



# **European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education**

## **WORK PROGRAMME 2024-2026**

Adopted at the ESSDE plenary meeting on 14 December 2023

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## **The context of this work programme**

### **Our goals**

Since the creation of our European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Education (ESSDE) on 11 June 2010, the two European sectoral social partners, ETUCE and EFEE, respectively representing the workers and the employers' sides, have been dedicated to enhancing the quality of education in Europe. Our primary focus has been on modernizing the education sector, improving leadership style and the conditions for teaching personnel, and creating a working environment conducive to the recruitment and retention of quality teaching professionals. We are firmly committed to continuing our efforts in several key areas, despite the support from the European Commission to the ESSDE being limited by the cuts applied to the budget dedicated to supporting EU sectoral social dialogue.

We strive to enhance the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession, emphasizing continuous professional development, teamwork, aspiration, and good working conditions. Our aim is to promote diversity in career opportunities and mobility for education personnel while fostering an innovative approach to teaching and learning. We also place significant emphasis on promoting gender equality in education and creating inclusive, safe, and healthy working environments that allow education professionals to flourish, thus benefiting the students they serve. To achieve these objectives, sound, effective and sustained public investments are crucial for the development of equitable, quality, and sustainable education systems.

### **The importance of social partners in education**

A strong, constructive and continuous dialogue between social partners within the education sector is essential for sustainable improvements, and it is actively encouraged in the development, monitoring, and evaluation of education policies and reforms. In this regard, the endorsement and implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the adoption of the Council Recommendation "Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union" [C/2023/1389] and the Communication of the Commission "Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions" [COM(2023) 40 final] are pivotal, as they seek to promote social dialogue and collective bargaining while enhancing the capacity of trade unions and employer organizations at both EU and national levels. In the context of a reorganization of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue, ETUCE and EFEE deem it essential to enhance the European Commission's current institutional and financial role in support of sectoral social dialogue at EU level.

As European Social Partners in Education, we are committed to strengthening our efforts by enhancing the capacity and potential of our social dialogue at local, regional, and European levels. We aim to explore how social dialogue can contribute to co-creation of new policy directions and participate fully in European social and economic governance mechanisms, such as the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Ensuring that the voices of teachers, trainers, school leaders, researchers, academics, and other education personnel, as well as education authorities, are equally heard in the policy sphere is a priority. Furthermore, the ESSDE actively plans to contribute to the European Education Area

2030 goals, and to continue playing an active role in the future education and training policy groups of the European Commission within the framework of the Open Method of Cooperation and enhanced EU cooperation.

Realising our ambitions requires a focus on quality and inclusive public education with a future-oriented, sustainable approach. The green and digital transitions impact on all actors in the education sector – necessitating adaptation in educational management, teaching and learning methods – and on the way trade unions and employers operate and interact. Adapting to these changes while holding on to our core values will be crucial to meeting the labour market demands of the 21st century and to promoting relevant and efficient social dialogue.

### **Duration**

This work programme covers a three-year period, from January 2024 until December 2026. ETUCE and EFEE commit to carrying out a mid-term review of this work programme in order to assess the opportunity to include additional topics to the present text.

### **Important note**

In the context of this Work Programme and the overall work of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education, by “education sector”, we refer to the whole education sector including early childhood education, primary and secondary education, higher education and research, vocational education and training, and further education. All these levels are inter-linked and have a pivotal contribution to make in preparing learners of all ages and irrespective of their socio-economic background for living, working, and acting as active and critical citizens in our society as it is now and as it evolves into the future.

## ESSDE key thematic areas

### 1. Tackling the shortage of teachers and enhancing attractiveness of the teaching profession

EFEE and ETUCE aim at promoting the development of the teaching profession, based on sustainable quality employment and working conditions, career progression including fair pay. Under this work programme, the ESSDE will devote particular attention to a selected number of policy areas that constitute a priority for both the trade unions and the employer organisations. These subjects, as identified in the ETUCE-EFEE “Framework of Actions on the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession” that was adopted by the ESSDE plenary on 14 December 2023, are: Commitment to strong social dialogue; Collective bargaining and respect for collective agreements; Decent working conditions; Initial teacher training and continuous professional development; Investment to enhance the status of the teaching profession; Professional autonomy; Occupational Health and safety; Status of the teaching profession.

