overall, EU-level data on teacher diversity are limited, restricting the analysis of representation across demographic groups and making it difficult to develop policies.

2.3. Teacher preparation for evolving demands

Addressing new challenges in the classroom

Teachers' work has always been multifaceted and constantly evolving. In recent years, however, teachers manage increasingly complex realities: a growing range of educational needs, multiple languages spoken in the classroom and at home, and expectations to protect students' well-being and mental health. Teachers are increasingly expected to respond to wider social challenges, support pupils with complex needs and take on responsibilities beyond classroom teaching. Teaching requires increased instructional adaptation and differentiation, which can place additional demands on teachers (time to develop their skills and prepare their lessons) and the system (e.g. class size, curricula flexibility).

About 20.8% of teachers in the EU report experiencing significant disruptive noise and disorder in their classrooms and losing time because students interrupt the lesson (OECD, 2025b, Table 3.35). Additionally, maintaining classroom discipline has become more difficult since 2018 as teachers report using teaching practices regarding classroom management more frequently, such as calming students who are disruptive (European Commission, 2026a, Table 1.35, OECD, 2025b). Among job demands, stress related to maintaining classroom discipline and experiencing intimidation or verbal abuse by students shows the strongest and most consistent association with teachers' intentions to leave the profession within the next five years across EU countries.

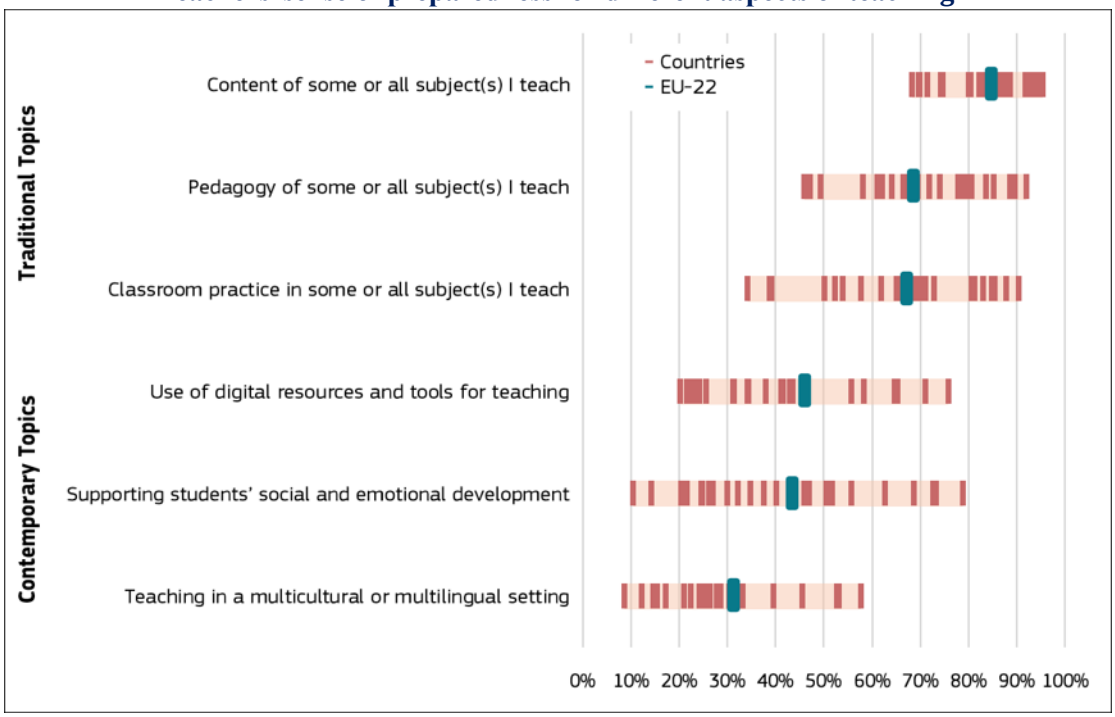
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relationships with staff and students and influenced how they were perceived as a teacher; pedagogical adaptation from a teacher-centred to a pupil-centred approach; uncertainty in recruitment practices, resulting in many working under precarious work contracts; lack of professional recognition, often leading to recruitment as teaching assistants or cultural translators; the need for longer-term mentoring; and the complex and lengthy professional socialisation process (Bengtsson and Mickwitz, 2022).

Novice teachers are more often exposed to challenging classroom contexts, such as those with higher shares of students who have difficulties understanding the language(s) of instruction, special education needs, behavioural problems, or academic difficulties. They also report more disruption than their more experienced colleagues (European Commission, 2026a). These findings suggest that novice teachers face greater challenges in managing classroom discipline, either because they have not yet developed the necessary skills or due to the way classes are assigned.

While teachers generally report that their **formal education** prepared them well in terms of subject content, they feel less prepared for pedagogy and class practice. TALIS 2024 results also show a decline in the proportion of recently qualified teachers who feel that their formal education adequately prepared them in content, pedagogy and classroom practice in the subjects they teach. This trend suggests that new teachers may perceive that the professional demands of teaching exceed the preparation received during their initial teacher education (OECD, 2025a).

Teachers' sense of preparedness for different aspects of teaching



Source: OECD, 2025a (Table 4.5)

Moreover, only a small proportion of teachers (31.3%) report that they feel that their initial teacher education prepared them for teaching in multicultural/multilingual settings[45] and for supporting the social and emotional development of their pupils (43.4%) (European Commission, 2026a). Preparation to respond to linguistic diversity in the classroom, recognise and value learners' linguistic backgrounds and use them as a pedagogical resource, while strengthening competence in the language of schooling are essential in supporting educational success. These can support educational achievement and more inclusive learning

[45] Language awareness and language sensitive teaching are a key skill for all teachers, given that 15,5% of pupils have a different language at home than the language of schooling.

environments, particularly for learners from migrant backgrounds, and contribute to their well-being at school (European Commission, 2020a).

Although provision of **induction** has become widespread across Europe (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2021), on average, only one third of teachers with five years of experience or less report having participated in a formal induction programme (OECD, 2025), and only one in five reports that they have an assigned mentor (European Commission, 2026a).

Stakeholder consultations pointed to the need to align recruitment, training and induction more closely to local needs, so that preparation reflects the specific contexts in which teachers will work. Participants also noted that raising the status of teaching requires higher recognition of the teacher educator profession and the field of teacher education research, which underpin the quality of initial preparation. This was linked to the need to guarantee that there are trained, recognised mentors to support new teachers through their induction, and to develop roles that allow experienced teachers to share their expertise without leaving the classroom altogether.

There are also gaps in opportunities for **career-long professional learning**. While participation in continuing professional development is near-universal[46] across the EU, only around half of teachers think it had a positive impact on their teaching. Moreover, continuing professional development focuses mainly on traditional topics, and there remain unmet needs for core areas such as classroom management, teaching students with special education needs, individualised learning and supporting students' social-emotional development (European Commission, 2026a). Additionally, fields such as ICT skills and teaching students with special needs evolve rapidly with new pedagogical approaches, generating an ongoing need to remain up to date (OECD, 2019).

Consultations highlighted the need for sustained continuing professional development that better matches teachers' needs, considers the tangible impact on teaching practice and applies effective learning approaches, rather than traditional one-off courses. According to TALIS 2024, the lack of time is a reason for not participating in continuing professional development activities for 64% of teachers, while around 50% of teachers lack incentives to participate or cannot participate because of conflicts with their work schedule (OECD, 2025a, table 4.39). Main barriers to participation as mentioned by the stakeholders include the lack of time or replacement in their teaching duties.

Teacher appraisal can play a role in identifying individual development needs, recognising and incentivising meaningful continuing professional development. However, more than one third of teachers work in schools where remedy to address professional weaknesses is not discussed in their appraisal, and more than half work in schools where no individual professional development plan is established as a result (European Commission, 2026a).

Defending democracy

[46] According to TALIS, most teachers participated in at least one CPD activity in the year before the survey.

> "*In what has been termed a 'post-truth' condition, professional judgements including those made by teachers are increasingly dismissed as mere opinions. This disregard persists despite the years teachers spend cultivating their understanding and their efforts to make informed pedagogical decisions based on knowledge and evidence*". Carmi, T. (2026)

Schools are often the first environment students experience outside the family and serve as a setting for practicing democracy, shaping young people's civic knowledge, attitudes and engagement (Damiani, 2026). They are also spaces for connection and belonging, where people with diverse perspectives come together.

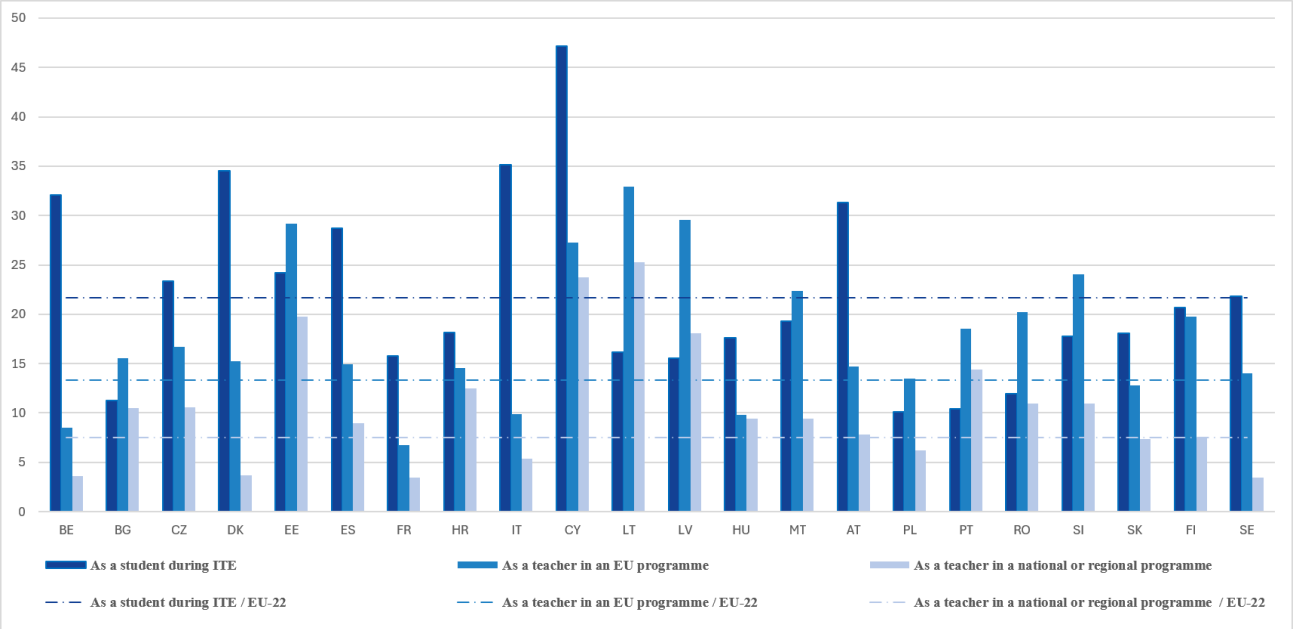
Education International (2026) highlights that teachers across multiple countries have reported intimidation and a recent survey of over 1,000 teachers in Germany found that 22% of teachers experience right-wing extremist behaviour from pupils every week, and 12% of these teachers said that they are hesitant to promote democracy in their classes for fear of backlash. Those teachers also called for training and support in navigating such situations. Consultations also noted teachers' sense of vulnerability in a politicised environment and the effects of social media, characterised by several participants as a threat to teacher agency and professional autonomy, with a disproportionate effect on women given the gender composition of the profession.

The professionalisation of teaching is based on specialised knowledge, public trust, and professional authority. Carmi, T. (2026) analyses several trends that disrupt teacher professionalism: misinformation and disinformation, rejection of verified claims, primacy of belief over evidence, declining trust in institutions and experts, fragmentation and polarisation of information environments (e.g. social media and messaging apps). For example, misinformation and disinformation may fuel suspicion about teachers' competence and teachers' judgments may be challenged. The spread of dispositions that erode trust in expertise have an impact on the teaching profession, and beyond.

International mobility

According to TALIS 2024, teacher international mobility has increased on average in recent years, yet, in 2024, only 21.7 % of lower secondary teachers declared having been abroad as a student during their ITE, 13,3 % as a teacher in an EU programme, and 7,5 % as a teacher in a national or regional programme. In all countries, the share of teachers participating in an EU programme was higher than the share participating in a national or regional programme. Moreover, evidence shows that higher participation rates in EU-funded programmes are associated with higher participation rates in national or regional programmes.

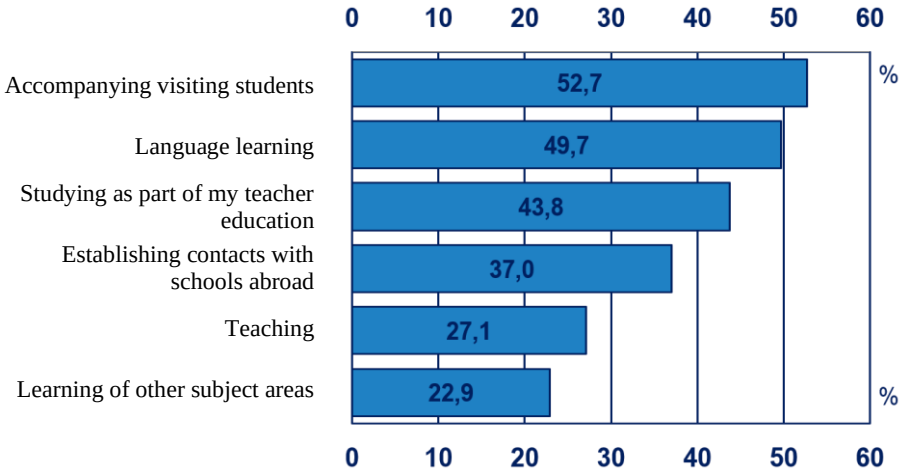
Percentage of teachers who have been abroad for professional purposes, ISCED 24, 2024



Source: European Commission services' calculations based on TALIS 2024 database.

Accompanying students on visits to other countries and learning a foreign language are the most common reasons for teachers to go abroad. Around half of the teachers who have been abroad report these two professional purposes for their mobility. Teachers also often go abroad either to complete part of their ITE or to establish contacts with schools abroad once in service. Less frequently, they go abroad to teach or learn other subject areas.

Percentage of teachers who have been abroad, by professional purpose, EU-22 average, 2024

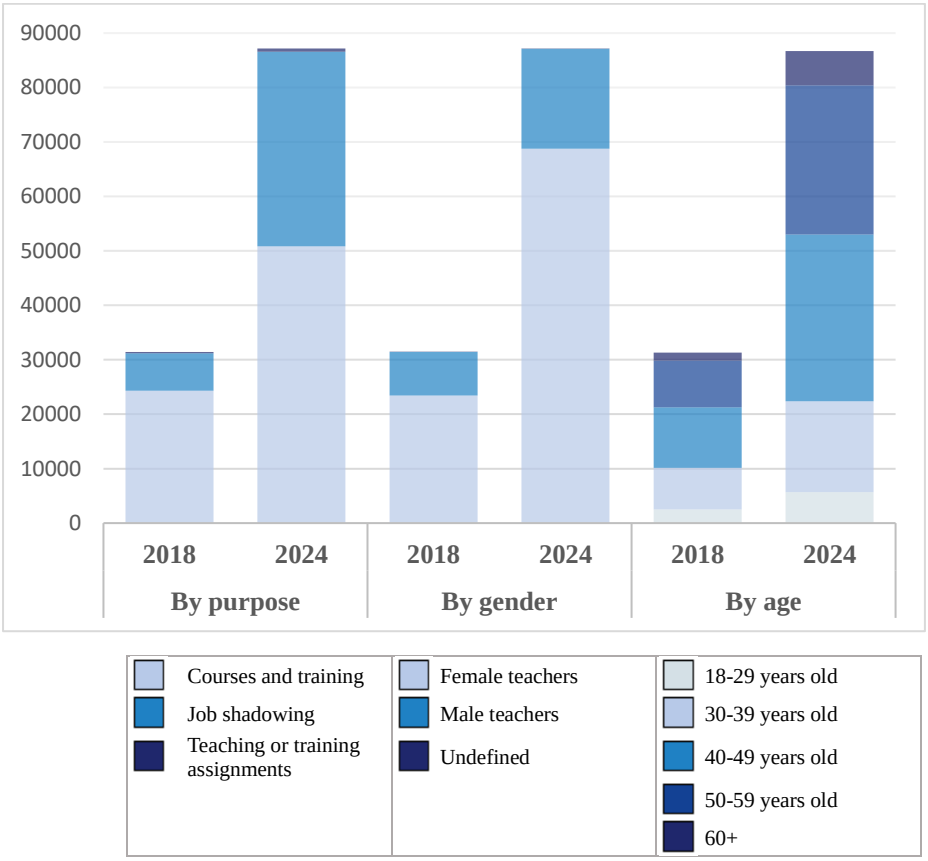


Source: European Commission services' calculations based on TALIS 2024 database.

Teachers with less than 10 years of experience, and particularly those in their first five years of service, are less likely to participate in mobility actions. TALIS 2024 results also show that early-career teachers, male teachers and teachers approaching retirement have lower odds to

participate in EU funded mobility. According to Erasmus+ programme data[47] for 2024, around two thirds of mobilities concerned teachers between 30 and 49 years old, and more than three quarters were women. The number of total mobilities more than doubled between 2018 and 2024, reflecting a significant budget increase between these years. In terms of type, courses and training account for the largest share, although job-shadowing has increased notably.

