



**Updated ETUCE Action Plan  
on teachers' work-related stress**



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## **Updated ETUCE action plan on teachers' work-related stress**

This action plan was originally an outcome of the first ETUCE project on teachers' work-related stress (2007). After the implementation of the second ETUCE project on teachers' work-related stress (2009) the action plan has been updated with some minor changes, drawing on the knowledge gained in this second project.

ETUCE believes a school should be a safe, healthy and propitious place for teaching and learning. Schools are the workplace of teachers, but first and foremost they are educational institutions for young students. Stress can thus be harmful not only for the workforce (teachers and other staff in education), but can indirectly harm the pupils and put at risk the quality and efficiency of the education provided.

The challenge of preventing and tackling work-related stress is consequently an issue for employers in education. There is furthermore a legal obligation for employers, under the European and national laws, to take action on stress, and in particular the necessary steps for a suitable risk assessment at the workplace. This risk assessment is the most appropriate process for managing work-related stress, aiming at identifying the hazards at the workplace of all school staff and consequently taking the appropriate actions to prevent, reduce and eliminate stress amongst teachers.

Within its projects on teachers' work-related stress, ETUCE has carried out several studies to gather information on how teacher trade unions in Europe deal with this issue. The first ETUCE survey showed that 14 out of the 27 (EU and EFTA) countries that answered the survey questionnaire have a specific risk assessment system on work-related stress, while only around 25 % of the same countries have implemented it at school level. Another ETUCE survey, focussing on collection of good practices of risk assessment including work-related stress at school level, equally showed that risk assessment in schools and particularly the inclusion of psychosocial hazards is only at its beginning.

The first ETUCE survey established that the most important stressors for teachers are related to the organisation of the work and to the working conditions and working environment at school. Stress is a symptom of organisational problems and not a separate workers' weakness. It finds its roots in the way teaching and the school as a whole are organised. Physical aspects of the school environment, such as noise and poor ventilation, can also cause stress and should not be neglected.

It is also important to underline the relevance of implementing the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on work-related stress at national level. National trade unions should use all the existing policy and legal documents on the issue to convince employers about the action needed in that field and to draw the attention of the public to this issue. Although almost 70% of the 27 countries which participated in the first ETUCE survey are aware of the



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existence of the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on work-related stress, only around 40% of them have taken steps to implement it at national level.

When it comes to influencing employers and legislators to act on work-related stress, teacher unions face different challenges. A third ETUCE survey has shown that in some, mostly the Nordic, countries the main challenge identified by teacher trade unions is to apply and implement existing legislation in practice. In other countries psychosocial risks and hazards are not even recognized, and are not integrated in national health and safety legislation. The national situations of teacher unions differ, and appropriate national actions will therefore also differ.

Teacher unions are increasingly active in preventative measures concerning work-related stress. According to the third ETUCE survey 61% replied that their union organised training on work-related stress for Health & Safety representatives. Meanwhile teacher unions also have limited human resources dealing with health and safety issues. In the same survey 57% replied that their union has only one person dealing with health and safety issues, and 13% remain without anyone in their union responsible for the area. Consequently the need for further progress on the issue of work-related stress remains. ETUCE supports its member organisations to continue the work achieved so far.

As the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on work-related stress has an intersectoral approach, a preliminary sector-wise interpretation is needed regarding the education sector and its specific features. As part of its first project, ETUCE has produced an interpretation guide from a teachers' perspective, and continues to promote it as a useful tool for teacher trade unions when implementing it at national, regional and local levels.

As regards the above-mentioned elements, the results of the ETUCE studies on teachers' work-related stress and the ETUCE interpretation guide of the European social partners Framework Agreement on work-related stress, three main levels for specific actions have been identified:

1. European level
2. National teacher trade unions level
3. School level

**At European level, ETUCE commits itself to:**

- Continue supporting the implementation of the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on work-related stress at national and trade union levels;
- Support the exchange of national good practices from the implementation of the Framework Agreement in the education sector and to disseminate these amongst its member organisations;



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- Report to ETUC on how the national implementation of the Framework Agreement is carried out, according to the information sent by its member organisations;
- Monitor and influence the EU decision-making processes, particularly the European Commission's Strategy on Health and Safety at Work (5-year strategic guidelines documents) and related policies and legislative measures, so as to give greater prominence to work-related stress in the European agenda;
- Continue lobbying the EU Commission's DG EAC and the Education Council to deal with teachers' Health and Safety issues within the "Education and Training 2020" Process;
- Maintain the discussion on the issue of work-related stress for teachers within the ETUCE Working Conditions and Health & Safety Network;
- Seek funds for a large-scale study on the causes for stress amongst teachers in the EU and EFTA countries in cooperation with the employers in education, taking into account the gender perspective;
- Negotiate specific and joint guidelines with employers in education at European level on how to implement the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement.

### **At national teacher trade union level**

#### **➤ ETUCE commits itself to:**

- Retain the acquired knowledge and experiences from its teachers' work-related stress projects by continuing to gather national good practices and by updating and disseminating the interpretation guide to the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on work-related stress;
- Support its member organisations in their efforts to improve national policies and national legislations on occupational health and safety and particularly on stress at work;
- Support its member organisations in developing national trade union strategies and on how to ensure a good working environment and well-being at school for teachers and pupils.

#### **➤ ETUCE advises national trade unions to:**

- Continue informing and raising awareness about teachers' work-related stress risks, especially about the implications of the failure to act, and to lobby national governments, local authorities and other employers in education on the need for action to tackle stress at work;
- Concentrate on the proper implementation of the Framework Directive 89/391/EC and in particular the national legislation transposing this Directive;
- Negotiate specific and joint guidelines with employers in education at national level on how to implement the European Social Partners' Framework Agreement;
- Work on the adoption of specific collective agreements in countries where the national



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collective bargaining model allows, or to work on the inclusion of the issue of work-related stress in general collective agreements when the latter ones are renewed;

- Provide advice and guidance on efficient measures and tools - for school management and school staff - on how to tackle and prevent work-related stress, by giving priority to examples of measures taking part of the risk assessment process;
- Disseminate this guidance to their regional, local and if possible school trade union structures;
- Promote training measures for teachers, Health & Safety Committees, and head teachers on how to prevent and tackle work-related stress.
- Work on the inclusion of work-related stress in the context of teachers' continuous professional education
- Provide legal advice for the implementation of risk assessment in schools.

**At school level, ETUCE advises national trade unions to:**

- Concentrate efforts on incentive measures to promote the implementation of risk assessment in schools;
- Emphasise the importance of involving school management in the process of tackling work-related stress for teachers, always in consultation with the workforce;
- Promote the balance model - balance between demands and resources for teachers in schools - amongst school leadership and workers;
- Promote the use of work-oriented preventive measures when dealing with stress, or to combine work- and worker-oriented measures in schools;
- Promote the use of external expertise, e.g. trainings, mediations, surveys, psychologists, when needed.