Building on ETUCE and EFEE’s commitment, as expressed in this framework of actions, to jointly work on these matters and to take action, the social partners will engage in discussion to identify priority issues among the areas that require further action. Quality teaching by well-trained and supported teachers and school leaders is at the heart of quality education. However, across Europe, there are common challenges for the teaching profession which is facing severe shortages, as well as recruitment and retention challenges. ETUCE and EFEE will pay special attention to the shift towards digitalisation, the need to focus on initial teacher training (ITT), induction paths, continuous professional development (CPD), and school leadership development.

In light of the clear and accumulating evidence of the importance of workload management and that work overload and intensification significantly diminish the attractiveness of teaching and school leadership and are key drivers of flight from the profession, ETUCE and EFEE are committed to an analysis of the issue and the development of guidelines on sustainable and fair management of workload and on the prevention of work overload and intensification.

- Methodology: joint social partners projects and/or joint agreement.
- Expected outcome: assessment report of the implemented social partner initiatives under the “Framework of Actions on the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession” three years after its adoption; joint agreement or declaration on ITT, CPD, and school leadership; development of guidelines on sustainable and fair management and balance, the prevention of work overload and intensification; capacity building and exchange of experience between national social partners.

### 2. Strengthening social dialogue across Europe

Social dialogue promotion has been at the core of the education social partners’ work since the establishment of European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education in 2010. ETUCE and EFEE wish to focus on enhancing the capacity of social partners to conduct impactful social dialogue, make

meaningful collective agreements, in particular in those countries with a more recent social dialogue tradition, and/or where social dialogue in education has been weak or unsatisfactory. In light of the review of the European sectoral social dialogue, ETUCE and EFEE will monitor and take the appropriate measures to ensure the good functioning of the ESSDE and to maintain the current institutional and financial support role of the European Commission. In line with the European Commission Communication on “Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union” [COM(2023) 40 final] and the Council Recommendation on the same matter [023/0012(NLE)], EFEE and ETUCE will further support national social dialogue to strengthen the role of social partners at national, regional and local level and promote exchange of good practices regarding social dialogue initiatives across the EU. EFEE and ETUCE will also consider the added value that the findings and work of the ESSDE bring to members from ETUCE and EFEE from EU candidate countries and eligible countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), working towards their increased participation.

- Methodology: joint social partners projects for capacity building
- Expected outcomes: reinforced coverage and representativeness of the ESSDE Committee, particularly targeting the public sector education.

### **3. Digitalisation and innovation in education**

While the use of digital tools in the educational context does not represent a new phenomenon, the advent of emergency remote educational management and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic created the need to deal with the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation in education. European Sectoral Social Partners in Education intend to ensure that no teacher nor student is left behind in the common quest for inclusive and quality teaching and learning environments, while facing the challenge associated with new radical trends, such as the development of artificial intelligence (AI) tools – in particular of applied generative AI to teaching practices and evaluation methods – and the massive investment of for-profit ed-tech companies in the education sector. ETUCE and EFEE are committed to ensuring that teachers, academics, other educational personnel, school leaders and education employers will be adequately provided with the relevant digital skills, equipment and infrastructure to foster a practical and ethical application of digital tools based on the fundamental human and social component of education. ETUCE and EFEE will focus on issues related to data privacy and security; professional autonomy and academic freedom, accessibility and inclusivity of digital tools and resources; equity and digital divide; content quality and curriculum adaptation; workload and well-being; and regulation, monitoring and evaluation.