Erasmus+ Teacher mobilities



Source: European Commission services' calculations based on Erasmus+ programme data from the Erasmus+ dashboard. Data refers to completed Erasmus+ mobilities in school education, including ECEC.

The main barriers to the mobility of teachers include limited language competences, insufficient financial support, family responsibilities, and lack of recognition of mobility periods (in the country of origin) or professional qualifications (in the destination country). Other important obstacles may be the administrative burden linked to organising mobility, insufficient support from institutions, concerns about the impact of absence on pupils and school continuity, difficulties in arranging substitute teachers, and timetable and curriculum constraints.

Some stakeholders flagged prejudice and inconsistent understanding of learning outcomes in East–West or South-North mobility and highlighted Nordic automatic recognition as a model. They stressed the importance of support and training during the recognition phase.

[47] Data were extracted on 7 July 2026 and relate to completed Erasmus+ mobilities in school education, including ECEC.

The study supporting the impact assessment of Directive 2005/36/EC[48] identifies barriers pertaining to qualifications when seeking to work or to move between EU countries, in particular relating to provision of information, the length of the procedure, and wide variation in documentation requirements.

2.4. School environment and leadership

School leaders

School leadership across the EU is characterised by an ageing workforce, with limited inflow of younger professionals. Nearly seven out of ten principals are aged 50 or above, while fewer than 5% are under 40, and the average age has increased from 51.7 years in 2018 to 53.1 years in 2024.

Job satisfaction is high among school leaders: 94.3% of principals are satisfied with their job overall and 96.4% enjoy working at their school. However, only 42% of principals are satisfied with their salaries (European Commission, 2026c). The demands they experience involve a distinct layer of occupational pressure: around 31% of school leaders report high levels of occupational stress, with administrative workload being a primary source for 77.5% of principals. Moreover, only 24% of school leaders perceives societal recognition of their profession. More than one in three principals (including those approaching retirement age) report intending to leave the profession within the next five years, pointing to significant sustainability challenges for school leadership (European Commission, 2026c).

Formal initial preparation for school leadership remains uneven across EU education systems, and unmet professional learning needs are substantial. While 79.9% of principals report having completed teacher education as pre-service preparation, only 63.8% report school administration training and 45.9% report formal training in instructional leadership. Despite widespread engagement in professional learning activities, school leaders report the highest levels of need in promoting staff well-being (29.9% report a high need), developing collaboration among teachers (28.7%), using data to improve school quality (24.3%) and school management, such as human resource and financial management (23.9%). TALIS Starting Strong 2024 (OECD, 2025) shows that more training opportunities are needed in the early childhood education and care sector, for example in the areas of inclusion, leadership, language expertise.

Supportive leadership

School leaders directly influence the working conditions and job satisfaction of teachers and the learning environments of students. They play a key role in supporting teachers throughout their careers. They are particularly important in supporting new teachers, but also in shaping school culture, collegiality and professional development opportunities for early-, mid- and late-career teachers.

Research shows that school leaders are vital in creating the conditions where learners and teachers can thrive and succeed: they allocate time for collaboration and reflection, signpost or provide professional learning, mediate between system-level expectations and school-level

realities. They can cultivate a supportive climate that values professional autonomy. School leadership influences collective teacher efficacy or sense of ability (Çoğaltay and Boz, 2023) and leaders are crucial to creating the necessary culture for pedagogical innovation. They can drive evidence-informed pedagogical practices and promote mental health and well-being for both staff and students.

Supportive leadership, including principals who trust teachers' expertise, provide useful feedback and maintain good professional relationships with staff, is among the most robust positive correlates of job satisfaction across EU countries (European Commission, 2026a). School leaders, when they are well-supported and equipped, can drive evidence-informed pedagogical practices, cultivate a supportive climate that reduces burnout and values professional autonomy, implement systemic, preventative mental health and well-being frameworks for both staff and students.

Supportive school environments

Teachers who report collaborating more tend to be more likely to fulfil their lesson aims. This holds for several specific collaborative activities, in particular working with colleagues to ensure common assessment standards (18 of 23 EU Member States with available data), participating in collaborative professional learning (13 EU Member States) and joint activities across classes and age groups (12 EU Member States)[49]. Collaborative school environments are also positively correlated with teachers' job satisfaction and well-being (European Commission, 2026a; ENESET 2026).

Regarding **collaborative practices**, teachers typically participate in informal exchanges on specific students' learning development or teaching materials. Most teachers report that principals encourage co-operation among teachers and maintain good professional relationships with staff. However, working in a team, peer observation or collaborative professional learning activities remain uncommon.

Teachers are increasingly expected to take on tasks typically carried out by other professionals, such as psychologists and social workers, which places an additional burden on them. **Multiprofessional teams**, bringing together teachers, psychologists, social workers and counsellors allow provision of comprehensive support in schools, addressing the challenges more effectively and alleviating burden on teachers. The European Disability Forum (2026) reports that schools often struggle to recruit and retain specialised staff, including support teachers, sign language interpreters, and other professionals.

A safe, secure, and accessible physical environment is crucial. It fosters teaching and learning, and is an attractive workplace. School buildings, classrooms and equipment affect how students learn and how teachers teach, and good design can support innovative teaching practices. Well-built and well-maintained infrastructure can have positive effects on student well-being and learning outcomes.

Adequate lighting, air quality, temperature, acoustics, hygiene and accessibility remain basic requirements for school infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic drew some attention to school design, but mainly to features such as ventilation, classroom density and hygiene facilities. Educational buildings are among the oldest and energy-inefficient and badly

[49] OECD, TALIS 2024, Table 6.11.

prepared for heat waves (European Commission, 2022). Nearly 43% of schools in European cities are in urban heat islands that are at least 2°C hotter than their region's average climate, and 5% of European schools are in urban heat islands that are at least 4°C hotter than their region's average climate (European Environmental Agency, 2022). The impact of climate change on teachers' work conditions, health and well-being in poorly insulated schools is increasing (Flouris, 2025). Teachers find themselves coping with classrooms that overheat during the summer and are cold and poorly ventilated in the winter. During heatwaves, these schools become even hotter, exposing teachers and students to health-threatening temperatures. Since 2010, the quality of the physical environment has improved in all sectors, except for the education and health sectors.

2.5. Integrating digital technologies in teaching

In the 2025 Eurobarometer survey, 41% of respondents cited inadequate teacher preparation as a reason for gaps in student basic digital skills (European Commission, 2025). According to the 2023 International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), computer and information literacy (CIL) is below level 2 for nearly half of students in their eighth year of schooling (average age 13.5+) in the EU (European Commission, 2024). Strengthening teacher digital competences is essential not only to bridge student digital skills gaps but also to combat disinformation, mitigate risks for social relations and well-being, and promote the responsible and safe use of digital technologies and AI. Moreover, integrating digital technologies to enhance learning is closely associated to teacher preparation (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2026a).

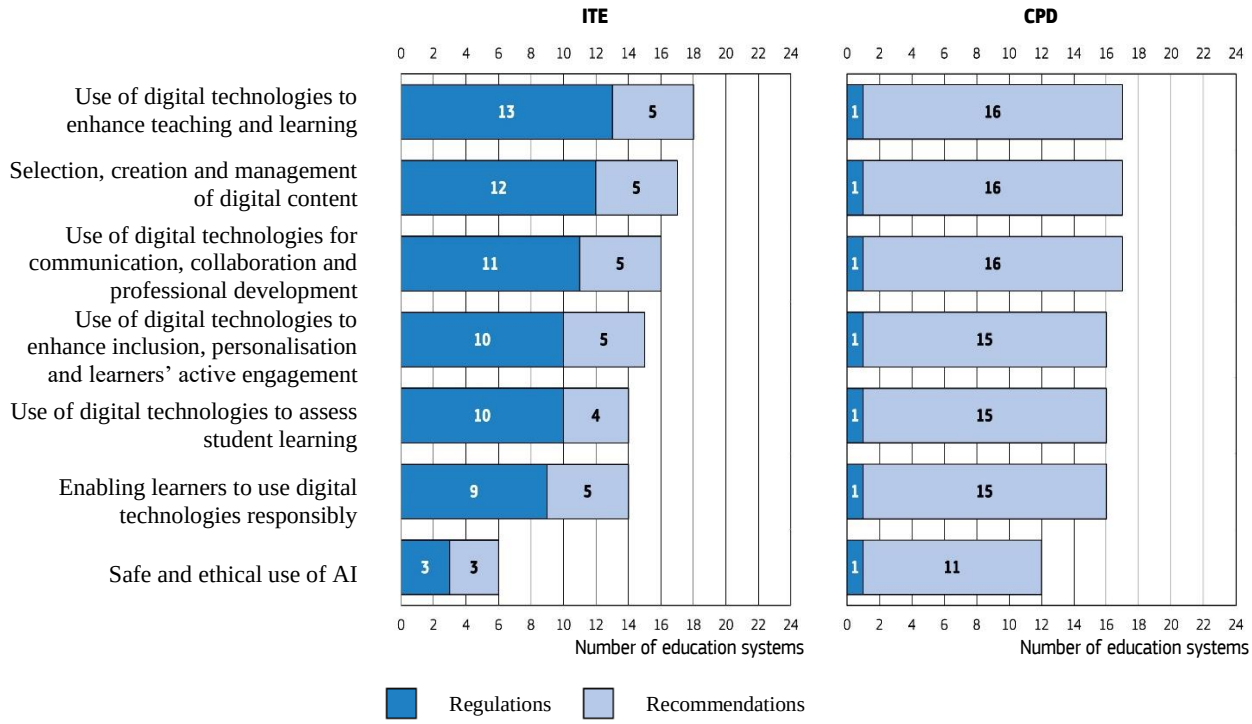
According to Eurydice, 18 Member States explicitly address the use of digital technologies to enhance teaching and learning in competence frameworks for ITE, which are usually mandatory. ITE frameworks cover personalised learning, student assessment and responsible technology use by learners in 15 and 14 countries respectively, and the safe and ethical use of AI in only six. Frameworks for teacher professional development – existing in 16 Member States – tend to cover more digital competence areas but are seldom mandatory (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2026a).

The integration of digital competences into initial teacher education programmes is relatively recent and, therefore, continuing professional development remains essential (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2026a). However, in-service teachers tend to participate mainly in learning activities on integrating digital technologies into teaching, while other areas receive less attention – including supporting personalised learning, assessing students, identifying and dealing with disinformation and managing social problems associated with digital communication. Although teachers generally recognise the need to develop these competences, they may lack access to relevant learning opportunities or sufficient time. Participation in professional development activities on AI is even less common, partly due to teachers' concerns on the use of this technology and doubts about its educational benefits.

Most member states have established and support specialised networks and communities of practice that enable teachers to share their experience and enhance their expertise. The use of self-assessment tools, usually drawing on SELFIE for teachers, is also common (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2026a). Some education systems have also developed personalised learning paths that teachers can adapt to their own needs and follow at their own pace. The completion of these learning paths or the development of digital competences

through other means may be certified and recognised for professional development or career progression.

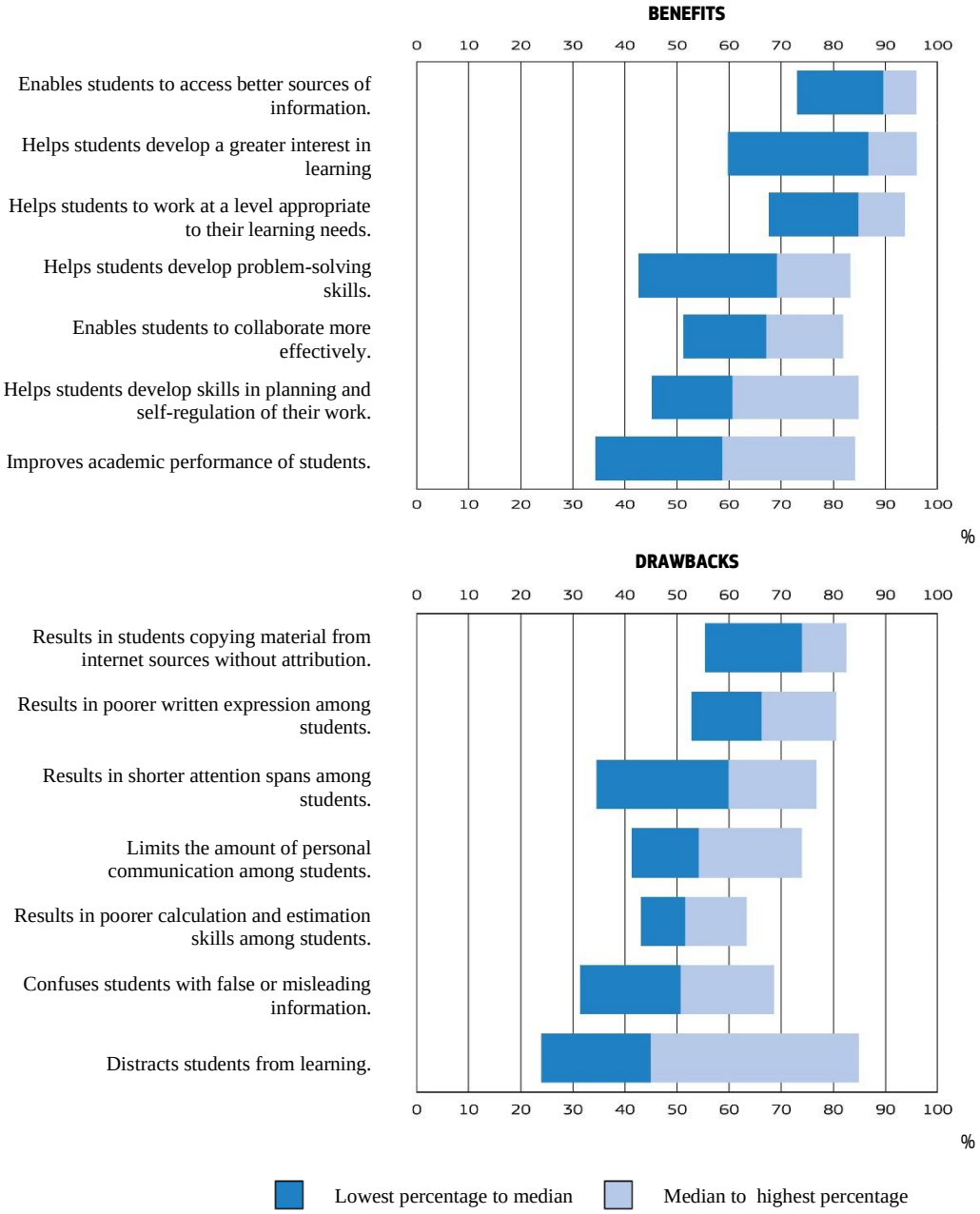
Education systems laying out digital competences for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), ISCED 24, 2024/2025



Source: Based on data from Eurydice report *Digital education at school in Europe 2026: Bridging gaps in access, teaching and learning*.

According to ICILS, teachers are generally more positive than negative about the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning. They most commonly see benefits in improving student's access to information, increasing their interest in learning, and broadening opportunities to work at the level of their individualised needs. Teachers are notably concerned about students plagiarising online content, the potential decline in their written expression skills and shorter attention spans. The greatest variation across countries concerns teachers' views on whether digital technologies improve students' academic performance or rather distract them from learning. The Council of Europe's Education Department has launched a survey to gather teachers' views on the impact of digital technologies on the profession, co-developed with ETUCE. The results will inform the development and follow-up of a White Paper on the Futures of Teachers and the Teaching Profession, to be adopted by Ministers of Education in December 2026.

Teachers views of the benefits and drawbacks of using digital technologies in teaching and learning (%), ISCED 24, 2023



***Source**:* Eurydice report *Digital education at school in Europe 2026: Bridging gaps in access, teaching and learning*, based on ICILS 2023.

Note: Each bar shows the range from the country with the lowest percentage of teachers that agreed with each statement to the country with the highest percentage of teachers. The colour shade changes in the median value.

3. Elements of a comprehensive approach to make the teaching profession more attractive

"*The status of teachers is closely tied to the quality of education (…) Where systems invest seriously in teacher education, working conditions, and participation in decision-making,*

> *the profession becomes more attractive; where they do not, the downward spiral of shortages, overwork, and demoralisation accelerates*"
> Opening address by Michalinos Zembylas at the Informal Meeting of EU Education Ministers on 29 January 2026 in Cyprus.

> *"The prestige of any occupation is traditionally linked to its professional status or professionalisation, which is characterised by a set of conditions: that the work is recognised as essential to society, that it requires substantial specialised education (advanced degrees, a well-developed knowledge base), restrictions on entry into the profession, that it is guided by a strong ethical code, common norms and standards of practice, that professionals have meaningful autonomy and responsibility, and relatively high compensation".* Kraft and Lyon, 2024.

A main recommendation emerging from the research and consultations is the importance of **a comprehensive approach to create an attractive profession**. Participants to the consultations were clear that an attractive profession cannot be created through isolated measures or incentives, and that it requires a long-term, coherent approach to recruitment and retention policies, covering professional standards, induction, working conditions, teacher autonomy, career development and the social recognition of teachers.

The consultations described competitive salaries and job security as essential foundations. At the same time, the consultations highlighted that improving salaries is not sufficient to address recruitment and retention issues, when professional trust, agency and autonomy are not addressed. They also highlighted unsustainable workloads, administrative burden and the erosion of teachers' personal time as a major concern. Looking at the education sector as a whole, the top three reported areas of work in which education sector workers would like to see improvements are: pay and benefits, workload and learning opportunities (Eurofound, 2026).

