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A Briefing by Education International

International Summit of the Teaching Profession 2025

Quality Education: The Key to Prosperity and Well-being

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International Summit on the Teaching Profession

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Introduction

by David Edwards,
General Secretary of Education International

Welcome to the 15th edition of the *International Summit on the Teaching Profession*. The ISTP is a unique forum where education unions and governments work together constructively to strengthen and enhance our education systems.

I would like to recognize and express our gratitude to our hosts. I congratulate and thank the Icelandic government and Minister Ásthildur Lóa Þórsdóttir for agreeing to host the Summit. I would also like to thank our colleagues at *Kennarasamband Islands* (KI), Education International member organization in Iceland, for welcoming us and preparing a fantastic programme. To our permanent partners in the Summit, the OECD and Andreas Schleicher, thank you for your continued support and faith in the power of cooperation between unions and governments.

Last year we discussed how to transform education to ensure it realizes its potential to contribute to a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. We explored the role of technology for the future of learning and teaching in TVET, and considered the types of partnerships necessary to support learning for life.

This year we turn our attention to fostering equity and well-being in our education systems, starting from those essential early years, and to empowering students to actively participate in shaping their futures and the world.

We will discuss the role of high-quality early childhood education and care in laying the foundation for equitable and inclusive education. While the need to expand access and enhance the quality of ECE have been recognized, this policy intention has not been met with the necessary increase in funding. Early childhood education remains an underfunded sector severely impacted by the global shortage of teachers and education support personnel. Low salaries, poor working conditions, a lack of recognition, and the low status of this highly feminized sector all contribute to the shortage. These issues must be addressed in order to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of ECE personnel while also ensuring that they have the right training, opportunities for continuous professional development, and supportive pedagogical leadership.

We will also focus on the well-being of teachers and education support personnel as a prerequisite for quality education. Research increasingly demonstrates a positive correlation between teacher well-being and

students' academic achievement and their social, emotional, and cognitive development. This relatively new policy priority is challenging as it includes and cuts across a number of distinct policy areas: employment status; remuneration and conditions of work; respect and social status; professional autonomy and agency; and occupational safety and health. As such, a policy commitment to enhancing teacher well-being requires a holistic approach.

Together we will also reflect on how our education systems can embrace and model empowerment through democratic governance so that our students can actively participate in shaping their future. To empower students, teachers themselves need to be genuinely empowered and not subject to oppressive top-down management structures. Professional autonomy and agency are cornerstones of quality education and a prerequisite for fostering participation, critical reflection, and active engagement. By building structures for dialogue and collaboration at all levels and between all actors, a culture of communication and mutual respect can be fostered across our education systems.

The ever-relevant *United Nations Recommendations on the teaching profession* will be essential for our discussions, building on the fundamental principle that teachers are valued partners in policy dialogue in education.

Indeed, fostering and developing collaboration between ministers and education union leaders in the pursuit of impactful policy change has been the longstanding mission of the ISTP these 15 years. I look forward to our discussions in Reykjavík as we continue to work together to drive systemic change.

David Edwards
General Secretary
Education International

Theme 1 Building a Foundation for Equitable and Inclusive Education: The role of high-quality early childhood education and care

The right to education starts at birth. However, despite a global consensus on the rights of all children, regardless of background, to a quality education, there is great variation when it comes to the funding, provision, and quality of early childhood education. In practice, early childhood education (ECE) tends to be fragmented, ranging from formal settings (e.g. preschools, crèches, and childcare centres) to more informal arrangements (e.g. home-based care and community initiatives), and often involving oversight by multiple ministries and agencies.[1] In many countries it is also the education level where the private sector is a significant factor. This makes for a complex governance landscape, where regulation may be difficult to enforce, including in relation to the rights and working conditions of ECE teachers and personnel, and quality assurance difficult to ensure.

When the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015, governments agreed to ensure "that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education".[2] The target's emphasis on preparation for formal schooling confirms the trend towards a more education-oriented approach to the early years. This also obliges policymakers to meet the twofold aim of expanding access, on the one hand, and enhancing quality, on the other. However, this policy intention has not been accompanied by the necessary increase in funding and early childhood education remains an underfunded sector. In response to this, UNESCO has called on governments to allocate 10% of the education expenditure to pre-primary education.

Attracting and retaining ECE teachers and personnel

The early childhood sector is impacted heavily by the global shortage of teachers and professional education personnel; most European countries, for example, face significant staffing shortages.[3] In Ireland, 56 % of services reported having experienced recruitment challenges over the previous 12 months to mid-2023, while 31% of services reported having at least one staff vacancy in mid-2023. In France, 10,000 crèches professionals are currently missing, while in Germany, there is an estimated lack of up to 72,500 skilled ECE workers by 2025.[4]

In many cases, the shortages are even more severe in the context of policy aspirations such as lowering the teacher-student ratios (Austria would need an additional 7,200 staff by 2025 to maintain the current quality of provision but an

1 Byrne at al, Review of the ILO Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for ECE Personnel. Education International, 2024.

