



Education International
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ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education
Education International - European Region

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Blueprint for improving the functioning of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue of Education

Adopted by the ETUCE Bureau on 16 June 2025

Background

Meetings

The Committee of European Sectoral Social Dialogue of Education (ESSDE) meets three times a year in 2 Working Group (WG) meetings and one Plenary meeting, plus an optional Steering Group meeting in a reduced format (Secretariat and political chairs only) around January/February that is self-organised by social partners.

Every year, the first WG meeting is traditionally devoted to general education matters, while the second WG meeting focuses on Higher Education (HE). The Plenary deals with topics related to both areas.

In fact, the difference between WG and plenary meetings is merely of a logistic nature: plenary meetings count on a higher number of reimbursements for participants and more languages for interpretation funded by the Commission.

Reimbursements

In 2025¹, the Commission agreed to organise two in-person meetings and one hybrid meeting: this setting should apply also for the next years. The number of reimbursements has not been officially communicated. However, during a Liaison Forum, Commission officials stated that there will be no ceiling for reimbursements to cover at least one representative per side (employers/unions) and Member State, possibly one per national organisation (i.e. one representative for each trade union).

¹ The Commission has taken a new approach to financial support of social dialogue meetings in 2025, following the demands from European social partners. Instead, in 2024 the Commission attributed to the ESSDE Committee a total number of reimbursements for the whole year (79) to be allocated as social partners preferred. This figure was considerably lower than the average of reimbursements received during the pre-pandemic years (100+/y).

Chairing

Based on an informal practice, to date, the ETUCE President chairs the trade union delegation at the WG Education and Plenary meetings, while this role is taken by the HERSC Chair at the WG Higher Education.

Delegates

The ETUCE Delegates are nominated by its member organisations. Delegates come from the 27 EU Member States and exceptionally from candidate and EEA (European Economic Area) countries, but these latter cannot claim reimbursements from the European Commission.

As a general rule, until 2024 each country used to have only one seat. Trade unions decided to indicate a different delegate depending on whether the WG meeting covered general education or higher education issues, while the plenary meetings were attended by just one of them. So, in total, each country had one seat and it was represented by either one or two delegates. As of 2025, this situation is open to change given the new approach of the Commission to the reimbursement of participants.

Composition of the delegation

In 2025, there exist 80 trade unions part of ETUCE representing EU Member States plus candidate and EEA countries. The current ETUCE delegation is composed by representatives coming from 33 trade unions. Out of the 80 organisations, 44 trade unions represent higher education and 23 of them are active in the ESSDE Committee, while only 8 trade unions represent exclusively higher education and 3 of them actively participate in the social dialogue Committee.

Criticalities

Over time this current setting has displayed several flaws, particularly when it comes to ensuring the continuity of the action, strategic planning for the trade union delegation, and engagement with the employer counterpart:

- a. Having different ESSDE delegates involved in activities on education and HE makes it **difficult to coordinate the two sub-delegations**, which mostly overlap anyway;
- b. Holding one thematic WG every year (education and HE) **delays considerably every political process**, as decisions and discussions can only be followed up at the meeting the following year, therefore often favoring the employers' stall tactics;
- c. The plenary meeting has assumed over the years a **very formalistic function**, being considered as the meeting where the most official debates can take place, and as the only forum where joint documents can be adopted, thus further slowing down decisional processes – to be noted that it is nowhere stated that this should be the role of the annual plenaries;
- d. Attributing to two different representatives the function of Chair of the WG Education and Plenary and Chair of the WG HE contributes to **a certain lack of coordination** among the ESSDE Delegation;
- f. The habit of holding one-hour preparatory meetings right before the social dialogue sessions (this had been the case until spring 2024) has lowered the level of contribution and engagement by delegates, who often do not have the **proper time to be briefed and prepare** for the social dialogue meetings with the employers' representatives;

- g. The current variety of actors involved in the preparation of ESSDE activities, including the role played in the past by the European Director, makes it difficult for the ETUCE Secretariat to **coordinate the delegation** and establish an essential channels of communication and negotiation with the employer organisation (EFEE), which is key to the well-functioning of the social dialogue Committee;
- h. The so-called Steering Group meeting does not respond to any practical need of preparing the work for the year ahead: it rather is a quite **ceremonious forum** where decisions discussed elsewhere are simply ratified, but often disrespected afterwards, as this Group has no actual steering power.

Proposals

The ETUCE Bureau gives mandate to the Secretariat to implement these measures aiming to improve the functioning of the ESSDE Committee and the effectiveness of its outcomes:

1. Merging the two groups of delegates on general education and higher education into one single delegation.

This formally is already the case, but the actual application of this concept ensures better coordination and cooperation of the ETUCE action. All trade unions from EU Member States, plus candidate and EEA countries, can nominate one delegate each. Then, in countries with more than one union, member organisations can choose whether appointing one single representative, having a rotating delegation, or attending ESSDE meetings with one delegate per each union. Only representatives from EU Member States can apply for reimbursement from the European Commission.