While a lot of policy attention is given to incentivise teacher recruitment, the importance of attrition as a key cause of shortages cannot be overstated (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024). Stakeholders underlined the need for nuanced and focused approaches to develop and sustain "the right people in the right place with the right preparation", including attention to regional variations in the distribution of shortages in many countries, which call for complementing national policies with regional and local workforce planning. They also called for broadening the focus from retention to sustaining novice teachers in a profession where they will feel fulfilled and see themselves as making a strong contribution throughout their careers.

Respondents to the online survey on building attractive teaching careers emphasise a range of conditions that support high-quality practice, including manageable workloads, stable contracts, supportive leadership and access to resources, as well as their prioritisation of professional autonomy, recognition of expertise and meaningful participation in educational decision-making. Their strong interest in ongoing professional learning, research engagement and mobility opportunities further reflects a commitment to continuous improvement and to broadening their pedagogical perspectives, even when significant structural and personal barriers exist.

Based on the analysis and the consultations, a comprehensive approach to make the teaching profession more attractive would cover the following elements: (i) attractive careers and

working conditions; (ii) strong initial teacher education and continuing professional development; and (iii) teachers' agency in the age of artificial intelligence (AI). Consensus building to reach a shared understanding of the causes of teacher shortages and the direction to address them emerges as a necessity, and social dialogue, as it engages all key stakeholders and considers all stakeholder concerns, is identified as the most effective mechanism to address occupational tensions and achieve complex goals (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). There is a rich diversity of contexts and national circumstances, and many jurisdictions have taken measures in several of the areas[50].

3.1. Attractive careers and working conditions

Teacher agency, professional autonomy and academic freedom

The consultations underscored the primacy of professional autonomy and academic freedom. Professional autonomy is central to what makes teaching both effective and attractive. Teachers who are afforded the trust and authority to exert influence over how their work is structured, organised, and practised perceive their profession as one of higher status (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024). When teachers have professional autonomy, their professional authority also increases[51]. This can have a positive impact on disciplinary and behavioural issues in the classroom, which are prevalent and have become more prominent since 2018[52].

The 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers recognises that '*the teaching profession should enjoy academic freedom in the discharge of professional duties'* (ILO, 2016). The Recommendation outlines that teachers must have professional autonomy and space for professional judgement to make key pedagogical decisions about teaching and learning materials, methods, and assessment. It also stipulates that teachers and their organisations should participate in the development of curriculum, be involved in decisions affecting their professional practice, and be consulted on matters of education policy.

Teachers with more instructional autonomy more often report being able to adapt their teaching to respond to students' needs, vary instructional strategies in their classroom, and reduce achievement gaps between students (OECD, 2025). Higher levels of instructional autonomy are also associated with less work-related stress and higher levels of job satisfaction. Teacher professional autonomy and the ability to influence decision-making in their school has also been shown to positively impact teacher well-being (OECD, 2025a), which in turn can impact student well-being.

Teachers in schools that provide opportunities to be actively involved in school decision-making and lead initiatives also report higher levels of satisfaction (European Commission,

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50 European Commission, 2023 and Cedefop, 2026.

51 Teachers with higher instructional autonomy report to a larger extent being able to get students to follow classroom rules (OECD, 2025b).

52 European Commission, 2026a suggests that about 20.8% of teachers in the EU report experiencing significant disruptive noise and disorder in their classrooms and losing time because students interrupt the lesson (Table 3.35, OECD, 2025b). Maintaining classroom discipline has become more difficult since 2018, as teachers report using classroom management practices more frequently. This is the case for all four indicators of classroom practices regarding classroom management, i.e. calming students who are disruptive (+7.6 percentage points), having to tell students to follow classroom rules (+5.8 percentage points) or to listen (+5.8 percentage points), and to quieten down when the lesson begins (+4.1 percentage points) (OECD, 2025b, Table 1.35).

2026a). The consultations stressed that overall, teachers are more likely to remain motivated and committed when their expertise is recognised and when they can contribute meaningfully to decisions affecting their professional practice. Pre-service teachers place great importance on having autonomy over their curriculum; this preference is strongest among the highest-performing pre-service teachers (de Cort and de Witte, 2026a).

Supporting teachers to exercise agency in their work, as well as reducing unnecessary administrative burden, emerged as a shared priority. Noting that teachers are particularly qualified to determine the needs of their students and make judgements on the teaching and learning materials most suitable for their pupils, the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation also stipulates that teachers and their organisations should participate in the development of curriculum, be involved in decisions affecting their professional practice, and be consulted on matters of education policy.

Education reforms, with limited or no teacher involvement in their development, have an impact on teachers' work, and school organisational culture and leadership can have a significant impact on how policies are experienced by teachers (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). ETUCE recommends promoting governance models that balance accountability with professional trust and ensuring meaningful teacher participation in educational governance at the level of the school, as well as at the local, regional, national and EU level.

Competitive salaries and terms of employment

> "Teachers are workers, teaching is work, and the school is a workplace" Connell, R. W. (1985).

Pay, contractual terms and other working conditions are central to the quality of working life and play a critical role in the recruitment and retention of teachers. The decision to become a teacher is influenced by financial rewards, as well as expectations on what the work entails in terms of career opportunities or social status. Competitive salaries that are on par with the remuneration paid to adults with similar education levels working in comparable occupations enhance the ability of school systems to attract and retain teachers, and all other things being equal, the higher teachers' relative salaries, the more attractive the profession (European Commission, 2022). A suggestion from the consultations was to give more attention to how the teaching profession evolves relative to other professions requiring similar levels of qualifications.

TALIS results also suggest that teachers who are satisfied with their salaries are 25% more likely to remain in the profession within the next five years, on average (OECD, 2025a). Teachers satisfied with their salary are about 7 percentage points more likely to choose the profession again, while positive perceptions of the work environment and of the profession's value increase this likelihood by around 4 percentage points.

Pay is traditionally considered an extrinsic motivator, as job security. It is not usually considered a significant factor in teachers' decisions to enter the profession, and does not intrinsically contribute to job satisfaction, but its absence can lead to job dissatisfaction and increased teacher attrition. Indeed, teachers report high job satisfaction overall, at the same time as they report low satisfaction with salaries.

Numerous studies focus on the altruistic motivations of teachers, such as the desire to help children or a passion for teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic also refocused discussions on professional concepts such as the altruistic motivation, commitment to public interest and wide-ranging impact of teachers' public service work (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024). TALIS results suggest that the motivations for entering the teaching profession, rated as of high importance by teachers, are making a worthwhile social contribution (65.8%) and influencing the next generation (58.0%), followed by working hours that are compatible with family responsibilities (European Commission, 2026a).

This perspective on altruistic motivations is valuable but overlooks a fundamental trade-offs students make between teaching and other careers. Perceptions of the value and conditions of the teaching profession also impact graduates' motivation to enter the profession. Evidence suggests that, when pre-service teachers choose between teaching and other job opportunities, expectations about working conditions, career advancement opportunities and teacher autonomy are as important as intrinsic motivations (De Cort and De Witte, 2026a). In career choice, salary, workload, and opportunities for advancement prove to be at least as important as more idealistic motives such as working with young people. About seven out of ten pre-service teachers perceive fewer opportunities for career advancement in teaching than in alternative occupations, and this is especially discouraging for the highest-performing pre-service teachers. The consultations linked attraction and retention to VET teaching careers to salary competitiveness with industry, particularly in STEM and IT, and to disparities between urban and rural areas.

In a background paper on costing and financing the teaching profession, which informed the recent UNESCO World Summit on Teachers, it is acknowledged that financing the teaching profession accounts for the largest proportion of educational spending in most countries. However, the report author argues that adequate compensation is essential for teacher recruitment and retention. Overall, in the context of inflation and rising living costs, which erode the real value of teacher salaries, the report highlights the need for inflation-indexed salary adjustments and non-monetary benefits such as support for housing and transport costs. Broad financial factors shape the attractiveness of the profession: salary levels relative to comparable graduate occupations, but also adequate funding for education systems (Sorensen, 2026).

Recruitment financial incentives can work if they are well-designed and targeted precisely, and if they include requirements to stay in a specific school or area for a certain period (European Commission, 2022). Some stakeholders urged careful consideration to differentiated pay/bonuses by subject or geographical area and the extent to which they could harm collegiality and be ineffective if other elements such as workload or collaborative leadership are not addressed.

Job security is a key indicator of job quality, and it matters to teachers themselves: about half report that it is of high importance to them. Precarious employment[53] affects teachers'

[53] Amitai and Van Houtte (2022) found that in the Flemish community of Belgium, 44% of novice teachers on temporary contracts left the profession within the first five years. These teachers reported that the long road to a tenured position was the biggest obstacle for young people entering and remaining in the profession. Some teachers still lacked tenured positions after ten years of temporary employment education, highlighting the long-term nature of employment precarity.

entitlement to leave and social protection, and limits opportunities for professional and career development. The consultations noted that teachers on precarious contracts might be more reluctant to report educational, organisational or employment issues. At the same time, fixed-term contracts can serve a function in managing teacher supply, offering employers flexibility to adjust staffing to shifting enrolment and demand. A risk for teacher supply is that teachers might have a weaker attachment to the profession and seek employment elsewhere (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). The tension between these two realities, precarity as a lived experience for a significant share of the workforce on one hand, and a staffing tool on the other, is central to the policy debate on contractual arrangements in the profession.

During the consultations, stakeholders highlighted the importance of stable and predictable employment for a sense of professional belonging, access to professional development and career opportunities, and teacher professionalism, and that permanent contracts reduce precarity, uncertainty and stress. Consultations also highlighted that an increasing recourse to temporary, fixed-term and precarious employment contracts, particularly among early-career teachers, weakens the attractiveness and stability of the profession. Evidence for Flanders[54] suggests that early-career teacher attrition is an important contributor to teacher shortages, and that short-term contracts are strongly associated with early attrition (De Cort and De Witte, 2026c).

Workloads

> *"We need less pressure to produce good grades, less bureaucracy and more time to focus on the work with children".* Teacher, Germany.

Education International (2026) reports that workload is a primary driver of teacher shortages and attrition, as well as salary levels which have stagnated in many countries, and a perceived decline in the status of the profession. Workplace stress reduces the probability of choosing teaching again by about 5 percentage points (European Commission, 2026b).

During the consultations, stakeholders underlined the importance of defining teachers' working time in a comprehensive manner, specifying contact and non-contact time, teaching-related duties (e.g. lesson planning, assessment, grading), non-teaching duties (e.g. administration, communication with parents) and extra-curricular activities that take place outside school hours. Current calculation methods were noted to be inconsistent and often based on statutory rather than actual hours worked. Additional bureaucratic demands unrelated to core teaching work were identified as a further burden meriting attention.

Class size is a key aspect that affects teachers' working conditions. The number of students with special education needs and intensive support needs in the class, the class size, and the lack of available support by teaching assistants are among the factors contributing to teacher burnout (European Commission, 2022). Many countries have maintained stable or increasing numbers of classes to reduce the number of students per teacher, reflecting efforts to preserve smaller classes, maintain geographical access to education or increase inclusion (OECD, 2026b).

[54] A first-year teacher's average contract lasts around four months. Fewer than 7.5% of starters work only with contracts covering a full school year.

Around half of the studies on the link between class size and student outcomes in the EU find a beneficial impact of smaller classes on education outcomes. Smaller classes improve academic performance for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as well as those with special education needs. They allow for increased instructional time, due to fewer disruptions and less classroom management time, more intensive teacher-student and student-student interactions, higher personal and academic support as well as better emotional connections and identification of students with the class and the school community. In contrast, larger classes might lead to poorer class management, instruction and teaching strategies among early-career teachers.

Smaller classes might improve student performance if teachers can adapt their pedagogical approaches to the size of the class. At the same time, reducing class size tends to come at a relatively high cost, calling for careful cost-benefit considerations. Targeting class size reduction in schools with more complex educational needs, where the evidence suggests the benefits are larger, and underpinning the measure with pedagogic training for teachers so they can adapt their pedagogical practice to the smaller class would enhance the efficiency of the investments. Larger class sizes intensify the challenges of responding to increasingly complex and diverse learning needs while also raising demands related to lesson preparation, assessment, feedback, reporting, communication and student support. Workload may further increase when teachers are assigned classes across different subjects and grades, or when they have less experience.

Teaching professionals rely on continuous social interaction as a core component of their roles. As a result of a unique combination of social, emotional and intellectual demands, the nature of work in the education sector differs significantly from that of many other professions (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2026). Psychosocial risks in education remain underestimated and are usually inadequately managed because of resource, legal and expertise constraints. Investing in reducing class sizes and improving student–teacher ratios could ease cognitive and emotional burdens.

In the early childhood education and care context, a sense of imbalance between the poor working conditions offered to staff and their strong commitment to their work has been highlighted, as well as high workloads, and high levels of responsibility for low financial compensation and limited career opportunities, particularly when compared with those of primary school teachers (Eurofound, 2025). Early childhood education and care staff often report experiences of burnout, substantial physical exertion during work, a high incidence of musculoskeletal pain and a high rate of sickness absence due to the physical activities required at work, e.g. lifting, carrying and supporting children, sitting on the floor when interacting with children, or other demanding body postures and movements (Eurofound, 2025).

Teacher well-being

A conclusion of the Working Group Schools is that student well-being is not possible without teacher well-being (European Commission, 2026c). The final report of the Working Group finds that this link is not incidental but structural: teachers with higher well-being report greater job satisfaction, employ more effective instructional strategies and create healthier classroom environments, while the converse also holds, as high stress leads to attrition and those who remain experience burnout that compromises their capacity to support diverse

learners. Policies must support the mental health and resilience of educators, including by reducing administrative burdens, which the report consistently identifies as a primary stressor rather than the demands of teaching itself. There is a need to focus on supporting well-being at a system level, as well-being cannot be addressed through isolated wellness programmes or stress-management training, and instead requires structural change: reducing administrative workload, increasing professional autonomy, fostering collaborative working environments, and improving both pay and the broader status of the profession.

Career progression

Teachers who engage in continuing professional development sometimes lament their limited capacity to fully leverage their abilities and skills, for example conducting educational research, linking practice with educational theories, or exercising leadership in their schools (Madalińska-Michalak, 2023). Career structures that allow both vertical progression and horizontal professional growth are vital (Sorensen, 2026). Consultations also underlined the benefits of horizontal career paths that allow broadening the scope of responsibility and 'growing' of teachers' professionalism, while retaining the possibility of mid- and late-career teachers to continue to teach students. Clear career guidance from early stages is essential to these efforts.

The 2020 European Commission report Supporting teacher and school leader careers, created with members of a Working Group of ministry and other stakeholder representatives, described the various directions that teachers' and school leaders' careers can take as career paths. The report highlighted that diversifying teacher career paths can positively influence teachers to stay and improve their practice. This is supported by UNESCO research on the organisation and management of teacher careers in ten systems (Tournier, B. et al., 2019). They found that horizontal opportunities for professional growth had a positive influence on teacher retention.

School leadership

Leadership is a multi-faceted role and a career path with specific competences that need to be fully supported with preparatory and ongoing professional learning, and with shared leadership approaches. It is recognised that leadership education would need to go beyond administration competence to include democratic governance and pedagogical leadership and attend to the various needs of leaders. Stakeholders also reported a lack of education programmes for VET school leaders who need to balance pedagogical leadership and managerial roles with industry understanding. VET leadership was seen as demanding but undervalued, with interest in leadership roles reduced by workload and salary levels.

Research has shown that when principals provide teachers with opportunities to participate in meaningful decision-making opportunities, it leads to teachers' feeling a greater sense of ownership and commitment to their profession and school. These positive feelings may in turn improve teachers' job satisfaction. Brezicha K. et al. (2020) show that though principals believe they are providing teachers with increased decision-making opportunities, teachers report that they still do not feel included in decision-making opportunities. The consultations also identified a persistent gap between how teachers and school leaders perceive teachers' involvement in, and influence over, school and education policy. These results lend empirical support to the call for policies that support greater opportunities for shared decision-making

as a policy lever that can be used to improve teacher job satisfaction. Consultations were consistent with these empirical findings and also highlighted it is a low-cost intervention.

Collaborative practices, multidisciplinary support

> "*In all, I have four classes. So, in each of these four classes, I have at least one student with special educational needs and nobody helps me…I need to take courses by myself. I need to look for courses by myself. I need to talk to the other teachers who teach that particular student… I live in a town, a rather big town. Nobody in my school is a support teacher.*" Teacher, Romania.

> *"I wish I could help all students equally and make sure everyone gets the support they need."* Student teacher, Sweden.

Multi-professional teams bringing together teachers, psychologists, social workers, intercultural mediators and counsellors in schools allow provision of comprehensive support, without placing the entire burden on teachers. Such collaboration can also reduce the isolation experienced by individual teachers in managing these challenges. Similarly, support teams and cross-sectoral cooperation to deal with administrative tasks, and non-pedagogic issues can also alleviate the administrative burden on teachers.

Establishment of a professional support system for teachers (national project)

Country: Latvia

Fund: ESF+

Main topic: The project's goal is to create and develop a unified and coordinated professional support system at the state, municipal, and educational institution levels to improve the quality of general and vocational education, promote student learning outcomes, and provide methodological support materials for teachers. The project, implemented by the State Education Development Agency (VIAA), offers online seminars, consultations, thematic workshops, and other professional development opportunities.