2 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goal 4, Target 4.2.). United Nations, 2015.

3 Staff shortages in early childhood education and care (ECEC). European Commission, 2023.

4 *Ibid.*

additional 9,900 staff to improve the quality), or enhancing the qualifications of the workforce.[5]

Staffing shortages can result from unmet increased demographic demands, but much of the current shortage is fuelled by the large number of personnel leaving the profession. Low pay, low recognition, and low job satisfaction are commonly cited factors behind this attrition. In early childhood education, salaries are comparatively lower than at other levels of education, while career pathways and opportunities for continuing training and professional development are few. High workload, including exhausting levels of emotional labour, coupled with the widespread deployment of untrained/unqualified staff on short-term contracts, make for an unsupportive work environment. Long-term staffing shortages are in themselves a contributing factor to workload pressures and stressful working conditions.

The 2023 International Barometer of the Health and Well-being of Education Personnel (I-BEST) confirmed that those working in early childhood education feel undervalued.[6] A significant number, varying from about a quarter to over half of the respondents across jurisdictions, also expressed that they would not choose their profession again. The majority of respondents have worked while sick; feel that their job is stressful from the beginning of the school year, and believe that the leadership in their workplaces is not concerned with the health and well-being of staff.[7]

Thompson points out in the 2021 Global Status of Teachers report, that status is a multifaceted concept, determined through a complex interplay between social values, government policy, material conditions, and individual perceptions. Disparities in perceptions of social relevance vary across education levels, with higher status generally accorded to those teaching in higher-education institutions and at the secondary level.[8]

In the case of early childhood education, there is a distinct gender dynamic too: across the globe, almost all early childhood educators are women. While this is often explained as a consequence of low wages and poor working conditions, the sector remains heavily feminised also in contexts where conditions are better – i.e. comparatively well-paid, secure employment, and a unionised workforce. This suggests that the key dynamic in play is that of gender norms, according to which women are seen as, and are expected to be, natural mothers and carers.[9] Early childhood education necessarily includes a number of tasks and responsibilities of a more care-related nature. The fact that such roles stereotypically have been assigned to women within the domestic sphere, shapes the social value and recognition of them in a professional context, including the extent to which professional qualifications are perceived to be necessary.[10] The structural discrimination which women face globally is therefore a key dimension of the issue of status in ECE (and indeed more broadly in education).

Efforts to raise the status of work in early childhood education need to include greater recognition of the pedagogical nature of the work and its requirements in terms of qualifications as well as professional agency.

5 Staff shortages in early childhood education and care (ECEC). European Commission, 2023.

6 Byrne at al, Review of the ILO Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for ECE Personnel. Education International, 2024.

7 Vitorovic, Early childhood educators: New data on the challenges they face raises the alarm about an education sector at risk. Worlds of Education, 2023.

8 Thompson, The Global Report on the Status of Teachers. Education International, 2021.

9 Byrne at al, Review of the ILO Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for ECE Personnel. Education International, 2024.

10 Mayol Lassalle and Urban, The 'sum total': Reimagining early childhood care and education through a gender perspective on the profession. Worlds of Education, 2024.

Moreover, such efforts have to address the low salary levels and generally poor conditions in the sector. As recommended by the United Nations High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, teachers should receive salaries and benefits at the same level as other professions with similar educational requirements. Gender pay equity should be ensured, and there should be commensurate fairness between salaries at different levels of education, including early childhood education and TVET (Recommendation 36).[11]

Social dialogue and collective bargaining are key mechanisms to ensure decent working conditions for ECE personnel and contribute to attracting and retaining professionals in the sector. In an internal survey conducted in 2023, EI examined the experiences of social dialogue and collective bargaining among member organisations representing ECE personnel. While the great majority of member organisations described social dialogue as more or less satisfactory, there were gaps in terms of the issues addressed through social dialogue. Fewer than half of member organisations had addressed issues related to attracting, recruiting, and retaining ECE professionals; continuous professional development and career pathways; professional standards; and health and safety. Alarmingly, 40 % of participants noted that collective bargaining does not take place for the ECE sector in their countries.