The cooperation of European Sectoral Social partners can make an important contribution to the implementation of the EU Digital Education Action Plan with regard to the priority of developing high-performing and inclusive digital education ecosystems, as well as the 2020 “Cross-Sectoral Social Partners Framework Agreement on Digitalisation” and the 2002 “Cross-Sectoral Social Partners Framework Agreement on Telework”. In this context, the European Commission is expected to put forward a proposal for a Directive on telework and the right to disconnect, on the basis of the Council conclusions on telework (9747/21) and the European Parliament resolution

on the right to disconnect [2019/2181(INL)]. ETUCE and EFEE commit to seeking autonomous sectoral agreement on this matter during the time frame of the present work programme and, if necessary, they will request the European Commission to provide additional funding to support the relevant negotiations.

- Methodology: negotiation meetings with direct support from the European Commission;
- Expected outcomes: autonomous sectoral social partners' agreement on telework and the right to disconnect; joint position on the impact and use of AI on employment conditions in the education sector; capacity building and exchange of experience between national social partners.

#### **4. Promoting education for environmental sustainability**

Climate emergency and environmental issues require a drastic social change, including individual and collective changes in mentality, behaviour, lifestyle as well as in the social, political and economic organisation of countries and societies, including all EU countries. This transition must be fair and must aim to leave no one behind. Education plays a crucial role in implementing this change, and education social partners should be leading these discussions. Following the Council Recommendation on learning for environmental sustainability [2022/0004(NLE)] and "GreenComp", the EU Competence Framework for Green Skills, the social partners in education will take action to support the green transition of education and society, which includes a long-term vision in education policy and sustainable public funding in order to update the skills and competences of education professionals, curricula, school infrastructure, textbooks, teaching materials and guidelines, assessment methods and teacher training. ETUCE and EFEE will follow on the findings and conclusions of the joint project "European Social Partners in Education Promoting Environmental Sustainability in School Learning, Teaching and Management" ensuring that education for environmental sustainability is strongly present in the social dialogue agenda on all levels. It is also helpful for the education social partners to seek alliances in their work on these issues to support the social partners' voice on this important goal.

- Methodology: social partners joint projects.
- Expected outcomes: organising a day of social partner action and/or drafting a joint declaration on the occasion of the upcoming United Nations COPs; implementation of joint recommendations 'European Social Partners in Education Promoting Environmental Sustainability in School Learning, Teaching and Management', to be assessed by the end of 2025.

#### **5. Increasing investment in quality education and training**

Sustainable, effective and efficient investment in education and training systems is at the core of European recovery and resilience, especially post-pandemic. The effects of the long-lasting lack of adequate public investment in education are becoming increasingly evident across Europe. Several countries are facing serious shortages of teachers and other education personnel, and the attractiveness of the profession has considerably decreased mainly due to the poor resources

allocated to the education sector and in support of teachers' working conditions and career development. Strategic investments will also be needed in the years to come in order to ensure green transition and energy-neutral school buildings. ETUCE and EFEE are concerned about a possible new wave of austerity measures that could be introduced by the revision of the EU economic governance, framed in 2022 by the European Commission Communication on orientations for a reform of the EU economic governance framework [COM(2022) 583 final].

Against this backdrop, social partners in education will continue addressing the need for continued, increased and comprehensive investment to improve the access to quality education for all. Following the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, ETUCE and EFEE will devote special attention to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Semester yearly cycle and the new EU economic governance. While respecting the competence of Member States for their education and training systems, a multitude of EU funding instruments are incentivising public-private developments in education and training investment, not least in the context of digitalisation in education. The European education social partners agree to jointly address investment issues with a view to strengthening and supporting with long-term plans public education, training and research in order to improve access to quality education for all, to avoid social and labour market segmentation, and to enable the process of upward social mobility and convergence across Europe.

- Methodology: ESSDE meetings.
- Expected outcomes: joint declarations and/or positions on EU economic governance and investments in education; capacity building and exchange of experience between national social partners.

## **6. Ensuring Occupational Health and Safety**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on the physical and mental well-being of education workers and students alike. Psychosocial risks during emergency remote teaching have resulted in depression, anxiety and loneliness at unprecedented scale, and have led to a significant rise in third-party violence and harassment experienced by professionals in education. The Occupational Health and Safety Strategic Framework 2021-2027 of the European Commission gives a new impetus to counter psychosocial risks and address the long-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis in all health and safety domains. ETUCE and EFEE are committed to supporting the creation and upkeep of decent, healthy and safe education environments for education workers and students alike, while implementing the lessons learned from COVID-19 as a new occupational disease and its long-term effects on working conditions in the education sector, with a particular focus on early-childhood education.