The project involves the Ministry of Education and Science, state city and district municipalities and their associations, vocational education and training institutions.

Link: Establishment of a professional support system for teachers | State Education Development Agency

Total budget of approximately EUR 77 million for 2024-2029.

Collaboration with parents, legal guardians, foster carers and other caregivers

Education systems acknowledge the importance of engaging parents and guardians in child/student learning, with several systems embedding expectations in quality frameworks. Teachers often find it challenging to maintain effective communication with parents (European Commission, 2026c). Teachers need to communicate effectively, also with parents who may be less trusting of the school or early childhood education and care setting, as well as with families where the language at home is different to the one(s) used at school or in the ECEC setting (OECD, 2025b). This challenges the interpersonal skills of staff. Cooperation with cultural mediators can help better support learners with a refugee or migrant background, for example developing activities for and with parents and easing the inclusion of children. This can also help parents to better understand education in the host country[55].

[55] SWD (2022)185.

Public status and social recognition

"Media coverage focuses on deficits". Teacher, Germany

Teachers tend to feel considerably less valued by the broader community, including the media and policymakers than by their immediate school community, pointing to a role for public communication and policy signalling. Moreover, media coverage of problems in the education system can diminish perceptions of the teaching profession's social status and exacerbate teacher shortages. Both media coverage of education and information about teachers' social standing affect students' aspirations to become teachers (De Cort and De Witte, 2026b). Negative media coverage of educational quality reduces students' interest in teaching, particularly among women. The negative news seemed to further motivate a minority of students who are already inclined towards the profession. Positive information about teachers' social status increases students' teaching intentions. Together, these findings underscore the complex role of public narratives in shaping teaching aspirations and suggest that accurate, nuanced and credible communication could be an effective tool for policymakers and teacher educators to counteract the impact of negative media coverage.

Professional entry standards also shape perceived status and attractiveness. Higher entry requirements for professional education are generally associated with higher status and rewards. Reducing entry requirements to increase teacher supply may therefore have the opposite effect (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). There is a strong trend towards initial teacher education at Master's level at EU level, and qualified teachers are important for education quality and equity and for the status of the profession (Sorensen, 2026). The consultations emphasised that it is vital that teacher qualifications are of a high standard, including a Master's degree as a minimum requirement. Raising ITE standards, including the selection of candidates led to increases in the number of applications. In contrast, lowering standards undermined the status of the profession and teacher retention.

Workforce diversity

During the consultations, it was observed that the underrepresentation of certain groups in the teaching workforce had received limited attention, despite its salience. The "InclEdu4AllNeeds" project[56], co-funded by the EU and run by EFEE and ETUCE, looked at how to include students and education personnel with disabilities in education through social dialogue. It found that barriers to inclusion include exclusionary admissions, poor workplace accessibility, low rates of disability disclosure, and limited access to leadership roles and professional development (Milner et al, 2026). Based on this, it recommends developing inclusive teacher policies together with social partners, aligning recruitment and employment practices with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ensuring stable and transparent funding for inclusive education, building professional development into collective agreements, reducing administrative burden on teachers, and giving people with disabilities a real say in social dialogue at every level.

In response to gender imbalances in the teaching profession, it is also important to attract more men to the teaching profession such as through the promotion of a "Boys in HEAL"

[56] https://www.csee-etuce.org/en/projects/136:incledu4allneeds

approach[57]. Further attention needs to be paid to attract underrepresented groups into the profession, including teachers and school mediators from groups facing inequalities, for example Roma. Research of the Erasmus+ Teacher Academy project TUTOR[58] found that recognition of LGBTIQ+-specific training needs varies sharply by country. To address this, TUTOR calls for embedding LGBTIQ+ inclusion in initial teacher education and continuing professional development, covering support for staff as well as pupils, building on the joint curriculum and specialisation course it piloted across its partner countries (Grummell and Matson, 2025).

3.2. Strong initial teacher education and continuing professional development

"*Education* is *Europe's democracy shield*". Employer representative, the Netherlands.

Initial Teacher Education

High-quality teaching combines strong subject knowledge, effective pedagogy, good classroom management, and responsiveness to students' diverse learning needs. Teachers need support to update their practice and competences to meet student needs, a pressure intensified by rapid technological and labour market changes. As the expectations for student competences widen, so too become the demands placed on their teachers since schools are the core source for the development of these competences. The consultations underlined the importance of high-quality, practice-based initial teacher education, together with structured mentorship for those entering the profession, as key levers for improving both recruitment and retention.

Aside from the TALIS 2024 data recording what teachers report as important, stakeholders have called for an emphasis on literacy and numeracy, STEM education, citizenship, environmental sustainability and critical thinking. The consultations noted the need for ITE content to balance preparing teachers to cover subject curricula, guiding them to develop their own pedagogy and classroom management based on educational theory, and supporting them to address contemporary issues in the classroom, including citizenship education, digital and AI competences, inclusion, well-being and additional learning needs.

The consultations also discussed the usefulness of guidance to fully prepare ITE graduates for employment, and the reality of classrooms, and of tasks beyond the classroom, such as fostering collaboration with parents and among colleagues and offering comprehensive support to their students. The expectations for the teaching profession to innovate after ITE would require additional competences in critical reflection and research methodologies to be developed within ITE. The consultations underlined that teachers themselves are well placed to be actively involved in research and the training of newcomers to the profession.

The consultations highlighted the importance of ensuring sufficient school-based training during ITE. Most student teachers have a structured and supervised practical experience in schools or early years settings prior to entering full employment. However, the timing (point in the academic year) and length (number of weeks) varies greatly (European Commission /

[57] In the framework of the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030, the Commission will promote a "Boys in HEAL" (Health, Education, Administration, Literacy) approach, which aims to reduce gender-based disparities in study choices and educational outcomes, and to help attract more boys and men into these study fields and sectors.

[58] https://tutor-project.eu/

EACEA / Eurydice, 2021). Research literature and consultations advocate for a structured and supervised experience of school/learning settings to be embedded in ITE. A common understanding is that spending more time in learning settings as a student – for observing, being mentored, teaching and co-teaching – results in greater opportunities to address satisfactorily the realities of the profession. ITE programmes may include a second placement to give students a sense of the variety of practice across different institutions and a clearer idea of their first employment.

The success of initial teacher education requires its own quality assurance mechanisms. In many systems, universities may assume sole responsibility or accountability for ITE programmes but are no longer involved in preparing students entering the profession after ITE. Other actors - administrators and leaders within schools, local authorities, school boards, national agencies - may take their place in guiding new teachers. The support to teachers in their first years will depend on the communication and collaboration of these actors.

Support for undergraduate preparation of future teachers (open call)

Country: Czechia

Fund: ESF+

Main topic: development/reform/quality improvement of ITE

The aim of the open call was to improve the quality of undergraduate/pre-service preparation of future teachers and to support the implementation of the reform of Teacher Education. The call also focused on developing the professional competences of student teachers, academic staff and teachers involved in the preparation of future teachers.

An important part of the call was also networking and cooperation between faculties, departments, schools and school facilities, in order to better connect the theoretical and practical preparation of future teachers.

Eligible applicants were public higher education institutions offering accredited bachelor's or master's programmes leading to a teaching qualification.
In total, 15 applications were submitted, and 14 projects were supported, with a total budget of approximately CZK 449 million.

Professional standards can usefully inform the content and assessment in ITE to ensure that graduates are well-prepared to enter the profession and continue to develop the same competences throughout their career. Professional standards provide clear and coherent expectations of new teachers and their mentors. The provision of career guidance during ITE can also contribute to this endeavour.

The consultations highlighted the limited extent of mobility opportunities within ITE and stressed that mobility during the early career phase could serve as a motivating factor, exposing new teachers to different education systems and pedagogical approaches.

Alternative routes to enter the profession

Alternative routes to full teacher qualifications (e.g. employment-based) can be effective ways to attract and retain teachers, when underpinned by appropriate support in the form of induction, mentoring, professional development and career opportunities (European Commission, 2022). A more flexible entry can improve the diversity of entrants and contribute to teacher supply. During the consultations, employer representatives supported second career and hybrid teachers, provided structured pedagogical formation and ongoing mentoring are in place. They highlighted that experience in fields such as IT, construction or engineering brings specific value to VET teachers. Teacher profession representatives called

for careful design of alternative routes to full teacher qualifications, and for second-career teachers to complete qualification and pedagogical training and meet recognised, profession-led standards. They highlighted the importance of induction to prevent a "two-tier" workforce. They also called for their independent regulation and evaluation to establish their long-term impacts. Teach for All/ Belgium explained that alternative routes require clear standards for pedagogical preparation, structured induction and ongoing support, alongside a transparent pathway to a recognised teaching qualification and stressed the complementary nature of the role they can play. Expanding entry routes is not likely to lead to long-term retention unless the underlying sources of low retention are also addressed, in particular workload.

During the consultations, several participants cautioned against describing VET as a "second choice," noting that perceptions vary across Member States, and supported profession-led standards for flexible entry routes to prevent a two-tier system between differently paid or inducted teachers.

NEWTT – A New Way for New Talents in Teaching

Fund: Erasmus+ Key Action 3

The project piloted and evaluated a framework covering selective recruitment, intensive practical preparation and continuous workplace support across five education systems (Austria, Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania and Spain) between 2016 and 2019. The evaluation showed that flexible, high-quality diverse pathways can help attract new entrants and career changers into teaching, especially people who had not followed university-based initial teacher education Alternatively trained teachers increased their teaching competences and pedagogical knowledge over the two-year period.

Induction

The importance of the first years of teaching is well known. Experiences during the early career of teachers influence their motivation for staying in the profession, and for developing a high level of competence and for innovating practices. The first years of teaching can be seen as laying positive foundations for a teacher’s whole career.

Defined phases of the early careers of teachers can help to establish clear expectations and targeted support. Having a coherent continuum of teacher education avoids that ITE is separate to beginning employment and this coherence promotes a sense of ongoing professional development. Research and system approaches are broadly aligned to an understanding of an “early career” phase of 5 years following ITE, where the first 1-2 years require familiarisation and additional support, and the subsequent 3-4 years invite teachers to take more responsibility, considering extra areas of expertise or paths to leadership.

Induction creates an important transition point, or ‘bridge’, from ITE. The induction period gives an opportunity to explore pedagogic practice and learn from each other. Novice teachers have new knowledge and ideas and can be agents of change, but they need to be supported in the community of practice in their school or early childhood education and care setting. The TeacherEd project, led by the European Federation of Education Employers and co-funded under the EU's Social Prerogatives and Specific Competencies Lines, developed a

guide and evidence base to help education employers build a collaborative, effective induction process for new teachers[59].

There are many ways to support new teachers in an induction period, including: mentoring and coaching; in-school or external offers of courses and seminars; self-reflection activities (portfolios, diaries, journals); networking, peer groups, and informal conversations; an adjusted teaching load; collaborative lesson design and team teaching; and formal appraisal at the end of induction. The popularity of certain practices can depend on whether systems require them (within a formal programme) but also on the personal preferences or expertise of individuals that are giving support, and the time that they have in addition to their other work. The consultations considered how the formalisation of induction and mentorship arrangements might function within the early childhood education and care sector. For example, professionals often must work alone with children, without the necessary staff to cover absence from the classroom in order to mentor other staff members or complete CPD.

Many systems are focusing on mentoring and coaching, recognising the benefits of this type of support within both ITE practicum and the first years of teaching including as part of structured induction. System approaches lie along a broad spectrum from formal requirement and support for the training of mentors to an ad-hoc offer by some schools. There is a concern for the quality of mentoring that is highly influential during the first year of teaching and a concern for the extra demand that this places on experienced teachers. Mentors require certain competences and conditions to ensure that the practice is mutually beneficial. Moreover, education stakeholders believe that the effectiveness and impact of induction and mentoring can vary substantially depending on the nature, scope, quality and time allocation of the programmes.

Initial Teaching Residency Programme SENSEI (pilot) (national project)
Country: Spain (Catalonia)

Fund: ESF+

Main topics: The SENSEI programme aims to support the transition of newly qualified teachers into the profession through a one-year, school-based induction programme combining individual mentoring, co-teaching, classroom observation and structured professional development. It seeks to strengthen teachers' practical competences, professional autonomy and reflective teaching practices, while fostering collaboration and peer learning within schools.
Results: Launched in 2023/24, the programme initially trained 250 novice teachers annually, reaching 500 teachers by December 2025. It was extended in 2025/26 to 98 schools, involving both established mentoring schools and new participating schools. An evaluation of the first year of implementation published by Ivàlua in March 2025 found very positive results, with novice teachers particularly valuing mentoring and co-teaching for their professional development. A final evaluation is expected in 2026, assessing the programme's implementation and impact on teachers' professional competences and student learning outcomes.S ENSEI's potential wider rollout and long-term sustainability remain to be determined.
Total budget: EUR 11.2 million, including EUR 10.6 million from ESF+ for the two-year pilot (2023/24 and 2024/25); EUR 5.4 million for the extension to 2025/26, of which 2.2 from the ESF+.

Link: https://educacio.gencat.cat/ca/arees-actuacio/professors/formacio/programa-sensei/inici/coneix-sensei/

Time for new teachers to adjust, and for others to support them, is reported as a key enabler and a reported deficiency. This is particularly problematic in the first year of employment. Teachers are needed, and willing, to be fully immersed into their new work but some systems

[59] Project webpage accessible at https://educationemployers.eu/teachered-page.

have found it beneficial to reduce teaching load in favour of more preparation and reflection. Teachers do not always experience this, especially in early years and primary school settings where classroom presence is more continuous, and in general where there are staff shortages and absences. This is also true for mentors and other teachers who are required to support new teachers, but who are instead moved to other duties (Grainger Clemson and Fernandes, 2024).

Participants to the consultations called for structured orientation and protected mentoring to help new teachers develop a professional identity and avoid being used as unsupervised cover for staff shortages, and identified gaps in classroom management, inclusive pedagogy, and digital and AI literacy. Hybrid and external trainers brought in to address shortages were said to often lack equal access to induction and CPD.

Continuing professional development

The TALIS 2024 data suggest that some professional learning opportunities – but not all – have been useful to teachers. This affirms the importance of high quality and relevant professional learning. Research literature suggests that teachers pre-judge the usefulness of professional learning courses and seminars and potentially avoid them if there is no guaranteed improvement to their students' learning.

Demand for support in teaching students with additional learning needs remains high, as it was in TALIS 2018. Education reforms, including new curricula, need to include the creation of guidance and support to teachers on the proposed changes (Haug & Mork, 2021) and this may be of prime interest to mid- and late-career teachers in positions of subject curriculum leadership. The consultations highlighted that professional development needs are different, as is the diversity of challenges that teachers face, for example those related to inclusion in large urban areas, or to the need to take on multiple responsibilities in small and rural communities. Mid-career teachers have varying professional development needs, based on their career trajectories and ambitions, their expertise, and wider personal and professional priorities and contexts. (Booth et al., 2021)

The consultations also stressed that CPD should be topically relevant and delivered by practitioners with a genuine, current connection to the classroom, noting that CPD provision is often led by individuals not engaged in teaching. Professional development that is collaborative, includes feedback and reflection and has a sustained duration enhances impact on teaching practices. Recurring concerns included the absence of dedicated time and resources for CPD, with participants noting that teachers in some systems must use personal time or bear costs themselves; the necessity of stable, permanent contracts as a precondition for meaningful career-long development, and the case for CPD to be free of charge.

Respondents to the survey on building attractive teaching careers generally considered CPD essential to the profession but often by a lack of time within working hours, with participants calling for it to be funded and scheduled during working time. Most participants also reported valuing supportive leadership and management (87%) and peer collaboration within their institution (84%) as factors of professional support.

Lack of time and competing priorities are major barriers to teacher professional development. In some countries, teachers are entitled or required, to devote a minimum amount of time to their professional development. Finding time for CPD or engaging in suitable learning

activities may be challenging when participation is not possible during teaching hours or when teachers cannot be replaced. This is especially relevant for early childhood education and care staff. Additionally, although some CPD is generally available free of charge, costs may still constitute an obstacle for teachers to undertake specific activities not covered by the free offer (including for instance further formal education and learning experiences abroad). Individual learning accounts based on time or financial credits may be used to mitigate these barriers. An example[60] illustrates the possibility to extend of individual learning accounts to teachers to facilitate the exercise of the right to CPD.

One way for a teacher to increase their professional knowledge, and for teachers to contribute to their professional community, is to engage in action research within their learning setting. Participation in research has shown positive benefits to teachers but also highlights the need for teachers to have a positive attitude towards action research and be competent in the demands of a research project (Cortes et al., 2025). School-university partnership projects can help support teachers to research and innovate within their own context and practices (Bergmark et al., 2025).

Preparing and developing teachers for new content and forms of teaching (national project)

Country: Slovakia

Fund: RRF

Main topics: The reform aimed to modernise initial teacher education and strengthen continuous professional development, focusing particularly on competence-based curricula, inclusive education and digital skills. It provided grants to universities to update initial teacher education programmes, including to better prepare future teachers for inclusive teaching, linguistic diversity and the pedagogical use of digital technologies. It also introduced financial allowances to encourage teachers to engage in continuous professional development and revised the regulatory framework governing training providers, professional qualifications and the accreditation of training programmes. The reform targeted training at least 55% of teaching and professional staff by the end of 2023, and its implementation was completed in 2025.