2. Devoting the two working groups to both education and higher education.

This is to ensure for both levels of education more frequent meetings and regular follow-up during the year, which will lead to faster advancement of the ESSDE activities. The objective is to obtain more flexibility in the way matters related to different levels of education are dealt with in the ESSDE, and easier liaising with ETUCE bodies and groups.

3. Recognising the representativeness of the whole ETUCE delegation.

This implies that every setting of the ETUCE delegation, WG and Plenary, is entitled to represent the whole delegation of trade unions. In so doing, each of the three yearly ESSDE meetings can officially adopt joint texts, thus not having to wait for the yearly plenary meeting or the next thematic WG the following year. The continuity of the work of the ESSDE Committee and the validation of decisions by all unions part of the ESSDE delegation is ensured by the Secretariat during the preparatory phase.

4. Making the plenary meetings more operational.

In fact, plenaries should function like working group meetings, with the mere difference of having a higher number of participants and available reimbursements, and languages for interpretation.

5. Appointing one single Chair for the whole trade union delegation to the ESSDE Committee.

This ensures better engagement and accountability of the Chair in the preparatory and follow up phases, and more coordination with the Secretariat. The Chair could be ETUCE President, so to guarantee optimal political coordination of the ETUCE delegation. Liaising with the HERSC chair is assured by the ETUCE Secretariat, and it allows better alignment of the ESSDE and HERSC workflow all-year long.

6. Forming a “duo” in charge of managing the ESSDE Delegates and ESSDE Committee.

This duo is composed of the politically nominated Chair and the Policy Coordinator for social dialogue within the Secretariat, who reports to the European Director. As a result, ETUCE ensures more agile and reactive management of the ESSDE activities, by being better placed to prepare meetings and negotiate with the European employers.

7. Organising ad-hoc preparatory meetings, either online or in person.

These meetings last up to four hours, so to ensure proper preparation and coordination between the Secretariat and the delegates. The preparatory meetings are organised in Brussels the day right before the ESSDE Committee session in the case of in-person meetings, or set up online in the days or weeks ahead of an hybrid ESSDE meeting.

8. Replacing the Steering Group meetings with continuous coordination.

This implies continuous exchange and cooperation between ETUCE and EFEE Secretariats, and reporting to the political leaderships in charge of social dialogue.

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Annex 1

Source: Eurofound (2020), *Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Education sector*, Sectoral social dialogue series, Dublin

Table 6: Sector coverage of the 202 education sector trade unions, 2018

	ESSDE Delegates
	Trade Union in Higher Education
	Trade Union <u>only</u> in Higher Education

Country	Trade union	85.1 Pre- primary education	85.2 Primary education	85.3 Secondary education	85.4 Higher education	85.5 Other education	85.6 Educational support	ESS DE
AT	GÖD	Y	Y	Y	Y			
BE	CGSP Enseignement/A COD-Onderwijs			Y				
	ACV-COC	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	ACV-COV	Y	Y				Y	
	CSC Enseignement/A CV - Onderwijs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	CSC-Services Publics/ACV Open bare Diensten							
	SLFP Enseignement/V SO A-Onderwijs							
BG	SEB	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
CY	OELMEK			Y				
	OLTEK			Y				

	POED	Y	Y					
CZ	ČMOS PŠ	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
DE	GEW	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	VBE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
DK	BUPL	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	DLF		Y		Y		Y	
	DM			Y	Y		Y	
	GL							
	UED							
EE	EEPU	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
	Universitas				Y	Y	Y	
EL	DOE	Y	Y					
	OIELE	Y	Y	Y		Y		
	OLME			Y				
ES	COG-ENSINO							
	CSIF	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	ELA-GIZALAN							
	FECCOO	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	FeSP-UGT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	FE-USO	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	STES-Intersindical	Y	Y	Y	Y			
FI	FUUP				Y			
	FUURT				Y			
	OAJ	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
FR	FEP-CFDT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	FERC-CGT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	FNEC.FP-FO	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	FNEC.FP-FO	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		

	SNCS-FSU	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	SNES-FSU	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	SNESUP-FSU	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	SNUipp-FSU	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
	UNSA-Education	Y	Y	Y	Y			
	SNETAA-FO					Y		
HR	TUWPSEC	Y						
	CTU		Y					
	IURHEEC	Y						
	ITUWEC				Y			
HU	FDSZ		Y	Y	Y			
	KPSZ-KPT		Y	Y	Y			
	PDSZ	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	
	SEH	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
IE	ASTI			Y				
	IFUT				Y			
	INTO		Y					
	TUI			Y	Y			
IT	CISL-Scuola		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	FLC CGIL		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	UIL Scuola	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
LT	LEETU	Y	Y	Y				
	LESTU	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
LU	CGFP/SNE	Y	Y					
	OGB-L/SEW	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
LV	LIZDA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		
MT	MUT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
NL	AOb	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	

PL	KSN NSZZ Solidarność				Y			
	SKOIW Solidarność	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	ZNP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
PT	FNE	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	SINDEP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	FENPROF	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
RO	FNS 'Alma Mater'				Y		Y	
	FSI 'Spiru Haret'	Y	Y	Y				
	FSLI	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
SE	Läraryförbundet	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
	LR		Y	Y	Y	Y		
	SULF				Y			
SI	ESTUS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
SK	OZP	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	