- Methodology: social partner joint projects.
- Expected outcomes: creation and implementation of the OiRA tool for higher education and research (see below); revision of the "Multi-Sectoral Guidelines on Preventing Third-Party Violence and Harassment at Work" (2011); implementation of the joint "APRES-COVID"



project on psychosocial risks in education; capacity building and exchange of experience between national social partners.

## **7. Fostering democratic school cultures, equality and inclusion in education and training**

Social partners play a crucial role in promoting democratic citizenship and creating just and inclusive societies. Furthermore, education social partners are pivotal in ensuring the enhanced provision of quality and inclusive education, seeking to support students through personalised approaches, targeted support and cooperation with the families and local communities. Social partners in education also have an important task to ensure that young people learn about democratic citizenship, peace education, respect and tolerance, human rights and equality, and are able to practice these values every day. This requires initial and continuous professional development for teachers, trainers, academics, school leaders, and other education personnel to allow them acquire relevant and up-to-date competences, skills and knowledge that equip them to respond to diversity in the classrooms and promote mutual respect, cross-cultural understanding and intercultural dialogue. Social partners in education seek to ensure that the necessary policy frameworks and measures are accompanied by sufficient resourcing and public funding.

In the context of recent war and conflicts in the European region, social partners in education pay particular attention both to addressing the challenges of inclusion in the education system of refugee and migrant students and employment barriers for refugee and migrant education personnel in the education systems of the host countries. Moreover, education social partners commit to promoting safe physical and social learning environments where the freedoms of opinion and expression are respected with a view to building a democratic school culture and promoting collegial governance. They also recognise the need to support teachers and school leaders regarding the increasing social pressure for a better socialisation of students and implementation of a whole-school approach, in particular to prevent any form of radicalisation as contrary to the principles of open and democratic societies that ETUCE and EFEE promote (following the growing number of violent acts in schools like shootings, knife attacks, etc.). Finally, education social partners continue working towards enhancing equality and inclusion in the education sector, ensuring a better gender balance and addressing the under-representation of people from migrant background, those with special needs, ethnic minorities, and other groups.

The ETUCE and EFEE, recognising the pivotal importance of a collegial school/institutional culture (and the meaningful social dialogue that engenders it) in enhancing both the attractiveness of teaching and educational outcomes for learners, commit to the development and dissemination of a joint statement of the principles and practices that foster and sustain such a collegial culture.

- Methodology: social partners joint projects.
- Expected outcomes: joint statement on democratic citizenship and inclusion ahead of the European elections in June 2024; implementation of a joint ETUCE-EFEE project “Inclusive education for all needs” currently under review by the European Commission; review of the

joint statement on promoting gender equality in education; joint ETUCE-EFEE statement of the principles and practices for collegial culture; continue the ESSDE work on the topics of inclusion, equality, and democratic citizenship building on the success of the past joint projects “EU CONVINCED” (2018-2020) and “European Sectoral Social Partners in Education promoting effective integration of migrants and refugees in education” (2017-2019); capacity building and exchange of experience between national social partners.

## 8. Higher education and research

Contributing to the development of a framework of a European Education Area, the European education social partners will continue their work in contributing to the building of innovative, connected, inclusive and sustainable high-quality education and research systems. EFEE and ETUCE will thereby build on previous work, such as the EFEE-ETUCE “Policy Recommendations on Promoting Quality of Academic Teaching and Management” (2022); the EFEE-ETUCE “Joint Statement on Promoting the Implementation of OIRA tools in Education Institutions by the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education” (2021); and the ETUCE and EFEE “Proposal for a Quality Framework for an Effective Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees in Education” (2019). In their Policy Recommendation of 2022, EFEE and ETUCE committed to take action on institutional autonomy and academic freedom, supportive work environments and decent working conditions, good learning environments, collegial and democratic governance, meaningful involvement of the education social partners in decisions on quality assurance schemes and accreditation systems, fair mobility of academics, diversity and inclusion, equal value of teaching and research in career development and progression, and professional development programmes.