Link: https://reforms-investments.ec.europa.eu/recovery-and-resilience-facility-1/country-pages/slovakias-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en

The Working Group schools highlights the limited impact that one-off training sessions and generic theoretical content may have on teachers' competences and teaching practices (European Commission, 2026c). It recommends sustained, collaborative, and practically oriented professional learning, covering areas such as teaching reading comprehension, differentiating class levels and content for diverse learners, training in recognising signs of mental health difficulty, and building relationships with families from varied backgrounds. It further recommends professional learning communities in which teachers can refine their practice, along with access to specialist expertise. Frequent interaction with peers also establishes healthy community expectations and bolsters what teachers believe they know and can do in their educational practice (O'Dowd, R. and Vinagre, M., 2024). Teachers also value online collaboration and participating in an international teaching community. When teachers become more aware that their struggles are shared globally and not the result of a personal failure, their self- efficacy increases.

[60] https://www.education.gouv.fr/la-formation-continue-des-personnels-de-l-education-nationale-de-la-jeunesse-et-des-sports-340496.

Teacher professional standards and competence frameworks define what teachers are expected to know and be able to do (pedagogic skills). They can help teachers reflect on their practice and identify professional development needs. They can also serve as reference points to initiation teacher education and continuous professional development, guiding education and training providers, school development planning and evaluations. More generally, they can support and incentivise quality teaching. They need to be grounded in evidence on effective teaching practice and designed with broad stakeholder involvement (Halász, G. and Looney, J., 2019).

The teaching of key competences such as citizenship, entrepreneurship or green competences could be better supported if these were more systematically embedded into teacher competences frameworks, which is still limited across Member States (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2024; European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2025b; European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, forthcoming). Other important areas such as inclusive education, socio-emotional and intercultural competences could also be better reflected in these frameworks. The Commission is developing guidance on citizenship education and an EU competence framework, to be finalised in Q1 2027. Guidelines on preparedness education in pre-primary and primary education are also available.

Micro-credentials can allow teachers to certify their competences and proficiency levels even when not developed in traditionally certified courses (for instance, when acquired through experience, peer learning or individualised learning paths).

Professionalisation of the teaching career (PROF) (national project)

Country: Romania

Fund: ESF+

Main topics: The project seeks to ensure teachers receive professional mentorship throughout their career by creating a coherent and reliable national system of professional training and development of teaching competences, including for digital education. The project includes providing training to over 28 000 teachers, focusing on the upskilling needed for digitalisation in education and teaching students from vulnerable groups, including Roma and children with special educational needs.

The project run between 2021 and 2023 and established a national institution for mentoring and network. By 2023, 28000 teachers participated in CDP developed within the project.

Total budget: EUR 26 million, of which EUR 22 million from the European Social Fund+Link: https://www.eprof.ro/

3.3. Teachers' agency in the age of Artificial Intelligence

"AI" is used generically to refer to all forms of artificial intelligence used in education. As AI and digital technologies increasingly shape the environment in which young people learn, communicate and form opinions, teachers and school leaders need digital and AI-related competences, and the pedagogical tools to promote digital literacy, address disinformation and digital well-being, and support critical thinking. The Santiago Consensus[61] adopted on 29 August 2025 established a priority action to strengthen teachers' digital and AI competences "so that education *technologies may be co-created and utilised by teachers to amplify the*

[61] Available here: https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/08/world-summit-teachers-santiago-consensus-en_1.pdf

relational and affective dimension of learning without replacing the creativity, core competences and pedagogical knowledge of teachers".

During the focus groups, educators reported that they use AI predominantly for administrative tasks and lesson preparation. The main barriers to using AI include lack of preparation and concerns that it may erode their creativity and professional identity. As regards the use of AI by students, academic integrity is a major and recurring worry, and some teachers have shifted to oral presentations and handwritten assessments and to revisit traditional homework. A deeper concern is that students are bypassing critical thinking processes. As one teacher put it, "*writing is thinking, not just producing text*". The panel identified critical gaps in support, including the absence of clear national or institutional guidelines, frameworks for ethical use, and structured AI-focused CPD, alongside an urgent need to foster student AI literacy, prioritising critical and responsible use over unquestioning reliance. Teachers recognise that the bigger pedagogical shift is still ahead: "*the phase of changing pedagogies is probably ahead of us*".

While education authorities are progressively issuing guidance on the use of AI in education, teachers continue to report insufficient preparation. In 2024, two out of three teachers had not used AI yet for teaching, and among those, the most frequently cited obstacle is a lack of knowledge and skills (74.3%) (European Commission, 2026b). Teachers hold a cautious, but nuanced view on the use of AI in the classroom, and need support to understand the capabilities and limitations, so they can use it to strengthen and enhance learning.

National governments can also support large-scale initiatives aiming to deploy AI-enabled tools or platforms, strengthen teacher capacity to use AI, participate in European partnerships or test innovative approaches linked to broader digital transformation agendas, ensuring collaboration between educators, researchers, technology experts, companies and non-governmental organisations (European Commission, EACEA, Eurydice, 2026a).

Digital competences are increasingly integrated into national frameworks for initial teacher education and continuing professional development in EU countries. However, competence frameworks for initial teacher education could give greater attention to key areas such as using digital technology for personalised learning and assessment, managing social problems arising from digital communication, supporting students' capacity to assess the reliability of online information and the effective, safe and ethical use of AI. More generally, national teacher competence frameworks, which usually draw on the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators[62], will need to be upgraded accordingly to cover underdeveloped core areas such as wellbeing and teacher agency.

Teachers are best placed to make the most of digital technology when they have access to relevant professional development opportunities, time to develop their expertise and prepare lessons, reliable infrastructure and devices, technical and pedagogical support, and clear, evidence-based guidance on whether and how to use digital technology and AI (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2026a).

[62] The European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators captures the variety of teacher practice in the classroom and wider school community. Teachers are invited to reflect and describe certain areas of their own practice, acknowledging that various areas of practice could be at multiple levels. DigCompEdu is currently undergoing a revision to update it to recent developments and emerging challenges.

Self-assessment tools such as the European Union's SELFIE for Teachers help teachers track their progress and identify areas to develop. These tools work best when paired with follow-up support, locally relevant feedback, and close integration of follow up training into school-level planning, acting as a starting point for development rather than a one-off exercise. AI and computational thinking have emerged in national exercises as the areas with most room for development. Teacher appraisals can help evaluate teacher digital competences and facilitate appropriate professional development when needed. At the same time, the evaluation and update of CPD plans and schemes should consider teachers' needs, views and experiences.

The provision of personalised learning paths can complement teachers' assessment allowing them to develop their digital competences according to their prior knowledge, skills and experiences and at their own pace. Accreditation with badges or micro-credentials can certify the completion of learning paths and proficiency levels.

Schools can further benefit from support in assessing their digital capacity, plan strategically and embed innovation in teaching, learning and assessment. Requirements and guidelines for the integration of digital education into school development plans and quality assurance frameworks could contribute to this endeavour (European Commission / EACEA / Eurydice, 2026a). Recommendations by education authorities on the use of digital technologies at school could also target and promote collaboration with universities, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, companies, and local stakeholders. In this context, school leaders play a central role in shaping vision, creating the conditions for effective use of digital technologies, supporting staff development, and ensuring that digital education is aligned with broader school priorities.

4. Teacher voice and social dialogue

> "S*ocial dialogue between governments (at the appropriate level) and representative teachers' organisations and relevant employer organisations should be the principal means for developing policies on education, teaching and the teaching profession*". UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession (ILO / UNESCO, 2024).

Social dialogue is recognised as a European Union objective in Article 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Social dialogue encompasses formal and informal processes, which can take place at multiple levels: information exchange, consultations, negotiations or collective bargaining and joint actions (European Commission, 2016). Social dialogue provides teachers with formal mechanisms to exercise "voice" in their professional work. Social dialogue can be bipartite, between employer organisations and trade unions, or tripartite, also including public authorities. The European Union supports social partner capacity building and the development of sectoral social dialogue at the European level through committees and work programmes. A European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education is in operation since 2010.

The Council Recommendation of 12 June 2023 on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union recognises that social dialogue arrangements and processes vary between Member States, reflecting their respective histories, institutions, and economic and political situations. It outlines that an effective social dialogue implies, among other things, the

existence of industrial relations models in which the social partners can negotiate in good faith and exercise autonomously their practices of collective bargaining and employee participation.

International organisations have long advocated for greater teacher engagement in the design and development of professional and educational reforms[63] (Schleicher, 2011; UNESCO, 2021; UNESCO, 2025). Beyond pay and working conditions, it is suggested that the social dialogue agenda includes broader professional and education policy issues, such as the development of professional standards, digital technologies, the regulation of private sector providers and the transformation of education for the world of work (ILO, UN and UNESCO, 2024; Stevenson and Milner, 2023).

Social dialogue can take place at multiple levels of the education system: national, regional, local or at school level. Social dialogue, which engages all key stakeholders and considers all stakeholder concerns, is identified as the most effective mechanism to address occupational tensions and achieve complex goals and, to achieve its objectives, social dialogue must take place at the level at which decisions are being made (Stevenson and Milner, 2023). Despite its potential, social dialogue in education at the national level is uneven. Social dialogue was weakened during the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, when policies governing school closures and remote and distance teaching were not always made in consultation with teachers and their representatives (ILO, UN, and UNESCO, 2024).

Education trade unions can face challenges in representing teachers' professional needs. Social dialogue on professional issues tends to take place at the national level, rather than at the level of the educational institution where teachers experience these issues. Ultimately, teachers can be excluded from broader policy debates and discussions on education (ILO, UN and UNESCO, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). For example, teacher unions in Europe did not consider current retention strategies effective and reported that government authorities do not consult teacher organisations about the reasons for teacher attrition (Arnold and Rahimi, 2024).

This is significant as TALIS 2024 suggests that teacher involvement in school and system-level decision-making processes can have a positive impact on job satisfaction. In some countries, wages and terms of employment are unilaterally set by the state for the public sector. In other countries, collective bargaining takes place between the trade unions and representatives of the ministry of education, in some cases also involving the ministry of finance. In most countries, such agreements apply to the public sector as a whole; however, depending on the nature of the organisation of the education sector, the local and regional authorities are sometimes responsible for collective bargaining. In the private sector, single-employer bargaining is more common, although multi-employer bargaining also takes place" (Eurofound, 2020). Among employer organisations, there is a significant degree of fragmentation, largely because many organisations represent only one of the subsectors of education, or they represent funding organisations (ministries, local authorities) or individual school heads. In most countries where the relevant ministries (usually the ministry of education) are the main or only employer in the sector, they are not seen as employer

[63] The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation of 5 October 1966 concerning the Status of Teachers contains numerous recommendations for teachers' participation in educational decisions through consultation and negotiation with educational authorities.

organisations even if they often perform the main role in setting both wages and the terms and conditions of teaching staff in the public sector. The largest trade unions in all countries are members of ETUCE[64].

Discussion of collaborative governance raised the case for representation of parents, students, and staff, including teachers specifically, in school governance structures, the involvement of community actors such as NGOs, and safeguards to prevent undue influence of commercial or for-profit interests over public education.

The low comparative attractiveness of the profession can also be understood in the context of broad changes to the teacher role and wide education policies that, with little to no teacher involvement in their development, are redefining teachers' work (Stevenson, H. and Milner, A.L., 2023). Social dialogue processes are therefore needed at all levels of the system.

The Santiago Consensus, adopted at the UNESCO World Summit on Teachers in 2025, calls on governments to establish permanent, inclusive and transparent mechanisms for social dialogue between governments and democratically elected representatives of teachers, including trade unions, in order to promote a genuine participatory and constructive decision-making process at all stages of policy making and implementation affecting the teaching profession and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. The UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and ILO Workers' Representatives Convention No. 135 (1971) Page 4 of 22 provide foundational international standards for the rights and professional conditions of teachers and their representatives. It is appropriate for the Union and its Member States to apply these principles and standards in their teacher policies.

The results of the survey on attractive teaching careers suggest that, when it comes to professional autonomy, recognition of professional expertise (91%) and involvement in educational decision-making processes (88%) are the main priorities. This indicates a widespread desire for participatory governance and a professional voice.

5. EU support to the teaching profession

Long-standing and ongoing policy cooperation helped to bring about consensual policy guidance on teachers and early childhood education and care staff. Further to the Council's identification of teacher education as a key issue, the Commission established a working group to reflect on improving the education of teachers and trainers in 2002, as part of the 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme. It led to the development of a set of Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications[65]: teaching is a well-qualified profession; it is a profession of lifelong learners; it is a mobile profession; it is a profession based on partnership.

This paved the way for "support for educators" becoming one of the six priorities in the 'Education and Training 2020' framework for cooperation, focusing on improved recruitment, selection and training processes as well as continuing professional development.

64 Eurofound, 2020. Of the 202 national education sector trade unions in the EU, 89 are affiliated to ETUCE (44%). At least one trade union in every EU Member State is affiliated to ETUCE, and in all countries the largest union in the sector is affiliated to ETUCE.

65 COM(2007) 392 final.

The Education and Training 2020 working group on schools addressed the question of establishing and maintaining quality in the teacher profession during its 2014-15 mandate. Later, it prepared guidance to develop national career frameworks (European Commission, 2020b). It explored possibilities to diversify teaching careers and develop national career frameworks to help fulfil the career aspirations, motivations, and learning needs of teachers, with the understanding that the perception of a long-term career solely in the core role of teaching, year after year in the same or a similar school setting, may not be attractive to young graduates. It outlines new opportunities that may arise in the classroom or include roles such as being a curriculum expert, involvement in curriculum development, in mentoring less experienced colleagues, or moving to senior management roles. A peer-learning project was set up to develop national career frameworks, using the guidance developed by the working group. Six countries[66] adapted the European framework based on their needs, co-writing a guide for career frameworks[67].

The 2020 Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future[68] shed light on the main challenges to address. The Council invited Member States to improve the attractiveness and status of the teaching profession, to invest in measures related to improving teachers' initial education and continuous professional development, working conditions and career prospects, as well as to further enhance their resilience and well-being, to support them in addressing stressful aspects of their work. The Council conclusions also briefly refer to the challenges of working in environments transformed by technology, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, paying attention to their pedagogical potential, as well to ethical, safe and responsible use.

The Council Conclusions of 5 April 2022 on enhancing teachers' and trainers' mobility during their initial and in-service education and training[69] emphasised that the mobility of teachers and trainers (in particular European mobility) contributes to the attractiveness of the teaching profession. The Conclusions recognised mobility as one of the key elements for both practising and prospective teachers and trainers. Exchanges of views and experiences among peers and close cooperation between teachers and trainers contribute significantly to their professional development. The Council conclusions invited Member States to motivate education and training institutions to embed teachers' and trainers' mobility in their learning, development and internationalisation strategies.

The Council Conclusions of 11 May 2026 on teachers in the era of artificial intelligence[70] stressed that teachers play a decisive role in shaping how AI is introduced, interpreted and used in the classroom, and that integrating AI in education requires building on teachers' existing digital skills and supporting their continuous development, and that professional judgment, pedagogical autonomy and responsibility are essential.

66 Albania, Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Portugal, and Romania participated.

67 *Teachers and school leaders: How to create a profession that is attractive, motivating and fulfilling? A guide for career frameworks.* https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/Guide-to-career-frameworks.pdf

68 2020/C 193/04

69 OJ C 167, 21.4.2022.

70 OJ C, C/2826, 26.5.2026

The Council Conclusions of 19 October 2026 on equality as a driver for economic growth and competitiveness stressed the need take an inclusive and gender-responsive approach, such as attracting more men to the teaching profession.

5.1. European Education Area

Teachers and trainers are one of the main priorities of the EEA and the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)'. Already in the first cycle, the Communication[71] on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 stressed the need to valorise and recognise the education profession. This was reiterated in the 2021 Council Resolution[72] that also included a list of specific issues and actions. The 2023 Council resolution on the European Education Area[73] gave a particular focus to enhancing the teaching profession and addressing teacher shortages; promoting the professional development, mobility opportunities, working conditions and well-being of teachers as key factors in increasing the attractiveness.

The teachers' role has been highlighted in many EEA initiatives such as the Council recommendations on blended learning (2021), on learning for the green transition and sustainable development (2022), on pathways to school success (2022), the two digital education and skills Council recommendations (both from 2023), as well as in the Digital Education Action Plan (2020). This included also ongoing support for teachers and educators, with practical guidance on key challenges, including four sets of guidelines on i) the ethical use of AI and data in education, ii) tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy, iii) creating and leveraging digital education content, and iv) delivering high-quality teaching of informatics, as well as guidelines to address well-being and mental health at school.

Still, the interim evaluation of the 2021-2030 European Education Area strategic framework[20] identified, inter alia, teacher shortages among the remaining significant challenges, as well as the need to further support Member States in adapting their education systems for students and teachers to thrive. The evaluation found less progress to enhance the competences and motivation in the education profession, relative to other strategic priorities. This is partly due to the lack of complementary policy frameworks and the fact that, unlike for the other strategic priorities, there were no EU initiatives (in the form of a Council Recommendation) specifically on teachers and trainers. It concluded that the breadth of challenges across all EU Member States in this area, in particular teacher shortages, attractiveness of the profession, and working conditions, underline the need to strengthen efforts.

Consequently, the 2026 Council Resolution on the second cycle of the strategic framework for the European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (2026-2030)[74] reconfirms 'Enhancing attractiveness, competences and motivation in the education and training profession' as one of the six priority areas for the coming years.

Most recently, at the informal meeting of Education Ministers on 29-30 January 2026 in Cyprus, Ministers held discussions on the theme 'Investing in teachers: professional development, attractiveness and retention.'