The ILO Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for Early Childhood Education Personnel were designed as a reference tool for governments seeking to expand and improve early childhood education.[12] Agreed in 2014, the guidelines cover conditions of work and employment, ECE financing, curricula and learning practices, social security, professional ethics, and ECE governance systems. Yet, their non-binding nature coupled with the fragmented ECE landscape in many countries have led to them having limited impact.[13]

Ensuring professional growth and development

The quality of a system is intrinsically linked with the quality of its workforce. Ensuring further and ongoing professionalisation of the workforce is critical to enhanced quality provision. For many systems, there is, thus, a twofold challenge of recruiting sufficient numbers of ECE personnel while also ensuring that they have the right training and qualifications. In some countries an age-based distinction is made between younger and older children in early childhood education, where higher qualifications are required for those working with the latter in pre-primary education, while lesser qualifications are required for those working with children under the age of 3 years.[14]

In the majority of systems, quality early childhood education depends on a team of professionals. This multiprofessional team includes teachers as well as other roles for which no teaching degree is required, such as social pedagogues, childcare assistants, and nurses. The teacher plays a crucial role in these teams, leading the pedagogical project, and as such, it is imperative to ensure specialised and age-appropriate teacher training as well as continuous professional development.[15] Early childhood education has typically had the lowest qualification requirements

11 United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession: Recommendations and summary of deliberations. ILO, UN and UNESCO, 2024.

12 ILO Policy Guidelines on the promotion of decent work for early childhood education personnel. ILO, 2013.

13 Byrne at al, Review of the ILO Policy Guidelines on the Promotion of Decent Work for ECE Personnel. Education International, 2024.

14 Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe 2025. Eurydice, 2025.

15 *Ibid.*

for teachers[16], but this is a fast-changing policy area, with a growing number of countries introducing a requirement of a Master's degree.[17] Some systems also have sector specific post graduate qualified staff to fulfil a leadership role.

Governments and teacher unions should discuss how reforms can be introduced in a way that is respectful of the workforce and accompanies teachers in their further development. Comparatively few teacher unions have experience of addressing issues related to attracting and recruiting ECE personnel, and ensuring continuous professional development, and career pathways through social dialogue, which suggests a gap as well as an opportunity to discuss challenges and collectively identify solutions.

Clearly, continuous professional development should be free and accessible during working hours for ECE teachers and personnel. It should respond to the needs identified by the profession and encourage teachers to deepen their pedagogical practice, including in relation to more recently introduced policy priorities, such as play-based learning, gender-transformative pedagogies, mother tongue instruction, and climate change education. Such modules should be designed specifically for early childhood education and aimed at supporting the age-appropriate introduction of these themes.

Other measures to support the pedagogical practice and leadership of ECE teachers include teacher collaboration, peer-to-peer learning, and mentoring programmes. Such initiatives are particularly important for early-stage teachers, who need dedicated and targeted support.

16 Thompson, The Global Report on the Status of Teachers. Education International, 2021.

17 Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe 2025. Eurydice, 2025.

Supporting pedagogical leadership in ECE

With rapidly changing and expanding expectations on the quality of early childhood education, there is also a new set of expectations on leadership in early childhood education. The 2024/25 Global Education Monitoring Report found that school leaders generally lack training and support, with almost half of principals in richer countries not receiving any training before appointment.[18]

There are specific leadership needs and challenges in early childhood education, where the pedagogical project has to be integrated with the broader aims of care and child development, and the team consists of a number of different professionals. Research shows that leaders with stronger pedagogical competences were associated with a range of positive outcomes for children, including related to learning, emotions, and social relationships.[19] However, TALIS data reveals that preschool leaders spend around 30% of their time on administrative tasks and in many contexts less time is spent on pedagogical leadership. There is evidence suggesting that training in pedagogical leadership results in more time being devoted to that side of the role.[20] The absence of formal training and requirements for ECE leaders contributes to the fragmentation of the sector and large variation in terms of how staff, workplaces and the pedagogical project are managed.[21]

Developing comprehensive policies that clearly define the roles and qualifications

18 Global education monitoring report 2024/5, Leadership in education: lead for learning. UNESCO, 2024.

19 Fonsén et al., Teachers' pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. Educational Research, 2022.

20 Building a High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce: Further Results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018. OECD, 2020.

21 Global education monitoring report 2024/5, Leadership in education: lead for learning. UNESCO, 2024.

of ECE leaders is essential for supporting pedagogical leadership and enhancing quality.[22] As discussed above, each multiprofessional ECE team must have at least one qualified teacher who is responsible for pedagogical leadership, models practice, and ensures systemic consistency.