ETUCE and EFEE will focus on the working conditions of teachers in higher education, the increasing number of precarious, short-term contracts, the impact of digitalisation after the COVID-19 pandemic, the growing influence of platform learning and ed-tech investments, micro-credentials and hybrid teaching, and the future of universities’ infrastructure and facilities. Education social partners will continue to consolidate their cooperation for example against the backdrop of quality, inclusive, healthy, safe and innovative education environments in higher education and research. In this regard, the social partners have, together, engaged with the European Agency for Safety and Health at work to develop a new OIRA-tool for the Higher Education and Research sector. Adding to this, in accordance with the European Pillar of Social Rights, European Education Area and the UN Sustainability Agenda 2030, education social partners maintain their support for higher education and research staff and effective social dialogue to tackle the direct and indirect impacts of green and digital transition in the sectors.

- Methodology: social partners joint projects.
- Expected outcomes: joint programme of actions on changing trends in working conditions in higher education, with a focus on the effects of the digital transition, joint EFEE-ETUCE action plan moving from the joint “Policy Recommendations on Promoting Quality of Academic Teaching and Management” (2022); creation and implementation of the OIRA tool for higher education and research; exchange of experience between national social partners.

## 9. Promoting the status and attractiveness of the VET profession

Building on the “Joint Statement on improving Vocational Education and Training in Europe”, the “Joint Policy Recommendations on Lifelong Learning for All: Social Partners in Education promoting quality and inclusive VET to enhance lifelong learning for all”, and their joint work together with CEDEFOP for the creation of the “European VET Teachers Survey” (EVTS), ETUCE and EFEE will put specific focus on promoting the status and attractiveness of the profession of VET teachers, adult learning educators, VET trainers, school leaders and other education personnel by improving recruitment processes, supporting retention and decent working conditions of teachers, educators and trainers, and by promoting stable employment in the sector. This includes preparing teachers and school leaders for the green and digital transition of initial VET within effective social dialogue. The education social partners are committed to discussing the improvement of initial VET and apprenticeships. They will also discuss how to improve the European Alliance for Apprenticeship, so to increase the quality and inclusiveness of the apprenticeship systems.

- Methodology: ESSDE meetings.
- Expected outcomes: joint declaration or recommendations on the status and attractiveness of the VET profession; capacity building and exchange of experience between national social partners.

## **Annex 1**

### **Outcomes of Social Dialogue under the Work Programme 2022-2023**

#### Adopted joint texts:

- EFEE-ETUCE Joint Policy Recommendations on Promoting Quality of Academic Teaching and Management;
- EFEE-ETUCE Statement on the Interim Report of the Commission expert group on quality investment in education and training;
- Joint ETUCE-EFEE Statement on Enhancing and Promoting Gender Equality In and Through Education;
- Joint ETUCE-EFEE Framework of Actions on the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession.

#### Implemented joint projects:

- e-Speed: Challenges and opportunities for European education trade unions and employer organisations in the digital era;
- Promoting the Implementation of OiRA tools in Education Institutions by the European Sectoral Social Partners in Education
- Promoting Quality of Academic Teaching and Management;
- Towards a Framework of Actions on the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession.

## **Annex 2: Ongoing joint social dialogue projects**

During the period 2024-2025, ETUCE and EFEE will be implementing the following joint social dialogue projects, while new project proposals in the areas covered by this work programme may be jointly submitted:

- APRES COVID: Addressing psychosocial risks for an equitable and sustainable education-led recovery from the COVID-19 crisis;
- SP4ES: Promoting Sustainability in School Learning, Teaching and Management;
- LearningSchools: Schools as learning institutions – Promoting effective quality innovation management models in the education sector in a post COVID-19 era.

Pending applications:

- Inclusive education for all needs: European Sectoral Social Partners in Education promoting inclusion of persons with special needs in education