71 COM/2020/625 final
72 2021/C 66/01
73 2023/C 185/08
74 OJ C, C/2026/3720, 10.7.2026.

EU-level guidance is converging with the long-standing focus on the attractiveness of the teaching profession at international level. Most recently, in 2024, ILO/UN/UNESCO published recommendations on the teaching profession, setting out a roadmap for transforming the teaching profession into a high-status, highly respected profession for highly qualified, well-supported, adequately remunerated professionals, capable of delivering quality and relevant education to new generations.

European cooperation among relevant authorities has inspired national reforms. In the field of early childhood education and care, examples are manifold on how working groups at European level have prepared the ground for solid policy guidance and inspired reforms across Europe:

- The ET2020 working group prepared a 2014 European Quality Framework (including staff) which was embedded in the 2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality ECEC Systems. This inspired reforms across Europe[75].
- The ET2020 working group on ECEC prepared in 2014 a European Quality Framework which includes five pillars for quality, one of them being staff. The group later reflected on how to implement the EU Quality Framework which had been embedded in the 2019 Council Recommendation on High-Quality ECEC Systems. As a result, the working group gives policy guidance[76], based on research findings and policy and practice examples, concluded with a set of policy pointers for Member States. This report was an inspiration to develop the 2022 Council recommendation on ECEC, in the context of the Barcelona targets and the Care strategy. It was also instrumental to reforms addressing ECEC staff shortages and improving their working conditions in Austria, Belgium-fr, Ireland, and Romania.
- The EEA working group on ECEC emphasised the role of staff in monitoring and evaluation of quality in ECEC (2023), published a policy brief on staff shortages[77] to highlight the causes, impact and possible solutions to this increasing problem. This helped addressing staff shortages in Slovenia and encouraged reflections on strategic leadership in Malta, for example. The working group has also worked on leadership, reviewing models and practices, assessing the competences required and training and career pathways needed, and preparing three reports[78] and a reflection tool[79].

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75 European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, PPMI, Hulpia, H., Sharmahd, N., Bergeron-Morin, L. et al., *Quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) – State of play in the EU Member States based on the European Quality Framework – Executive summary*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/18383.

76 European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Early childhood education and care – How to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff – Final report*, Publications Office, 2021, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/489043.

77 European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Staff shortages in early childhood education and care (ECEC) – Policy brief*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/385.

78 Leadership in ECEC: an overview of models and practices in Europe; Leadership in ECEC: Competences and training; and Leadership for inclusion: Building capacity to strengthen a whole-system approach to early childhood education and development.

79 https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2026-05/Reflection-tool-to-organise-leadership-in-ECEC.pdf

5.2. European Semester

Funding was mobilised under the **Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Cohesion Policy Funds** to support Member States' reforms and investments in teacher professional development. 19 Member States have included dedicated measures in this area in their national recovery and resilience plans.

In 2026, **country-specific recommendations linked to the teaching profession were addressed to 17 countries**. The recommendations refer to flexible and attractive career paths (Belgium), stepping up and/improving the quality of teacher education/training (Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, France, Malta, Poland, Slovakia), and teacher evaluation (Greece), improving working conditions (France, Slovenia), tackling teacher shortages (Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden) and more generally to increasing the attractiveness of the profession (Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands).

In addition, the Council Recommendation of 9 March 2026 on human capital in the European Union recommends that Member States act, in the period 2026-2027, to strengthen basic skills through ensuring adequate incentives to increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, especially for STEM subjects, and supporting initial and continuous professional development at all levels, including inclusive and gender-sensitive teaching approaches. It also recommends strengthening VET by promoting a sufficient supply, in particular of STEM teachers and trainers.

Among various EU cooperation and funding instruments dedicated to support addressing structural policy challenges and the corresponding country specific recommendations adopted in the context of the European Semester., the EU's **Technical Support Instrument** (TSI) has provided technical expertise to Member States implementing reforms in teacher workforce planning. The reforms in Austria, Ireland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Italy point the same way: without adequate forecasting data and long-term planning, countries end up managing shortages reactively. The project on Strategic Workforce Planning for Teachers in Ireland (24IE16)[80] shows that technical support can provide vital evidence in forecasting and workforce planning for the future of the teaching profession and enhance consensus among national stakeholders regarding challenges to the teaching profession and measures to improve the teacher workforce planning. It has produced concrete recommendations tailored to the local context which can be used by policymakers to improve teacher workforce planning. Continuing Professional Development is another recurring theme in the TSI projects. The induction work in Flanders and the digital-transition project with Belgium and the Netherlands both found that Continuing Professional Development is most effective when it is targeted at a specific career stage and school context that closely addresses the actual needs of teachers.

AI and digital readiness were also supported via TSI, the latest reforms were built around providing teachers and school leaders with ready-to-use AI toolkits. This points to teachers' need for concrete and practical assistance in adapting to this quickly developing technology. Futureproof Education: Supporting Schools in the AI Evolution is an ongoing project focused on building the toolkits and CPD resources for teachers and school leaders that TALIS 2024 suggests are still missing (Q3-2025–Q3-2027). The experiences from TSI projects, as well as

[80] https://www.unesco.org/en/teachers/strategic-workforce-planning

from peer learning activities within EEA working groups and peer counselling actions, suggest that national authorities and stakeholders value knowledge sharing and capacity building from EU peers.

5.3. Strengthening the EU-wide evidence base

Monitoring the state of the teaching profession is improved based on availability of data. A Teacher Dashboard was developed to support EU countries' debates on the teaching profession, in response to the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) of 26 February 2021 that invited the Commission to propose indicators on the teaching profession. The Teacher Dashboard, as part of the Education and Training Monitor toolbox for tracking progress towards EU-level targets[81] and priorities, brings together evidence and data on key aspects of the profession, such as perceived autonomy, societal appreciation, as well as alternative pathways to becoming a teacher and salary progression., helping to identify and contextualise challenges facing the teacher workforce. In 2026, the Commission has updated the Teacher Dashboard, drawing on the Job Demands-Resources framework to capture a rich variety of aspects relevant to the attractiveness of the teaching profession, and expanding its data sources to include Eurydice, PISA, the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and other Eurostat data, and trend data, allowing broader coverage of countries and topics.

The data presented in the toolbox and teacher dashboard feeds into the preparation of the annual country reports under the European Semester reports, as well as the Education and Training Monitor publication.

The OECD TALIS is the source of many indicators of the dashboard. Erasmus+ supports the participation of countries in TALIS and TALIS Starting Strong. Nevertheless, coverage issues remain, as 23 Member States participated in 2024 at lower secondary level[82], and fewer took part at primary and upper secondary level, and in TALIS Starting Strong.

Two EU-level reports based on TALIS data were published in 2026, one on the teaching profession and another on school principals. These analyses are complemented by the annual Investing in Education report, whose 2026 edition focused on the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Two reports from ENESET, *Leading through uncertainty: A model for effective school leadership in times of crisis* (European Commission, ENESET, 2026) and *Supporting teachers across career stages to promote well-being, prevent burnout, and enhance retention*[83] informed this Staff Working Document. The 2021 Eurydice report on teachers careers, development and well-being (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021), and the annual reports on teachers' and school heads' salaries and structural indicators supported the analysis, and a Eurydice report on teachers and school leaders is planned for

[81] While there is no specific EU-level target on the teaching profession, supporting teachers and trainers is one of the priorities of the Council Resolution of 29 June 2026 on the second cycle of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (2026-2030).

[82] Austria, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands (though not meeting the technical standards), Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Germany, Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg did not participate at lower secondary level.

[83] Report forthcoming.

2027. Eurydice, Eurostat and the OECD offer a range of information related to qualifications, working conditions and salaries of ECEC staff. An ECEC observatory will be set up in 2027, funded under Erasmus+, strategically bringing together all the data about ECEC staff in a user-friendly tool, to support decision-making and research. A new European Vocational Teachers and Trainers Survey (EVTS) coordinated by Cedefop is being prepared, examining experiences, working conditions and professional development of teachers in initial vocational education and training. This Staff Working Document presents preliminary evidence from the pilot phase of the Survey. The EVTS will provide comparable data of representative samples[84] of teachers working in initial VET schools, at ISCED level 3, across 23 EU Member States. It is expected in 2027. It will examine critical challenges, including effectiveness of teachers' professional development and relevant barriers, digital and green technology skills gaps, inclusive classroom management, job satisfaction and working conditions, factors influencing career attractiveness. Ongoing monitoring will play a key role in the outcome of any new measures.

Research funding under the Horizon Europe programme supports research on the impact of professional development for preschool teachers and in secondary education.

5.4. Support to candidate and potential candidate countries

The Commission supports teacher involvement, teacher governance and teacher support and development also within candidate and potential candidate countries, supported by the expertise of the European Training Foundation (ETF). It holds specific expertise on teacher professional development and data collection, including communities of practices and peer-learning activities, on-demand policy advice and guidance on teacher management and professional education and development as well as strengthening evidence and dissemination on teacher shortages and attractiveness, including analysis of teacher well-being, workload, and retention.

The ETF supports neighbouring and enlargement countries to improve teacher policies and practice by helping governments use evidence to design, implement and monitor reforms. Its work covers key issues such as teacher recruitment and deployment, professional development, digital competence, inclusion, labour-market relevance and governance. Across countries, ETF analysis points to common challenges, including teacher shortages, ageing workforces, fragmented continuing professional development systems, and growing demands linked to digital, green and learner-centred teaching. To address these, the ETF provides policy advice, diagnostic tools, country studies and data that help identify reform priorities and shape national discussions on how to better support the teaching profession.

A series of teacher management system studies map workforce data, identify systemic challenges and provide evidence-based policy options on teacher recruitment, career structures, deployment, professional learning, appraisal and retention[85]. Alongside policy

[84] It will gather data from approximately 14 000 randomly selected teachers in initial VET schools (ISCED level 3) in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden.

[85] Conducted under the EU-funded Supporting Education Reforms and Skills in Eastern Partnership (EaP) Programme.

support, the ETF offers practical tools and learning opportunities for teachers and teacher educators in neighbouring countries. These include models and resources on competence-based teaching, formative assessment, digital self-reflection and professional development, as well as support for innovation, green skills and vocational excellence. The ETF has also helped countries apply these tools in practice, for example through support for digital competence studies, micro-credential courses for teachers in Ukraine, and regional work in Central Asia using the Scaffold tool to strengthen key competences teaching. It also promotes peer learning and exchange through its community of innovative educators, which connects practitioners across countries and helps spread good practice.

Country example: Ukraine

Digital competence data informing national policy

In 2025-2026, the ETF conducted a study on the digital competence of general secondary school teachers in Ukraine, using SELFIE for Teachers. The findings gave the Ministry of Education and Science evidence-based insights into teachers' self-perceived digital skills, per region of the country. The results will inform the national policy dialogue on teacher professional development for digital education. The results also contribute to the online Dashboard on Teachers' Digital Competence, giving dynamic access to national-level intelligence.

5.5. EU-level programmes and actions that directly benefit teachers

Staff learning mobility and cooperation partnerships under the Erasmus+ programme support Member States' efforts by providing professional development opportunities to all educational staff. These are organised as learning mobility activities in another country in a variety of formats: job shadowing, teaching or training assignments, courses and training. Other activities target teachers or future teachers and invited experts who can help improve the teaching and learning at the receiving school or hosting teachers in training who want to spend a traineeship period abroad. The Council Recommendation of 13 May 2024 'Europe on the Move' - learning mobility opportunities for everyone, aims to increase learning mobility opportunities for everyone, including educators and staff in all education and training sectors. It places a strong emphasis on boosting learning mobility for teachers through a dedicated policy framework.

Since their launch as a pilot in 2021, **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** have been set up as European partnerships of teacher education and training providers, schools and school authorities. They have been designed to address the gaps in education and training of student teachers and teachers and enhance the European dimension of teacher education. They support high-quality initial teacher education for future teachers and continuous professional development for teachers by creating courses, modules, and other learning opportunities. Until now, Academies have focused on one topic that is aligned with EU priorities, such as inclusion and equity, democracy and European values, digital education, sustainable development, well-being and STE(A)M. For example, the Teacher Academy 'ContinueUp'[86] supports the development of teachers' digital competences based on DigCompEdu through a

[86] https://continueup.eun.org.

MOOC module, while 'acaSTEMy'[87] develops a systemic support structure for high-quality, research-based STEM teacher education.

Erasmus+ Teacher Academies have seen an increasing number of applications. The initiative has exceeded initial targets, with 61 Academies co-financed to date. A further 17 new Academies were selected in 2025. Each project can count on up to EUR 1,500,000 for three years, encouraging networks, mobility, and collaboration among teacher education providers.

An assessment of the first two generations of the Academies (2021 and 2022 calls) was carried out to assess early results, identify good practices and develop actionable recommendations for the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, including how to address weaknesses, build on strengths, and upscale the initiative (European Commission and PPMI Group, 2026).

Participants have expressed high satisfaction, with 84% of participants reporting a direct influence on their teaching methods. Furthermore, participation in Academies influenced 57% of respondents to continue their careers in teaching. Still, the Academies have faced barriers in recruiting teachers, time constraints for teachers to attend courses, inconsistent recognition of teacher participation, lack of institutional recognition for the Academies' courses and limited collaborations with Ministries of Education. Over a quarter of respondents found it difficult to translate their learning into wider organisational change within their schools. For some it was difficult to translate abstract themes into practical classroom activities, and many struggled with receiving formal recognition of participation. The Academies found it challenging to continue their activities after the projects ended.

Recommendations stemming from the assessment are to look into strengthening national-level policy alignment and formal recognition of participation, remove barriers to learning mobility, strengthen the community between the Academies, engage school leaders more strategically to ensure effective implementation at the school level, improve the practical relevance of resources through co-design with educators and strengthen funding continuity. A community of practice has already been established in 2025.

Following on the lessons learnt, new Teacher Academies 2.0 will move away from a project logic towards better supporting the design of national ecosystems that include stakeholders relevant for strengthening high-quality teacher education in each participating country (HEIs providing ITE, schools, authorities responsible for teacher education, CPD providers and social partners). At the European level, bringing together these national ecosystems into broader transnational partnerships will support excellence in teacher education. Grounding the Academies on a co-creation process that involves schools can better and they will tackle emerging classroom challenges to support student teachers, novice teachers, teachers and school leaders.

The online community of the **European School Education Platform** enables the EU, and early childhood education and care, school and VET stakeholders, to quickly access a wealth of resources, including professional development courses and spaces for collaboration on EU policy priorities. It currently reaches over 400,000 people. It includes **eTwinning**, a community set up in 2005 and open exclusively to teachers/educators and other school staff in Initial Vocational Education and Training, and education from early childhood education

[87] https://www.acastemy.eu.

and care to upper secondary schools from 45 countries. 295,000 schools and 1.2 million educators have been involved in eTwinning projects and events over the past 20 years, reaching over 3 million pupils through more than 160,000 eTwinning projects. eTwinning has shown significant potential to motivate participating teachers in their job[88], by enabling exchange with peers and professional growth. The eTwinning for Future Teachers initiative aims to **raise awareness of eTwinning to initial teacher educators and their students** and to involve student teachers in short eTwinning projects while still in teacher training. Models to introduce eTwinning vary by country and institution.

The European Innovative Teaching Award, launched in 2021 to celebrate the achievements of teachers and schools, and to identify and promote outstanding teaching and learning practices, developed through collaboration between schools within the Erasmus+ programme. More than 500 projects have been awarded since 2021.

The **European Digital Competence Framework for Educators** (DigCompEdu) sets out what it means for educators to be digitally competent and was developed by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in 2017. Users of the framework include government authorities, higher education institutions and public or private professional training providers. The framework is also used extensively in Erasmus+ and other European-funded projects on teacher digital competence. The European Commission has started updating the DigCompEdu to reflect the rapid changes impacting education today. The publication of the final version is planned in 2027.

The self-assessment tool 'SELFIE for Teachers' was launched in all EU languages in 2022. Based on DigCompEdu, this free online self-assessment tool helps primary and secondary teachers reflect on and review how they use technology in their professional practice and identify areas where they can further improve their digital competence. A version of the tool tailored for Early Childhood Education and Care was launched in October 2024. To date more than 350 000 teachers have used the tool to reflect on how they are using digital technologies in their professional practice[89]. First launched in October 2021 for school teachers, a second version for Early Childhood Education and Care educators was released on World Teacher's Day 2024. This approach inspired a **new self-assessment tool on well-being and inclusion**, launched in 2025. Similarly, SELFIE for work-based learning is adapted from the SELFIE tool to match the requirements of work-based learning, that supports vocational education and training (VET) schools and companies in using digital technologies effectively for teaching, learning and training in a work-based learning setting.

5.6. Testing teacher policy reforms: Erasmus+ policy experimentation

The EU also helps Member States design and test reforms of teacher policy through Erasmus+ policy experimentation. These transnational projects test whether a policy measure works in real school settings, and whether it can be scaled up. Many of these projects have focused on teachers, including the below examples which were selected in 2020, and each ran from 2021 to 2024. Some tested ways to support teachers at different stages of their careers.

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88 Yearly monitoring reports on eTwinning show, for example, the impact of eTwinning on teachers' well-being.

89 https://selfie-in-education.ec.europa.eu/educators/?pk_source=website&pk_medium=link&pk_campaign=s4t-login&pk_content=hero-log (data as of October 2026).