Participants at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession may want to reflect on the following questions

The quality of staff in ECE is umbilically linked to the quality of experience provided. Systems deploy a range of staff across the sector: for example, qualified teachers, graduate pedagogues, development officers, and childcare assistants. In general, the better qualified staff are the better the chance of positive outcomes for children. But the challenges faced by the teaching profession in the school sector are replicated in ECE:

- *How do we address the perception of low status in ECE?*
- *How do we resolve poor salary structures currently lacking equity both within and external to educations systems?*
- *How do we improve poor working conditions?*
- *How do we provide good career pathways and professional development opportunities?*
- *How can the play-based nature of ECE be strengthened in a context where increasing emphasis is put on readiness for primary school?*

22 Global education monitoring report 2024/5, Leadership in education: lead for learning. UNESCO, 2024.

Theme 2 Supporting Educators to Foster Equity and Well-being: How well-established services enable educators to promote inclusive, supportive learning environments

Teacher well-being as a prerequisite for quality education

There is no student well-being without teacher and Education Support Personnel (ESP) well-being.[23]

Research increasingly demonstrates a positive correlation between teacher well-being and student academic achievement: teacher well-being correlates with improved teaching practices and enhanced student-teacher relationships and student experiences. Evidence also indicates a significant relationship between teacher well-being and students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.[24] Knowing that they can confidently make a positive difference to students' learning and social and emotional well-being contributes further to teachers' sense of well-being.[25]

Put simply, student achievement is dependent on teachers and ESP who are positive about themselves and their ability to teach and accompany students in their growth and development. While the virtuous cycle of being well and doing well may seem intuitive, teacher well-being is a relatively new policy priority. At the same time, it is challenging as a policy area as it includes and cuts across a number of distinct policy areas: employment status; remuneration and conditions of work; respect and social status; professional autonomy and agency; and occupational safety and health. As such, a policy commitment to enhancing teacher well-being requires a holistic approach. This is also reflected in Recommendation 38 of the United Nations High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession[26]:

> *Working conditions should promote teachers' mental health and holistic well-being. Educational jurisdictions, in collaboration with teachers and their organizations, should develop systemic teacher well-being policies that are reflected in teachers' conditions of service.*

This is an important policy statement and an invitation to unions and governments to prioritise teacher well-being, particularly as it relates to retention.

Key levers to improve teacher well-being

Despite the recognition that teachers are key actors in their students' learning and that teaching is one of the most stressful

23 Hargreaves and Shirley, Well-Being in Schools: Three Forces That Will Uplift Your Students in a Volatile World. ASCD, 2022.

24 Hattie, Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement. Routledge, 2008.
Jennings and Greenberg, The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes. SAGE, 2009.
McCallum et al, Teacher Well-being: A Review of the Literature. AISNSW, 2017.

25 Bangs and Frost, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Voice and Leadership: Towards a Policy Framework for Education International. Education International and University of Cambridge, 2012.
TALIS 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning. OECD, 2014.

26 United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession: Recommendations and summary of deliberations. From Education International website, 2024.

professions[27], there has been a lack of attention paid to teacher well-being and few government policies address well-being directly.[28] Most recently, the pandemic and its impact on working conditions and well-being helped elevate issues related to health and well-being of teachers on the policy agenda. It also helped illustrate the complexity of a teacher's work – intellectual, emotional, and administrative work – including the extent to which social issues related to poverty, inequality, and discrimination permeate the classroom and impact the teaching and learning process.[29]

Yet, the situation continues to be dire. The last edition of I-BEST, the International Barometer of the Health and Well-being of Education Personnel, revealed that the proportion of staff who feel that their day-to-day tasks have been restricted for health reasons in the last 6 months is significant across the jurisdictions included in the research, ranging from 30% in Japan to 76% in Morocco.[30] The reasons cited most often relate to mental health: severe fatigue, sleep problems, depression, psychological problems. It was reported that almost a third of sick leave was attributed to a psychological condition in Belgium (35%), Quebec (34%), and Canada (32%). At the same time, more than 95% of staff in Belgium and France deplored the low social status of the profession.

It is imperative to recognise that several factors shape understandings and experiences of well-being and that, as such, teacher well-being definitions can vary across contexts and for the experiences of different groups of teachers. Commonly, the core definition understands teachers' well-being as having four main dimensions: mental and physical well-being, cognitive well-being, subjective well-being, and social well-being.[31]

Teacher well-being can be enhanced or degraded by a variety of levers. These levers are interconnected; they overlap, influence, and interact with one another. Their level of influence is context dependent. What follows here is an overview and discussion of the key levers.

Workload: Teacher well-being is not only affected by the quantity of work and work intensification; it is also affected by the nature of teachers' work and working conditions. Excessive administrative demands, variable and inadequate professional development, being held responsible for student achievement, an expansion of the role, and keeping up with changing requirements are key triggers for poor teacher well-being.

An appropriate work-life balance is a major issue for the teaching profession globally. This requires urgent attention, including addressing inequities for different groups of teachers: for example, gender inequities in caring duties affect women's life and work.[32]

Safety and discrimination: The ability to fulfil one's basic needs is foundational to being able to meet psychological needs, especially in the workplace. Research indicates that violence directed at students, teachers, ESP, schools, and universities have increased globally since 2013.[33] According to recent research, the proportion of staff who have been the victim of violence at work in the last 12 months is alarming in many countries.[34]

27 Greenberg, Brown and Abenavoli, Teacher stress and health: Effects on teachers, students, and schools. The Pennsylvania State University, 2016.

