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ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education
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ETUCE Activity Report on

Higher education and research

To BFUG Plenary meeting on 19-20 February 2024, under the Belgian Presidency

The following report is a summary of ETUCE¹ activities on higher education and research between September 2023 and February 2024.

Higher education and research staff are concerned about the Attractiveness of the Academic Profession

Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) is a permanent body of ETUCE representing 45 education trade unions whose membership covers higher education and research staff. HERSC meets twice a year and discusses education trade unions' reactions to higher education and research policies in Europe.

On 20-21 September 2023, the Standing Committee met to discuss the following issues:

- The members adopted a Call to the ministers of the Bologna Process ahead of the Tirana Ministerial Conference. The Call was presented to the BFUG Plenary in November 2023: [12.8 Education International](#)
- Precarious contracts, lack of support for young academics, and declining salaries were identified as concerns affecting the attractiveness of academic professions in higher education and research.
- [ETUCE's Campaign on the attractiveness of the teaching profession](#) and events planned for the [European Week of Teachers](#) aimed to address these issues were presented.

¹ The *European Trade Union Committee for Education* (ETUCE) is a recognised European social partner for education and represents 11 million teachers and educators affiliated to 131 education trade unions across 49 European countries. It was established in 1975 and, since 2010, has been the *Regional European Structure of Education International* (EI). It is also a European Trade Union Federation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). ETUCE is composed of national trade unions of teachers and other staff at all levels of general education, including higher education and research.

- Education trade unions at the national level were reported to be actively involved in activities to raise the status of teaching and research careers. Efforts to tackle teacher shortages and job precarity were emphasised, with a recognition of the importance of effective social dialogue with education trade unions.
- The new president of EQAR Stéphane Lauwick and director Magalie Soenen discussed the future of quality assurance in higher education and the role of academics in quality assurance.
- The impact of digitalization, artificial intelligence, and ChatGPT in institutional management, higher education, and research was discussed. Concerns included increased workloads and stress for teachers and researchers, protecting intellectual property rights, potential discrimination in data-driven student enrolment processes, and the need for a human element in education. HERSC members stressed the importance of policy decisions to create regulatory frameworks aligning AI development with fundamental educational values, protecting academic freedom, and safeguarding workers' rights.
- EU and international policy developments in higher education and research, including mutual recognition in education and training, academic freedom, and the European Career Framework for higher education. The need for strong social dialogue, increased funding, and the exchange of good practices to enhance the attractiveness of teaching and research professions and address teacher shortages was highlighted.

More information: [here](#)



Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) will meet also on 27 – 28 February 2024, to discuss the following issues:

- International policy developments on higher education and research, with a focus on global educational initiatives;
- Analysis of EU policy developments, including discussions on the priorities of the Belgian Presidency and insights into the European Commission's work program for 2024, including the European Commission initiative of joint European degrees, accompanied by Council Recommendations on sustainable careers and on a European quality assurance and recognition system
- Discussions on trade unions' demands and strategies ahead of the Tirana Ministerial Conference;
- Dialogues on strategies for organizing trade union members and supporting early career staff in higher education and research sectors.

Social dialogue in the Higher Education Sector

In order to cope with challenges of the future, strong social dialogue in higher education institutes is key. In relation to the new [Social Dialogue Work Programme 2024-2026](#) the partners of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education met for the Working Group on Higher Education and Research, on 26 September to discuss crucial developments in the field. Two significant topics took centre stage: the development of the OiRA ([Online Interactive Risk Assessment](#)) tool for Higher Education, jointly developed by ETUCE and EFEE with the European Commission's agency EU-OSHA, and the importance of enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

The meeting underscored the dedication of European educational social partners to enhancing safety, attractiveness, and innovation in higher education and research.

Additionally, in the Social Dialogue Plenary meeting in December 2023, discussions focused on addressing the shortage crisis in the teaching profession. ETUCE and EFEE's joint project led to the drafting of a [Framework of Action on the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession](#), emphasizing areas such as enhancing social dialogue, improving working conditions, and promoting professional development.