The LOOP project[90] for example, developed an induction programme for new teachers and a training programme for the experienced teachers who mentor them. It tested both in schools and made recommendations on including induction and mentoring in national policies. Other projects looked at teacher well-being. Teaching to Be, led by several Ministries of Education, developed an online course on teachers' professional well-being and a guide to help school communities work together to improve it. Both were tested through randomised controlled trials and qualitative research in schools. HAND IN HAND[91] tested a whole-school support system to develop teachers' social, emotional and diversity competences. Further projects covered school leadership, teachers learning together, and teachers' digital and AI competences, as in the project Artificial Intelligence for and by Teachers[92].

Projects under the 2024 call are still running. Many of them aim at teacher professional development, e.g. on digital well-being, data literacy and gender-sensitive teaching in ICT. Many projects selected under the 2026 call will focus on reversing the decline in basic skills and include professional development for teachers, too. They will, inter alia, set out to test professional development on teaching literacy, identifying pupils' learning needs early, inquiry-based STEM teaching and using AI to personalise learning. Some will also involve teachers in deciding how AI is used in schools.

90 LOOP: Empowering teachers personal, professional and social continuous development through innovative peer-induction programmes (2021–2024), https://empowering-teachers.eu/loop-project-white-paper-empowering-teachers-enhancing-teacher-induction-through-mentoring-activities/. Erasmus+ project number 626148-EPP-1-2020-2-PT-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY

91 HAND IN HAND: Empowering teachers across Europe to deal with social, emotional and diversity related career challenges (2021–2024), https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/1c4534f8-653c-4043-a61f-4ce414e2893e/HiH_Policy_Guidelines_ENG.pdf. Erasmus+ project number 626137-EPP-1-2020-2-SI-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY

92 Artificial Intelligence for and by Teachers (AI4T) (2021–2024). Erasmus+ project number 626154-EPP-1-2020-2-FR-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY

6. Annex 1: consultation inputs

This annex provides an overview of key inputs from the consultation meetings of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sports and Culture during the period between 16 June 2025 and 22 September 2026.

6.1. Consultation strategy

The stakeholder consultations were mainly conducted in a virtual manner, with a few meetings in person. The stakeholders consulted included representatives from local (either European umbrella associations or sectoral ones), regional, and national levels. The stakeholders represented different geographical areas of the European Union.

On 26 June 2026, the European Commission held its **first-ever hearing of the education sector social partners**, dedicated to gather views on how the EU can best support Member States, education authorities and Social Partners in addressing the challenges faced by the teaching profession.

On 11 June 2026, **Executive Vice-President Mînzatu** convened an Implementation Dialogue on Supporting the Teaching Profession[93] to discuss European support to the teaching profession. The dialogue brought together social partners, European stakeholder associations, civil society organisations, Ministries of Education from four Member States, international organisations (including the OECD and UNESCO) and education practitioners, including school leaders, teacher training bodies and Erasmus+ National Agencies.

On 12 June 2026, a **Youth Check consultation** was held, in which two groups of youth representatives discussed support to teachers and what had made the best teachers effective.

Discussions at **meetings within the European Education Area Strategic Framework** were carried out in autum and winter 2025-2026.

Targeted stakeholder consultations with education sector social partners, as well as civil society organisations, researchers, international organisations and EU agencies, and teachers and school leaders between October 2025 and January 2026. Focus group meetings with teachers and other educators were held in January 2026, and a focus group with teacher educators on 17 June 2025.

Targeted stakeholder consultations with teachers and policymakers during the review of the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) were carried out between 2024 and 2025 (see the Staff Working Document Review of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 and Outlook on Digital Education);

An online survey on building attractive teaching careers open to the public on the European School Education Platform between September and November 2025;

A **call for evidence** was open between 30 July and 8 September 2026.

6.2. Targeted Stakeholder Consultations: Key Insights

Attracting New Entrants to the Teaching Profession (Status, Diversity, Pathways and Incentives)

[93] https://education.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/events/implementation-dialogue-on-supporting-the-teaching-profession-with-executive-vice-president-roxana-minzatu.

Stakeholders were clear that an attractive profession requires a **coordinated, long-term approach** spanning recruitment, induction, retention, professional standards, working conditions, respect for teacher autonomy, career development and the social recognition of teachers. It cannot be built through isolated measures alone.

Competitive salaries and job security were described as essential foundations. It was also noted that competitive salary levels for teacher educators in higher education can enhance their capacity for research and high-quality teacher preparation. Some stakeholders urged caution with differentiated pay or bonuses by subject or geographic area, warning of the risk that these could damage collegiality and prove ineffective if underlying structural issues were left unaddressed. Accelerated incremental pay progression in high-cost areas within existing pay structures and differentiated investment, such as reduced class sizes in disadvantaged areas, were suggested as more targeted alternatives. It was suggested to prioritise job security and permanent employment contracts to strengthen retention. Several stakeholders proposed sustained investment in the teacher workforce and union representatives called for stronger engagement of education trade unions in collective bargaining.

Some stakeholders pointed to the need to build the image of teaching as a prestigious, intellectually attractive profession, and stressed that teachers should be **active participants in decisions about their profession.** The need to raise the **attractiveness and status of initial teacher education** across Europe was also highlighted. This could be done for example by developing joint postgraduate (consecutive) initial teacher education programmes, improving mobility opportunities and embedding research more fully in initial teacher education. Union representatives called for the teaching profession to lead the development of standards and quality assurance for initial teacher education, through trade unions and professional associations.

Structural barriers continue to limit **diversity** in the profession, including inadequate accommodations, insufficient support for qualification recognition and host-country language development, and a lack of inclusive teacher competence frameworks. Stakeholders argued for diversity, equity and inclusion to be embedded by design in teacher preparation, recruitment and employment, across initial teacher education, continuing professional development and employment practice alike, with attention to differing professional motivations (for example among male teachers). Addressing the lack of diversity in the profession also requires removing structural barriers that limit access to minorities or marginalised groups subject to discrimination such as Roma.

Collaboration, collegial leadership and a positive school climate were framed as essential to both recruitment and retention,. Practical school-level arrangements were seen as necessary to structure cooperation among teachers, between schools, and with social partners and policymakers. Gaps persist across initial teacher education, induction and CPD, with insufficient preparation and practice for co-teaching and multi-professional collaboration, and limited time available for professional development and collaboration more broadly.

Stakeholders suggested that national self-assessments are carried out on the attractiveness of the profession. They also suggested to better align policies addressing teacher shortages to local or regional needs, for instance strengthening the cooperation between ministries, higher education institutions, schools and local or regional networks. Another proposal was to develop peer learning activities to share practices in teacher recruitment and retention,

including financial, career and workplace incentives. It was also suggested to consider piloting regional standards to assess the portability and mutual recognition of teacher competences across Member States.

Several participants supported **flexible pathways into the profession** to diversify entrants and address workforce gaps but stressed these must be carefully designed, meet recognised professional standards, and include mandatory induction as well as mentoring to avoid creating a 'two-tier' workforce. The need for independent evaluation for long-term impact was also stressed. Alternative pathways, as well as financial recruitment incentives, need to have clear objectives and be assessed for effectiveness, equity and impact on recruitment and retention before being scaled up.

Early Career Support

Stakeholders examined the induction (years 1-2) and development (years 3-5) phases of a teaching career. The main principles brought forward were that **initial teacher education** should develop teachers' wider professional competences and prepare them to be active members of their professional community, with quality and professional standards upheld across three domains: content (subject knowledge and skills), teaching (pedagogy and classroom management), and relationships (with colleagues, leadership, parents and guardians). Stakeholders highlighted the importance of practical experience, introduced early in studies, of sufficient length, and structured and designed for students to build professional knowledge, skills and attitudes gradually.

Stakeholders discussed how financial and personal constraints during ITE can limit student teachers' full engagement, affecting their capacity to commit mentally, emotionally and physically to training. Differences in ITE and licensing systems across Member States create obstacles to early-career mobility and may complicate the recognition of qualifications gained in another country.

The vital importance to ensure **equal access to high-quality induction support** was highlighted, at minimum during the first year of employment, with mentoring delivered by colleagues having received training for mentoring, and underpinned by clear guidance for schools, dedicated time, and recognition of the mentor role through certification, professional status or remuneration. A reduced teaching load for new teachers and trainers was seen as necessary to create space for preparation, observation, mentoring, feedback and reflection. Improving the coherence between initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development is also necessary to nurture a professional learning culture based on observation, feedback, reflection and improvement.

Mid-career teachers. Career Progression, Professional Learning and Mobility

Stakeholders considered continuing professional development, diversified career pathways (leadership, mentorship, subject-expertise, research), the conditions needed to sustain teachers throughout their careers, and the barriers limiting teacher mobility.

There was broad consensus that career development should allow teachers to grow professionally without having to leave the classroom, and that mentoring should be recognised as a formal career role with a defined status, given its importance for supporting early-career colleagues. Leadership should be recognised as a career path (vertical

progression), supported through structured preparation, induction and ongoing professional learning. Investment in leadership development, including VET, was seen as an important priority.

Participants called for **clearer definition and better preparation for leadership** roles, including clearer role descriptions, suggesting micro-credentials and short courses for aspiring leaders, and calling for stronger recognition, when recruiting school leaders, of experienced teachers' competences in curriculum development, assessment, quality assurance and mentoring.

Career progression needs differ across contexts: small schools, large schools, school clusters, VET and early childhood education and care settings all offer different opportunities, so frameworks need enough flexibility to recognise varied roles, including leadership, secondments and temporary role changes. A declining interest in leadership roles was reported in some contexts, driven by high workload, limited salary incentives and heavy administrative responsibility.

Professional learning should be more relevant, practice-oriented and embedded in teachers' daily work, combining discussion, reflection and community-building rather than being replaced by online or AI-supported formats, which add flexibility but so not replace human professional interaction. Teachers should be supported as professionals, innovators and knowledge producers. Stakeholders called for adequate support to professional learning, action research and innovation, to prevent the erosion of professionalism.

Lack of time remains the principal barrier to meaningful professional learning. Access is also uneven: costs, family responsibilities, lack of substitute cover and limited institutional support can all prevent participation. A varied offer of short, long, onsite, digital and blended formats are needed. VET teachers and trainers have distinct professional learning needs tied to the labour market, requiring industry-aligned, practice-oriented formats such as placements and work-based learning to keep pace with technological and skills change. School-company collaboration was seen as central to update teachers' sectoral expertise and support the pedagogical preparation of in-company mentors.

Digital technologies including AI, were raised as an area for which more CPD should be available. Digital technologies, digital literacy and AI are becoming core competence areas for teachers, already used by some to reduce administrative workload, support assessment and generate materials, but raising unresolved questions around authenticity of student work, ethics, privacy, data protection and bias, with policy on AI in schools still fragmented. Working with parents and the wider community was also highlighted as an important professional competence, and especially central for ECEC educators.

The value of **peer learning, observation and reflection** depends on supportive conditions, namely dedicated time, trust and a collaborative school climate, to strengthen professional culture. Stakeholders considered that European professional learning and mobility opportunities provided by Erasmus+ have strong potential to transform practice, but their impact on career progression is limited where they go unrecognised by national or regional authorities. They also highlighted the value of the eTwinning community providing opportunities for digital and low-barrier internationalisation and mobility in schools. The importance of sharing the benefits of international learning more broadly with colleagues was

stressed, and the supportive role that of school leadership can play. Collaborative leadership can strengthen school organisation and ease pressure on school leaders by distributing administrative responsibility. Effective school leadership requires both pedagogical expertise and management competence.

Class size and **support for learners with special educational needs** were flagged as major pressure points, with teachers frequently reporting a lack of teaching assistants and support staff. Multi-professional teams including psychologists, social workers and counsellors were suggested as a possible response, though this would require additional resources. School leaders play a key role throughout teachers' careers, supporting new entrants and in shaping culture, collegiality and development opportunities throughout career stages. Suggested measures include clearer role descriptions, short courses for aspiring leaders, and better recognition of experienced teachers' competences in areas such as curriculum development, assessment, quality assurance and mentoring when recruiting school leaders. Personal circumstances, including family commitments, can prevent teachers from taking up mobility opportunities, so maintaining a varied offer of mobility duration and format (on-site, digital, blended) is important.

Pay, Working Conditions and Governance

A key insight is that the attractiveness of the teaching profession depends on **working conditions as a whole**: competitive salaries, stable contracts, manageable workloads, professional respect and good working environments. Union representatives argued that precarious contracts weaken the profession's stability. Permanent contracts are important for access to career development. Stability needs to be paired with diverse career opportunities to avoid professional stagnation.

In some areas, **housing costs** affect teacher recruitment and retention to the point that nominal salary increases alone are insufficient, requiring coherent housing, transport, regional development and employment policies. Some stakeholders suggested to consider developing an EU teacher quality-of-work index in collaboration with education social partners, EACEA/ Eurydice, Eurofound, and Cedefop. They also suggested to run regular teacher barometers or pulse surveys.

Stakeholders highlighted the need to define teachers' working time more clearly, covering lesson preparation, assessment, grading, administration, parent communication, extracurricular activities, school trips and other tasks.

Stakeholders agreed that the development of professional terminology requires broad consultation and consensus. Clear terminology is essential to capture the complexity of different education professions (e.g. teachers, school leaders, education support personnel) across distinct sectors and settings (e.g. early childhood education and care, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, VET). General terms such as 'educators' do not always allow for a nuanced understanding of different professional profiles or the design of targeted policy responses to workforce supply issues.

Union representatives called for strengthening **social dialogue**, with education governance better connecting public administrations, schools, VET providers, social partners, parents and students, highlighting the distinct role for education trade unions and employers in discussions on pay, working conditions and education reforms. They also highlighted that

teachers often do not feel sufficiently involved in policy development especially as regards workload, teaching hours, or class sizes.

A **right to disconnect** and stronger protection of private time were highlighted in view of growing expectations and blurred boundaries between work and private life, as digital platforms, frequent parent and student communication, social media and expectations of constant availability extend the working day.

Class size and support for learners with special educational needs were again identified as major pressure points, with teachers articulating need for support from teaching assistants or special educators. Violence against teachers and social media abuse were flagged as growing concerns that are not sufficiently addressed and affect both professional and private life.

Teachers, trainers and VET leaders in Vocational Education and Training

The early, non-representative findings from the Cedefop EVTS pilot survey of 735 VET teachers across 23 Member States, pointed to low perceived status and salary adequacy, heavy administrative burden, and limited school support for continuing professional development.

Structural improvements remain more important than narrow incentives in VET as elsewhere, but the sector makes the labour-market pressure behind this especially clear: isolated incentives cannot substitute for systemic improvements to pay, workload, induction and career development. VET attractiveness is influenced by direct competition with industry, notably in STEM or IT, and by regional labour-market disparities. Stakeholders stressed the importance of the context and urged to avoid generalisations, including on whether VET is a "second choice." A recent Eurobarometer on the attractiveness of VET[94] reveals positive views about VET: it shows that 73% of Europeans see VET as offering high-quality learning, delivered by competent teachers (79%) and supported by modern infrastructure (78%).

Stakeholders representing the VET sector stressed that the flexibility allowing industry experts to enter teaching is highly valuable and necessary. Union representatives noted that flexible entry routes need quality standards that are developed by or with the profession and stressed that fragmented entry routes can undermine collegiality, retention and quality, a particularly salient risk in VET, which often relies on second-career entrants, external or part-time staff, and hybrid trainers. Structured induction is an essential safeguard: induction must combine mentoring, peer support and protected early-career conditions such as reduced teaching load, and prevent unsupervised cover for staff shortages. Workshop participants identified a VET-specific need for orientation, including the school-workplace learning interface and the expectations of multiple stakeholders at once.

ITE and early-career content gaps persist around inclusive practice, classroom management and ‘contemporary literacies’ such as green, digital and AI skills, with renewed calls to involve practising teachers directly in ITE design and delivery to keep training relevant.

CPD within working time remains the binding constraint, compounded in VET by the sector's reliance on school-company reciprocity. School-company collaboration was again seen as a way to refresh teachers' sectoral expertise while strengthening the pedagogical preparation of in-company mentors. An integrated investment logic of "kit, training and time"

[94] https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3367.

should pair infrastructure modernisation with funded professional learning and protected time, to avoid implementation failure and underused equipment.

VET school leaders are currently underserved by existing leadership education, needing to balance pedagogical leadership, industry understanding and managerial responsibility simultaneously, a combination that current systems can better support. Equipment investment without funded staff time risks going to waste: upgrades introduced without corresponding funded training or protected time were found to often lead to underused capacity rather than improved teaching.

At EU level, participants suggested narratives on VET attractiveness stay context-sensitive, explicitly recognising industry competition and regional variation, alongside building a stronger evidence base on VET teachers' and trainers' pathways and conditions, including hybrid and external roles, and supporting peer learning on induction models and school-company partnerships. At national and system level, they suggested guaranteeing structured induction and CPD access for all VET teachers and trainers, including external and hybrid colleagues where mutually beneficial; transparent, supported routes to permanence where temporary contracting is structural; CPD embedded in working time with planned cover; and, where inclusion, behaviour or harassment pressures are acute, investment in multi-professional support and practical staff training such as de-escalation and learner-family-employer engagement.

Early childhood education and care staff

Stakeholders emphasised the care dimension of the profession, the complexity of career progression in a sector where horizontal development is as significant as vertical advancement, the qualification pathways, the need for professional development, especially for supporting children with diverse needs, and the specific challenges around non-contact time, meaning the paid time dedicated to tasks not involving children.