28 Falk et al, Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource, Crisis, and Conflict-affected Settings. Education Equity Research Initiative, 2019.

29 Thompson, The Global Report on the Status of Teachers. Education International, 2021.

30 International Barometer of Education Staff. ESN, 2023.

31 Gibson and Caroll, Stress, Burnout, Anxiety and Depression: How they impact on the mental health and well-being of teachers and on learner outcomes. Education Support, 2021.

32 Teacher and Education Support Personnel Well-being - Vital for Education. Education International, 2024.

33 Falk et al, Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource, Crisis, and Conflict-affected Settings. Education Equity Research Initiative, 2019.

34 International Barometer of Education Staff. ESN, 2023.

Teachers from marginalised groups such as women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) people, Indigenous Peoples, language minorities, people with disabilities, and those living in marginalised contexts are often most impacted by structures of inequity and discrimination that impact well-being. Female teachers also face heightened risk to sexual and gender-based violence, and sexual harassment and abuse are critical barriers for female teachers to enter and stay in the profession.[35]

Teacher self-efficacy: Teacher well-being is associated with professional identity and self-efficacy: supporting teachers to be capable, competent, and experienced professionals is vital and includes strong curricular, pedagogical, and assessment knowledge. Research suggests that teachers with low levels of self-efficacy report higher levels of job stress.[36]

Research has suggested that there are positive associations between both self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and student achievement and that high levels of teacher self-efficacy are associated with student motivation and other positive teacher behaviours.[37]

Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction is the sense of fulfilment and gratification an individual receives from an occupation and is profoundly linked with a sense of self-efficacy.[38] Research suggests that teachers' job satisfaction is associated with their well-being, motivation, and commitment to teaching. Job satisfaction is also associated with the degree of autonomy teachers feel, which constitutes a fundamental psychological need that contributes to dignity and well-being. Job satisfaction is closely linked to both stress and burnout, and self-efficacy; teachers with higher levels of stress typically experience lower levels of job satisfaction, while teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to experience higher levels of job satisfaction.[39] Job dissatisfaction is one of the primary drivers of leaving the profession and sustained levels of dissatisfaction can lead to attrition. Job satisfaction is also associated with the quality of instruction and job performance, which has significant implications for student learning outcomes.[40]

Resources: A lack of resources or infrastructure is related to teacher stress and burnout, as well as a low sense of self-efficacy. Insufficient resources and infrastructure have also been linked to lower teacher motivation. The physical conditions of a learning environment have a direct impact on the quality of education, and on the well-being and health of students, teachers, and ESP.

Teacher leadership: The sense of having professional opinions respected and knowing that they can lead in their areas of expertise is integral to teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Distributed leadership, which provides the conditions for all teachers to show leadership in practice and policy, has become increasingly linked to sustained improvements in student outcomes and well-being.

Peer relationships: Teaching can be an isolating profession and building in opportunities for productive, positive peer collaboration can lead to increased feelings of self-efficacy and job satisfaction.[41]

35 Burns and Lawrie, Where It's Needed Most: Quality Professional Development for All Teachers. INEE, 2015.
Mendenhall, Gomez and Varni, Teaching amidst conflict and displacement: Persistent challenges and promising practices for refugee, internally displaced and national teachers. UNESCO, 2018.

36 Klassen and Chiu, Effects on Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction: Teacher Gender, Years of Experience, and Job Stress. Journal of Educational Psychology.

37 Schleicher, Schools for 21st Century Learners: Strong Leaders, Confident Teachers, Innovative Approaches. OECD, 2015.

38 Klassen and Chiu, Effects on Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction: Teacher Gender, Years of Experience, and Job Stress. Journal of Educational Psychology.

39 Greenberg, Brown and Abenavoli, Teacher stress and health: Effects on teachers, students, and schools. The Pennsylvania State University, 2016.

40 Klassen and Chiu, Effects on Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction: Teacher Gender, Years of Experience, and Job Stress. Journal of Educational Psychology.