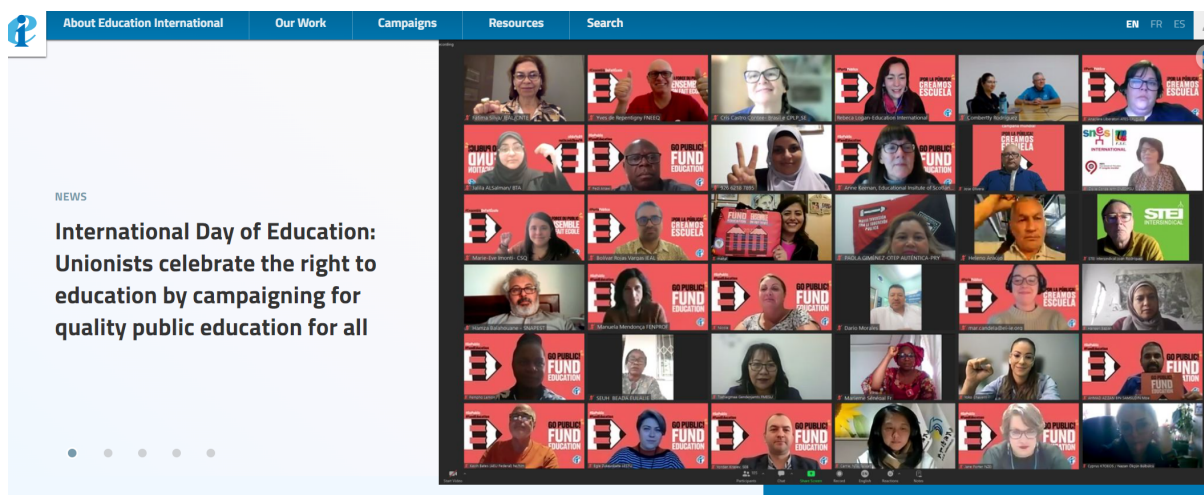
Expert conference on AI at work in the higher education and research sector

The joint ETUCE and ETUI (European Trade Union Institute, an independent research and training institution affiliated with the European Trade Union Confederation – ETUC) expert conference on AI at work, scheduled for 28-29 February 2024 in Brussels, will address the impact of AI on higher education and research and aims to develop trade unions' strategy on this topic. The conference is open for ETUCE member organizations in higher education and research sectors.

Key topics of discussion include:

- The didactic transposition of ChatGPT. The work that lies behind AI;
- Exploring the impacts of AI on working conditions in higher education and research sector;
- Exploring the boundaries between AI Human rights and AI Ethics
 - Behind the algorithms: The implications in higher education
 - What kind of learning is machine learning?
 - Concrete applications of AI in formal Higher Education
 - Datafication of education and performance management of academic staff;
- Opportunities and challenges of AI – what impacts for academics and researcher?
- Generative AI and intellectual property rights of academics;
- The impacts of metaverse and virtual worlds.

The expected outcomes of the Conference include an enhanced understanding of the deployment of AI systems in higher education; the identification of actionable points for collective bargaining and policy recommendations; a contribution to the academic discussion on AI in education.



12th International Further and Higher Education and Research Conference

ETUCE is the European Region of Education International. The 12th International Further and Higher Education and Research Conference, co-hosted by Education International and its member organisation Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE), is taking place in Mexico City from October 24 to the 26 2023. The event was organised to bring together education trade unions of the higher education and research sector under the framework of the EI [Go Public! Fund Education](#) campaign.

More information here: [Go Public! Leading further and higher education and research for the common good \(ei-ie.org\)](#)

ELNE: a new consortium on School Leadership

The European Leadership Network Europe (ELNE) is a Europe-wide network of several organisations (policymakers, practitioners, researchers and stakeholders) to collect good examples and research on school leadership to inform policymaking at both European and national levels, promote co-operation, policy development and implementation at different governance levels, and support the European Commission’s policy work on teachers and school leaders.

This network builds on existing activities developed at European level, especially initiatives and projects supported through European Union programmes in the field of education. The coordinator of the 4-year project, that started with [the Network’s kick-off meeting in Brussels on 6-7 September 2023](#), is the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE), with ETUCE as one of the key leaders alongside the European School Heads Association (ESHA), the European Parents’ Association (EPA), the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU).

Over the next four years, ELNE will bring together a network of 100 partners encompassing employers, education trade unions, schools, ministries of education, local governments, VET networks, school networks, universities, and research institutes. 18 ETUCE member organisations are also members of the consortium. The first year of the project will focus on learning communities and collaborative school and education leadership within research calls, a collection of good practices, a webinar week and a conference.

The upcoming events of the project are:

- The 1st [ELNE European Educational Leadership Week \(EELW\)](#) on 12 - 16 February 2024 (open to the public). Notably, a webinar organised by ETUCE on **Higher education: Collaborative governance in higher education institutions for quality learning and teaching will take place on 12 February 2024 15.15-16.30 (CET)** More information: [here](#)
 - 1st Conference on 23 April 2024 (for partners only);
 - A journal collecting research and good practices, EduJournal (first edition in January 2025)
- ELNE Network website: <http://www.elnenetwork.org/>



More information:

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