The structural challenges of the sector are long-standing and well documented, including qualification differentials, salary differences relative to other education levels, and between public and private early childhood education and care providers, and limited clarity on career pathways. Stakeholders called for clear, formalised career pathways with corresponding remuneration structures. Career progression frameworks that include both horizontal pathways (specialisation, skills development) and vertical pathways (formal roles, increased responsibility).

A proposal was to consider developing a consultative framework for quality in initial teacher education and induction. Stakeholders also called for recognising care as a transversal competence in initial teacher education frameworks. Digital competence, including AI literacy, should also be integrated into ECEC initial teacher education. Stakeholders also suggested policies to support non-teaching staff already at schools or staff in the ECEC sector to gain teacher qualifications.

The OECD TALIS Starting Strong report suggests that children with special needs require the involvement of more professionals. Induction and mentoring support could be usefully extended to educators returning after long-term leave, not only new entrants, with mentoring roles formally recognised within working time and linked to remuneration.

Focus groups with teachers

Focus groups consulted around 50 teachers from different Member States, education levels and roles (class teachers, subject teachers, school heads, ECEC leaders). There were four sessions structured around three guiding questions: what most influences job satisfaction and how; the current and likely future effects of AI in education; and what single change would make the greatest difference to teachers' working lives.

On question 1, teachers were consistent: the main source of workload strain is not teaching itself but the administrative, logistical (substitution cover), and relational demands surrounding it, which take energy and resources. Class sizes and insufficient special education support compound this, with many teachers reporting they have no assistant or specialist support despite having students with significant needs in their classrooms. Contracted hours were found to consistently underrepresent actual working time, with evenings, weekends and school trips worked without recognition or compensation. Where school leadership actively reduces administrative burden – for example by handling substitute cover externally or limiting email expectations – teachers report materially better conditions to focus on their core role.

On question 2, teachers across contexts are already adapting their practice, using AI for lesson materials, differentiated tasks, and administrative work, and moving away from take-home written assignments to in-class and oral assessment, in response to authenticity concerns. Teachers reported that AI integration was happening largely without school or system-level policy, systematic continuing professional development, or sufficient guidance on data protection or ethical use. Vocational settings reported fewer AI-related academic integrity concerns, owing to the practical, skills-based nature of their teaching.

On question 3, smaller classes or groups, protected preparation time, and adequate SEN support were the most frequently cited answers, alongside greater policy stability and improved social recognition of the profession.

Teachers perceive having limited or no voice over the structural factors that most affect their workload: class size, teaching hours, and cover arrangements. Frequent policy changes were identified as a specific source of demoralisation, with teachers calling for greater stability and consistency in policy direction. Formalised mentoring roles and mid-tier career pathways are sought by teachers but remain largely absent or unrecognised in most systems. Early years teachers noted compounding pressures not shared by other sectors: high child-to-staff ratios, year-round opening, and increasingly AI-generated parent complaints.

Focus group with Teacher Educators

A workshop to gather the perspective of the coordinators of Teacher Academies supported by Erasmus+ from 2021 to 2022 and shared the following insights.

As The teaching profession is constantly undergoing change, and it is essential to **adapt methods to meet the new demands**: the impact of AI, teacher shortages and the increasing number of second career teachers that results in a changing teaching community; changing student expectations; social isolation and increased awareness of the importance of well-being and inclusion for both students and teachers. Several proposals were discussed: rethink pedagogies and reorganise assessment methods considering AI; adopt more individualised

assessment approaches; revisit active pedagogies and active learning opportunities (e.g. flipped classroom, role-playing); use technology to improve initial teacher education programmes, e.g. simulations of classroom interactions and communication with parents; foster interdisciplinarity and improve the relationship between teachers from different disciplines and support communities of practice for different subjects The importance of preparing and supporting mentors for their mentoring role was highlighted. The large diversity of teacher education across Europe, and lack of familiarity with systems in other countries were highlighted.

Stakeholders noted that salary levels are a visible measure of the value society places on the profession and that perceived job security has diminished. They observed that the **public perception of occupational prestige** of teaching briefly improved at the beginning of the Covid pandemic. They highlighted public debates over the quality of ITE, and a lack of recognition of teacher expertise and autonomy in their work.

Teacher education needs to **prepare teachers** to work in multi-professional teams and with the community (parents, students, libraries…). A proposal was to use service-learning as a teaching methodology in teacher education, giving students opportunities to participate in a service that meets community needs as well as being relevant to the curriculum content and to reflect on the service-learning activity/activities and experience. Student teachers need to develop their **teacher identity**, involving **content specific knowledge, professional competence** (how to talk to parents, develop community partnerships, collaborate with colleagues and leadership), **pedagogical competence (**learner-centered, including didactics, learning theories, psychology, child development, inclusion, classroom management…), **life competence**: crisis management, communication, democratic values, citizenship, socio-emotional learning; **career competence**: career development, working rights, legislation, career guidance and alternative career paths. Placements in diverse learning environments to gain experience are important, as well as preparation for reflective practice and collaboration. The discussion focused on the need to facilitate the participation of schools to research projects, and of teachers to participate on an equal footing with researchers. It was also suggested that academics are visiting teachers in schools.

6.3. Implementation Dialogue on supporting the teaching profession

The dialogue allowed to take stock of existing EU measures and tools supporting teachers and to look ahead to the future of the profession in Europe Erasmus+ was reviewed as one of the EU's most valued instruments, with participants noting its transformative impact at individual level while calling for greater systemic reach for disadvantaged schools and less-resourced institutions, simplified programme administration, dedicated investment in school leadership, and continued support for Erasmus+ Teacher Academies and eTwinning.

Looking ahead, participants set out priorities for the EU, including addressing teacher shortages, developing more dynamic career pathways, and ensuring recognition for early childhood education and care professionals, initial VET teachers and support staff. They called for stronger synergies between EU instruments, along with more systematic use of the European Semester to embed education investment needs in governance and funding frameworks. with further engagement pursued through the Social Partners' Hearing on the Teaching Profession on 26 June 2026.

6.4. Social Partners Hearing

A Social Partners' Hearing[95] took place on 26 June 2026, the first of its kind in the education sector, bringing trade union and employer representatives together for structured social dialogue ahead of the Education Package. The inputs covered pay and working conditions, contract stability, administrative burden, professional qualifications and the role of early childhood education and care within the profession, with trade unions and employers discussing the balance between EU-level action and national competence. Points of convergence highlighted the value of structured social dialogue at all levels, the importance of peer learning and mutual exchange between Member States, along with the topics of artificial intelligence as priority areas for future European cooperation, with trade union representatives expressing interest in joint work on the topic of algorithmic management.

6.5. Youth Check Consultation

Participants recalled that trust-based relationships between teachers and students were key to learners' socio-emotional development, and that teachers needed to be supported with adequate infrastructure and resources to build such connections. They also highlighted that the best teachers gave students new and formative experiences, notably around democracy and values, and called for the teaching profession to be recognised consistently across Europe to support mobility, attract new entrants, and help teachers stay motivated with a healthy work-life balance. Participants further pointed to the need for a cohesive EU framework to strengthen European knowledge in schools, including digital platforms to help prepare teachers and students for Erasmus experiences and to teach cultural sensitivity and European values, and called for curricula and teaching methods to be updated to reflect how social media and AI are changing how young people access and process information. Other groups, discussing basic skills and digital tools more broadly, pointed to underfunded schools and teacher shortages as key barriers, and called for AI literacy that goes beyond technical skills to include ethical awareness, alongside digital tools that reduce teachers' administrative burden.

6.6. Call for evidence – key insights

A **call for evidence** was open between 30 July and 8 September 2026, which resulted in 440 responses overall, of whicha considerable number covered teachers and the EU Teachers Agenda. The call for evidence yielded rich insights and suggestions from a wide spread of citizens, national, regional and local authorities, universities, NGOs, social partners, businesses and chambers of commerce. 400 of the overall contributions came from within the EU, with 40 contributions from outside the EU. There were 25 individual submissions from teachers' unions across Europe. There were many common themes as well as regional and context-specific inputs, which are summarised as follows:

a. **Pay and financial recognition**

Higher, more competitive pay is one of the most frequent asks, with several respondents arguing teaching pays far less than equivalent graduate or private-sector roles. Many want pay to move away from flat, seniority-based scales and instead reward teachers who take on

[95] https://education.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/news/social-partners-call-for-structured-dialogue-on-the-teaching-profession

additional responsibilities, such as leading projects or mentoring colleagues, and reward expertise and innovation. Other proposals include a European minimum teacher salary adjusted to national cost of living, financial recognition of work such as school trips, and better pay or housing incentives for hard-to-staff rural postings. One contribution flags underpayment of women teachers specifically.

b. **Workload and administrative burden**

Teachers are repeatedly described as being asked to do more, new methods, technology, emotional support, administration, without more time or pay, which several respondents link to burnout. Respondents call for indicators of administrative burden, and call for reducing duplicated reporting requirements. Some contributions call for separating teaching from administrative tasks entirely, so "the teacher should only teach." Protected time for planning and joint work with colleagues is repeatedly requested. One respondent frames ongoing administrative accountability, rather than pay or image, as the real hidden barrier to attractiveness.

c. **Career progression without leaving the classroom**

Several respondents call for horizontal career paths letting experienced teachers become mentors, learning designers or specialists while staying in the classroom, rather than the only route upward being into management. One proposes a flexible late-career or return-to-teaching stage: reduced hours, mentoring, useful for small rural schools, additional to (not instead of) improving conditions for younger teachers. Another proposal suggests defined part-time or support roles letting senior teachers step back from full-time teaching, freeing space to hire younger staff. Several respondents call for a structured path between school levels without repeating probation. Formal pay and recognition for coordinating international projects and mobility, rather than treating this as voluntary extra effort, is also raised.

d. **Teacher autonomy, trust and voice in policymaking**

A frequent point is the necessity to consult teachers early and meaningfully on planned reforms, with unions requesting their involvement in designing and rolling out the EU Teachers Agenda. Several respondents describe teachers as designers of learning needing trust and time to innovate, not administrative implementers of decisions made elsewhere. Pedagogical autonomy, protection from arbitrary decisions and excessive testing, is raised as distinct from pay or workload. One respondent argues attractiveness policy should be judged by retention and satisfaction, not recruitment numbers, treating teacher agency as a policy goal in its own right. Original research from one respondent links how teachers experience evaluation to whether they feel they have leadership opportunities, with time, trust and training as the key conditions, and proposes formative evaluation. A separate analysis finds teachers have considerable discretion over methods but little sense of influence over policy itself, and feel mostly treated as implementers rather than interpreters of educational goals.

e. **Induction, mentoring and CPD reform**

It is very widely repeated: continuing professional development works best as a sustained, multi-year process combining training, mentoring, peer community and follow-up, not one-off courses counted by attendance hours. Several respondents want funded induction and mentoring for every new teacher, sometimes with reduced load for both new teachers and

mentors. Specific proposals include a "professional-development guarantee" with protected learning time and quality judged by impact rather than attendance, and quality assurance of CPD trainers themselves. A non-binding European framework of teacher competences evolving across career stages is proposed to structure this. More than one respondent wants mentoring and CPD-linked innovation to count formally, including financially, toward career progression.

f. **Initial teacher education and entry into the profession**

Several respondents argue entry routes are too short or too easy, allowing people in without full preparation, and propose longer pre-service pathways. One argues teacher-education content needs modernising to cover AI, digital skills, inclusion and international cooperation. Another proposal calls for folding qualifying training fully into university study rather than allowing unqualified reserve-list staff into vacancies. Mandatory training in pedagogical-research methodology and ethics is proposed to professionalise teaching. A university association stresses universities must be recognised as key partners given the research-based nature of teacher education. One respondent flags that training in an alternative pedagogical approach currently sits alongside, rather than counting toward, the state licence, discouraging entrants.

g**. Artificial intelligence and digital tools**

A consistent position is that AI should reduce workload, administrative burden, and support differentiation, but not replace professional judgement, and needs genuine training to use well and ethically. One respondent presents evidence from a teacher-facing AI platform estimating large efficiency gains when teachers help design the tools themselves, recommending EU hosting, data protection and real model choice as baseline conditions for any recommended tool. Several respondents call for clear institutional rules on assessment, data and appropriate use. Portable micro-credentials for AI literacy are proposed as achievable at EU level already.

h. **Mobility and international cooperation**

Mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ are seen as highly motivating but too complex to apply for, especially for small or rural schools and overloaded staff. One detailed proposal sets out a European teacher secondment scheme: a few years working in another Member State with a guaranteed return post at home, funded mobility, language preparation, induction and pension protection, designed as two-way capacity-sharing rather than one-way recruitment, counting toward career progression. Other respondents call for fixing practical obstacles to staff mobility such as arranging for substitute-teachery, and for recognising and paying those who organise placements. Proposals also include extending cooperation beyond Europe and linking schools to real projects with companies or universities, regular immersion placements for language teachers specifically, and keeping mobility accessible to rural and disadvantaged schools.

i. **Recruitment and addressing shortages**

Qualified teachers with third-country qualifications are flagged as an underused response to shortages, with proposals for faster, more consistent EU-wide recognition of foreign qualifications, funded bridging programmes, and sustained mentoring. A proposal sets out a

fast-track reskilling pathway for people with refugees or other migrants who have an educational background, and a dual or multi-subject qualification route, pairing a main subject with a shortage subject. Separately, one respondent notes that lengthening initial teacher education created a temporary graduate shortfall, arguing for EU recommendations to plan for managing such transitions.

j. **Vocational education and training**

VET teachers are described as competing directly with industry, which pays more and recognises experience faster, especially in technical subjects where shortages are concentrated; proposed remedies include validating work-based competence as a route into teaching and allowing partial or dual roles for industry professionals. Respondents call for VET to remain explicitly visible in the EU Teachers Agenda. They also call for reduced reporting burden and protected coordination time in vocational schools competing with industry, for reversing cuts to VET language-teaching hours, and for greater investment in vocational equipment, employer links, and AI/digital training.

k. **Well-being, mental health and working conditions**

Several respondents call for greater attention to teacher well-being from initial teacher education onwards, alongside school-level measures such as reasonable workloads, burnout-prevention and leadership supporting well-being. Individual accounts describe leaving, or considering leaving, teaching due to stress and lack of institutional support, particularly around classroom discipline for new teachers. Others call for stronger legal protection against aggression from parents, violence or misinformation. Investment in physical infrastructure is raised both as a well-being and a broader attractiveness issue.

l**. Support staff and multiprofessional teams**

A recurring call is for significantly more non-teaching support staff, IT, social work, medical, psychological and community liaison roles, so teachers are not left covering every need themselves, linked to what respondents describe as the "ever-expanding" informal role teachers are expected to play. Strong multiprofessional teams and protected joint planning time are also highlighted more broadly.

m. **School leadership**

School leadership's own attractiveness and training is raised as a distinct issue, with proposals to recognise leadership formally as a partner in EU-level social dialogue alongside unions, and to give leaders more access to genuine training and exchange, currently seen as limited. Selecting principals on competence and leadership skill, and giving them real autonomy to reward good teachers, is raised as a lever for attractiveness, alongside dedicated leadership training on staff development and AI adoption and more say for leaders in hiring decisions.

n. **Inclusion, diversity and multilingual classrooms**

CPD and initial training on inclusion, multilingual classrooms and personalising learning for diverse students is repeatedly requested. One respondent links a more diverse teaching workforce to better outcomes for migrant and minority pupils specifically, and cross-European exchange of good practice in inclusion is welcomed by several respondents.

o. **Governance, funding simplification, monitoring and evidence**

Respondents call for radically simplifying EU funding applications, through micro-grants and simpler forms, and a single digital access point for existing platforms and data. One flags reforms as sometimes designed without classroom experience or driven by pressure to use EU funds. Another calls for major reforms to be agreed on a stable, cross-party, roughly 15-year basis with resources ready before implementation. Respondents also want monitoring that tracks real change in classroom practice and outcomes such as retention and workload, not just participation numbers.

p. **Public perception and recognition of the profession**

Respondents call for public recognition and awareness campaigns on the dignity of teaching, and for awards to reach a wider group of teachers, not just a handful of prize-winners each year. More generally, one respondent wants society and reform processes to better recognise teachers' day-to-day work before legislating changes that affect them.

6.7. Annex 2: List of abbreviations and acronyms

- AI - Artificial Intelligence
- CPD - Continuing Professional Development
- CEEP - European Centre of Employers and Enterprises Providing Public Services and Services of General Interest (originally the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation)
- CIL - Computer and Information Literacy
- EACEA - European Education and Culture Executive Agency
- ECEC - Early Childhood Education and Care
- EEA - European Education Area
- EFEE - European Federation of Education Employers
- ENESET - Expert Network on Economics and Sociology of Education and Training
- ESF+ - European Social Fund Plus
- ETF - European Training Foundation
- ETUC - European Trade Union Confederation
- ETUCE - European Trade Union Committee for Education
- EVTS - European Vocational Teachers and Trainers Survey
- ICILS - International Computer and Information Literacy Study
- ICT - Information and Communication Technology
- ILO - International Labour Organization
- ISCED - International Standard Classification of Education
- ITE - Initial Teacher Education
- IVET - Initial Vocational Education and Training
- LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and other identities
- MOOC - Massive Open Online Course
- NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
- OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PISA - Programme for International Student Assessment
- STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
- STEAM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
- TALIS - Teaching and Learning International Survey
- TFEU - Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
- TSI - Technical Support Instrument
- UN - United Nations
- UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

- UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNICE - Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (now BusinessEurope, renamed in 2007)
- VET - Vocational Education and Training

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