41 Teacher Well-being Index. Education Support, 2023.
Falk et al, Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource,

Education is intrinsically relational, involving people and relationships. Promoting "intelligent professionalism" includes valuing and practicing an ethic of relationships and care between educational stakeholders with the potential to enhance teacher well-being.[42]

Respect and recognition: When teachers feel respected and recognised for their work, this can serve as a positive influence on dignity, professional identity, and motivation.[43] This can include respect from their students, their school leadership, the community, and larger society. However, feelings of being valued and respected appear to have worsened over time, including teachers and ESP perceptions about their status, salary, working conditions, and career prospects.[44]

Salaries: Issues of adequate funding and current experiences of budget cuts and austerity have a substantial negative impact for individual teacher and ESP well-being, the collective well-being of the profession, and the quality of education systems. While there are many factors affecting the status of the teaching profession and teacher well-being, the adequacy or not of pay is frequently identified as having major importance and impact.[45] While many countries are experiencing economic shifts, austerity, and financial crises, investment in teachers, including professional levels of pay, is imperative to ensure the continued development and betterment of society. Research indicates that the higher teachers' salaries are, the fewer people choose to leave the profession.[46]

Social protection: As a largely feminised profession in many contexts, inadequate policies surrounding maternity leave, childcare, and care have large impacts on teacher and ESP well-being.

While recognising that definitions and understandings of well-being vary across contexts, the reality and impact of deteriorating teacher well-being is currently being experienced as a global phenomenon.[47] In a context of global recruitment and retention challenges, increased attention to teacher well-being is urgently needed.

Resources for supporting equity, quality, and well-being, including opportunities and challenges in AI and digital technologies

The role of technology in education is increasing, yet the understanding of the impact it is having on the well-being of teachers is limited.[48] For many teachers, the COVID-19 pandemic was a time of increased workload and heightened levels of stress and exhaustion. The switch to online learning challenged work-life balance for many, as their homes suddenly became their classrooms, and students and families had unprecedented access to their teachers. The school closures also contributed to blurring the line between professional and private life, which may make it difficult to identify and isolate job-related stress. The introduction of teleworking and the combination of work and care responsibilities had a far-reaching impact on women teachers in terms of

Crisis, and Conflict-affected Settings. Education Equity Research Initiative, 2019.

42 Thompson, The Global Report on the Status of Teachers. Education International, 2021.

43 Falk et al, Landscape Review: Teacher Well-being in Low Resource, Crisis, and Conflict-affected Settings. Education Equity Research Initiative, 2019.

44 Singh, Teachers' working conditions in state and non-state school. UNESCO, 2021.

45 Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages; highlights. UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2023.

46 Well-being and the education of the whole child. EI and OECD, 2022.

47 Joshanloo et al, Four Fundamental Distinctions in Conceptions of Well-being Across Cultures. Palgrave Macmilan, 2021.
Viac and Fraser, Teacher Well-being: A Framework for Data Collection and Analysis. OECD, 2020.

48 Global education monitoring report, 2023: technology in education: a tool on whose terms? UNESCO, 2023.

stress, health related issues, and overall well-being.[49]

One category of digital technologies that may offer opportunities to further teacher well-being is those dedicated to peer learning and professional collaboration. Protecting and enhancing teachers' professional learning with their colleagues and enabling teachers to participate in activities which lead to the creation and transfer of professional knowledge is a critical dimension of teacher well-being. Digital technologies can facilitate access to courses and collaborative platforms where to interact with peers.

However, there is limited rigorous, independent research on the role and impact of AI in educational settings and on the equity and quality of education. This lack of evidence applies in particular to the impact of such tools on teachers and well-being.

Possible challenges related to the introduction and development of AI and digital technologies for teacher well-being may relate to areas such as:

- Workload: increased expectations on teachers to be always connected and responsive, deteriorated work-life balance;
- Technostress: constant exposure to screens, lack of human interactions, and lack of training to manage such tools;
- Professional autonomy/academic freedom being undermined by increasingly programmed study;
- Increased risk of online violence and harassment based on gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, cultural, and social identity;
- Surveillance and threats to data privacy and protection.

While not dismissing the potential positive impact of new tools, it is important to remember that few digital tools are designed by teachers, for teachers and with teachers. Teacher involvement and leadership is imperative in any consideration of digital tools for teacher well-being.

Participants at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession may want to reflect on the following questions:

- How can broader systemic issues, such as status and workload, be brought into conversations about teacher wellbeing? While education systems and schools are increasingly aware of concerns about teacher well-being, too often the supports that are available rely on the individual teacher seeking out guidance and proactively taking care of their own well-being. Such approaches place responsibility on teachers for systemic conditions over which they have little or no control.
- How can the research gaps on teacher well-being best be addressed, including teachers from marginalised and vulnerable populations? Given the paucity of research on teacher well-being, it is imperative to gather more empirical, longitudinal evidence to better understand teacher well-being and how best to support and sustain it. Without hearing from teachers directly, the research will never be able to provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher well-being.
- What could a commitment to teacher well-being look like? Few education systems have national-level policies or support structures to promote and support well-being in the profession, leaving it to unions and/or individual educators to address.

49 Vadkerti, Improving work-life balance: opportunities and risks coming from digitalization. European Union, 2019.


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Theme 3 Supporting Educators to Foster Equity and Well-being: How well-established services enable educators to promote inclusive, supportive learning environments

Fostering dialogue and participation

The right of children to form an opinion and express their views on all matters affecting them was universally recognised through the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The right to participate starts at birth, as does the right to education, and in line with the evolving capacities of students, education systems should offer students opportunities to play an increasingly informed and active role at school.[50] While it may have been controversial at the time, attitudes and values have changed significantly since, and today there is a broad consensus on the right of students to have a say in their classroom and school community. Most education systems have developed measures to promote and ensure student participation. Oftentimes, such measures include learning about your rights as a prerequisite for exercising them, electing representatives to a student council, and a range of participatory approaches in the classroom.

In the European region, the Council of Europe has paved the way for a more ambitious approach, notably through the adoption of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education in 2010.[51] In paragraph 8 on democratic governance, the Charter sets out that:

"Member states should promote democratic governance in all educational institutions both as a desirable and beneficial method of governance in its own right and as a practical means of learning and experiencing democracy and respect for human rights. They should encourage and facilitate, by appropriate means, the active participation of learners, educational staff and stakeholders, including parents, in the governance of educational institutions."

In many countries, school student councils are compulsory at all levels of education. While such representative bodies are important, both as a lesson in citizenship and as an arena for practicing participation, the whole system needs to embrace and model empowerment. The aim is to instil in students a sense that their experiences and opinions matter, and of agency and ownership, confidence and collaboration. This is intrinsically linked to the overall school culture and approach to governance and decision-making.

It is hard for teachers, however, to enable for students what is denied to them. To empower students, teachers themselves need to be genuinely empowered and not subject to oppressive top-down management structures. Democratic governance is about encouraging and facilitating the active participation of the whole school community, and a central element in this regard would be the possibilities for teachers to influence their work and conditions at school, and education policy in the broader context. By building structures for dialogue

50 Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations, 1989.

51 Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Council of Europe, 2010.

and collaboration at all levels and between all actors in school, a culture of communication and mutual respect can be fostered. School leaders play a key role here and must receive the support and specific training which their demanding role requires. Leadership should be founded on the principles of collegiality, teamwork, democratic decision-making processes and recognise the importance of dialogue and cooperation.

The right to participate extends to the classroom too. Student-centred approaches to teaching and learning have become the norm, with students gradually taking more responsibility for their learning process as they progress through the education system. While such an approach fosters ownership and is an important part of *learning to learn*, it is not necessarily encouraging participation beyond the individual learning process.

On the contrary, there may be a tension between an emphasis on more effective teaching and learning which seeks to nurture broader student competences and articulated targets measured by a capacity to deliver on a narrow set of standardised learning outcomes. A prescriptive curriculum, particularly if coupled with standardised tests, reduces the professional autonomy and agency of teachers, but also limits the extent to which the individual and collective needs of the classroom shape the learning process and its destination. In a context of standardisation and detailed learning objectives, there is little room for fostering curiosity and the free pursuit of knowledge, which are also elements of learning to learn.

Another central element of a democratic school is of course cultivating critical thinking. There is no doubt about the role of education developing the competences needed for analysing information and engaging critically with the world. As students grow up in ever-more complex information societies, it is imperative to equip them with the necessary tools to examine and interrogate sources of information and misinformation, intended messages and audiences, and power structures at play. This is a precondition for their active citizenship, but it may also be at odds with a wish to keep classrooms free from issues deemed political in nature. This raises a question about the extent to which the teaching profession enjoys the trust of governments to teach with autonomy and exercise their professional judgment.

For teaching and learning practices to foster and promote democratic and human rights values and principles, a culture of democracy must take root in the classroom from an early age, and it must be reflected in curricula, pedagogy and assessment. It fosters active engagement from all actors in the school. It supports teacher collaboration, peer learning and professional development, and encourages teachers to reflect on their pedagogical practice as well as policy and practice at school- and system-level.

Ensuring professional autonomy and agency

Professional autonomy and agency is a cornerstone of quality education as well as the status of the teaching profession, recognised by the 1966 Recommendation concerning the Status of the Teaching Profession.[52] It is also a prerequisite for fostering participation, critical reflection, and active engagement.

The 2021 Global Report on the Status of Teachers showed that whilst teachers are perceived to be able to exercise reasonable levels of professional judgement in classroom activities, only 16,5 % of respondents strongly agreed that

52 The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. International Labour Organisation, 1966.

they have autonomy over how they teach.[53] The 2024 edition of the report showed that comparatively few governments engaged with unions on issues related to professional autonomy.[54]

Unions have cautioned against a 'prescribed professionalism', where standardisation and externally imposed accountability interferes with and compromises the professional autonomy and agency of the profession.[55] As such, teacher voice in developing, implementing, and maintaining professional standards is key. When done right, standards support the pedagogical practice and professional growth and development of the profession.

However, the autonomy enjoyed by the profession is also impacted by the political environment in which education takes place. The Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations on the Teaching Profession cautions that "in some countries there appear to be tangible threats to academic freedom, with attempts to limit teachers' voices and autonomy in their teaching".[56] A recent study in the US revealed that compared with six or seven years ago, more than one in three higher education faculty feel more constrained in their ability to speak freely, whether that is in the context of teaching course content, participating in institutional governance, or as a citizen.[57]

The ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts concluded that:

> *"There are suggestions that leadership should become much more distributed and focus on fostering collaboration and quality teaching as well as innovation. Autonomy may need to emphasize self-regulation and the freedom to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances. Academic freedom appears to remain essential for fostering a vibrant intellectual environment where knowledge can be generated, critically analysed, and disseminated. As educational leadership evolves, preserving autonomy and academic freedom may be vital for nurturing collaboration, enhancing teaching quality and driving innovation."*[58]

Similarly, a recently adopted UNESCO Recommendation on Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms asserts that:

> *42.b Ensuring freedom of expression and opinion, as well as access to information, guaranteeing teachers', researchers' and education personnel's academic and intellectual freedom and respecting their autonomy and professionalism in teaching and research, especially for higher education institutions (HEI). To do so, appropriate institutional mechanisms, structures and governance should be put in place, as well as inclusive and equal opportunities for continuing professional development serving these purposes.*[59]

To what extent do these mechanisms and structures exist and function in your jurisdiction? It is no coincidence that this is stated in a recommendation on

53 Thompson, The Global Report on the Status of Teachers. Education International, 2021.

54 Arnold and Rahimi, The Global Status of Teachers 2024. Education International, 2025.

55 Evers, The Professional Standards Conundrum. Education International, 2018.

56 Report of the Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (Final Report: Fifteenth Session). International Labour Organisation, 2024.

57 Finley and Tiede, Academic Freedom and Civil Discourse in Higher Education: A National Study of Faculty Attitudes and Perception. American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2025.

58 Report of the Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (Final Report: Fifteenth Session). International Labour Organisation, 2024.

59 Draft revised 1974 Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. UNESCO, 2023.

Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which necessarily has to touch upon controversial issues in different jurisdictions.

One such area of potential controversy is that of quality climate change education, an arena for agency, responsibility, and critical thinking.

The extent to which education systems are able to address the climate crisis in curricula, teacher training, and teaching and learning materials varies across contexts. Education International has advocated for universal quality climate change education, arguing that students have a right to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to sustain our world for present and future generations, and they have the right to receive an education which prepares them for the world of work in a green economy.[60]

Exactly because it is deemed a controversial issue in some jurisdictions, climate change education is a good example of the tensions characterising many education systems today. While climate change education must be based on science, it also has to include the ethical, cultural, political, social, and economic dimensions of the climate crisis. It must not shy away from addressing the unequal contribution of countries towards causing climate change and the unequal impact of climate change today, recognising that the current system is inequitable, levels of production and consumption are unsustainable, and vulnerable populations and groups are most directly affected.

As such, quality climate change education is an opportunity for fostering critical thinking and civic engagement; it can be transformative and empower students to consider just and sustainable alternatives and then take action in their local communities and beyond.

However, teachers currently want to but do not feel supported to teach about the climate crisis.[61] In addition to including quality climate change education in the curricula, it is, thus, necessary to ensure that teacher training institutions have the funding and resources necessary to deliver quality initial teacher education; that climate change education is included in continuous professional development programmes and responds to development needs identified by teachers; and the provision of relevant and adequate teaching and learning resources. Moreover, it requires that the professional autonomy and academic freedom of teachers and further and higher education personnel are protected and guaranteed.

Participants at the International Summit on the Teaching Profession may want to reflect on the following questions:

- To what extent does your system embrace and model empowerment?
- Are schools in your system democratic schools?
- Does your system recognise and prize the key interpersonal dynamic between teacher and student?
- Do your students enjoy a broad curricular entitlement which values and validates “non-academic” achievement?
- Are there measures in place to address the impact of poverty on participation and also other structural barriers?

60 Manifesto on Quality Climate Change Education for All. Education International, 2021.

61 Teachers have their say: Motivation, skills and opportunities to teach education for sustainable development and global citizenship. EI and UNESCO, 2021.

Conclusion

The unique nature of the ISTP to provide a safe space for Ministers and Trade Unions leaders to explore together some of the challenges facing education systems today is an opportunity to be fully grasped by all participants. There may not always be agreement but as a prime example of robust social dialogue, it behoves us all to commit to the process with openness and good faith.

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