

Psychosocial risks in education: understanding work-related factors affecting teachers' well-being

Report

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List of Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
CCNL	National Collective Labour Agreement (Italy)
COPSOQ III	Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (third version)
DANES	Danish National Working Environment Survey
EFEE	European Federation of Education Employers
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ESENER	European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks
ESEP	European School Education Platform
ESJS2	Second (wave) European skills and jobs survey
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education
EU	European Union
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
EWCS	European Working Conditions Survey
ICTs	information and communication technologies
IEP	Individualised Education Program (United States)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
JD–R	job demands–resources (theory and model)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIRA	Online Interactive Risk Assessment (EU-OSHA tool)
OSH	occupational safety and health
PE	physical education
PSRs	psychosocial risks
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organisation

Executive summary

This report examines psychosocial risks (PSRs) in the workplace and work-related mental and physical health outcomes in the education sector. The results combine a scoping literature review and interviews with key stakeholder representatives from the sector. The study also provides ten examples of good practices that can be implemented to prevent and manage PSRs and improve mental health and well-being among teachers. Finally, based on the study's findings, key considerations and policy pointers are presented to address occupational safety and health (OSH) in the education sector. This research is part of a series of projects coordinated by EU-OSHA that focus on psychosocial risks and mental health at work and that will lead to a European campaign on the topic in 2026–2028.

Understanding the European education sector

The education sector is an important contributor to the European economy and a major employer. More than 10 million people were employed as teaching professionals in 2022, which accounts for 5 % of total EU employment (Cedefop, 2023a). The teaching profession is predominantly female, with women comprising almost 70 % of primary and secondary education teachers, while men make up the remaining 30 %. In contrast, the gender balance shifts in tertiary education, where men represent 55 % of the teaching workforce and women account for 45 % (Eurostat, 2023). The sector is experiencing important demographic challenges as roughly 35 % of current teachers are now approaching retirement age (Cedefop, 2023b). As the supply of teachers falls, the demand for teachers rises; moreover, the increase in demand is also driven by an increase in student enrolment, particularly in upper secondary and higher education, and by a reduction in class sizes (EENEE-NESET, 2023).

This study focuses on instructional personnel (i.e. teaching professionals) within the education sector, which includes classroom teachers, academic staff, teacher aides and teaching/research assistants.

Psychosocial risk in the education sector

Almost 50 % of lower secondary school teachers (ISCED level 2) experience stress at work, while 24 % of teachers report that their job negatively impacts their mental health, and 22 % their physical health (OECD, 2019¹). It is important to note that the work environments of teaching professionals differ significantly from those of office-based jobs, healthcare and service sectors, and industrial workplaces (Wischlitzki et al., 2020). Classroom teachers and teacher aides work in primary and secondary schools, while academic staff and teaching/research assistants are primarily employed in higher education institutions such as universities. Despite differences of setting, all teaching professionals share a common reliance on continuous social interaction as a core component of their roles. As a result of this unique combination of social, emotional and intellectual demands, the nature of work in the education sector differs significantly from that of many other professions. Hence, generalised approaches from other sectors are insufficient to effectively address the specific demands of the education sector.

Different societal trends are likely either to exacerbate or to mitigate PSRs already found in the teaching profession. The demographic shift, including an ageing workforce and declining fertility rates, intensifies the strain as older teachers are more vulnerable to digitalisation challenges, while the presence of fewer younger entrants reduces workforce renewal. The continued expansion of education increases system demands, leading to higher workloads and greater performance pressure across teaching levels. Digitalisation has added further cognitive strain, especially for those who are less digitally adept, while the COVID-19 pandemic created disruptions that blurred work–life boundaries and accelerated technological transitions.

In the context of this study, the authors have adopted a categorisation of PSRs derived from COPSOQ III (Burr et al., 2019), which divides risk into interlinked categories.

▪ Demand at work

The demands placed on teachers can be broadly categorised into: **quantitative demands**, such as workload and time constraints; **cognitive demands**, involving the mental effort required to perform their

¹ The survey referred has been conducted in 48 countries and economies, including 31 OECD countries and economies (OECD, 2019).

tasks; and **emotional demands**, which include managing emotionally charged situations and performing emotional labour.

Quantitative demands at work, which involve balancing teaching-related workload with non-teaching responsibilities and extended working hours, are not disproportionately prevalent in any specific teacher group. According to the 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), 71.5 % of lower secondary teacher workload is teaching-related, while the remaining time is divided between maintaining order and discipline (13 %) and performing administrative tasks (8 %), such as recording attendance and distributing school information or forms (OECD, 2019). In higher education, teaching roles are often combined with research responsibilities, an increasing workload and higher performance expectations than other groups (Nicholls et al., 2022; Kis et al., 2022). Balancing teaching and administrative workloads lead to chronic job stress and emotional exhaustion (Jentsch et al., 2023; Sanchis-Giménez et al., 2024). Long working hours are also linked to emotional exhaustion (Kreuzfeld et al., 2022).

Turning to cognitive demands, Cedefop (2022) reports that 63 % of teaching professionals in the EU had to learn to use new digital technologies for their jobs post-pandemic, and 64 % invested in more digital skills development. The report shows that older teachers are more adversely affected by digitalisation and the challenges of integrating new technologies into their work, leading to heightened stress levels (Ferreira-Santos, 2022).

In terms of emotional demands, 76 % of employers and OSH managers in educational institutions across the EU-27 report that difficult pupils present the most significant demand (ESENER, 2019). Moreover, 40 % of teachers report disruptive student behaviour as a concern, while less than 60 % describe the classroom environment as 'pleasant' (TALIS, 2018²). Teachers are often required to provide emotional support to students during personal crises, such as family issues, bullying or academic stress (O'Farrell et al., 2023). Teachers working in socio-economically disadvantaged schools may experience even higher pressure (Sinkkonen and Kytälä, 2014). Female teachers, particularly in elementary and middle schools, are more vulnerable to emotional demands (Noor and Zainuddin, 2011). Other research points to secondary school teachers, who work with adolescents, facing more challenging emotional labour (Kidger et al., 2016). Also, emotional demands that stem from relationships with parents are more pronounced in lower educational grades (Peterson et al., 2011; Baxter and Kilderry, 2024). Additionally, younger and less experienced teachers, especially in elementary education, are particularly sensitive to student relations, which affect their well-being (Collie, 2021). Emotional labour is linked to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Arens and Morin, 2016; Kollerová et al., 2023; Tuxford and Bradley, 2015).

▪ **Work organisation and job content**

According to the OECD (2020), 96 % of teachers report having control over selecting teaching methods, 94 % over assessing students' learning, and 92 % over disciplining students. Nonetheless, lower and middle school teachers (ISCED levels 1–2) are likely more affected by issues of autonomy, since they face greater exposure to external control factors such as strict curricula, standardised testing requirements, and accountability measures that constrain their professional discretion (Salokangas et al., 2020). Reduced autonomy limits their ability to tailor instruction and manage classrooms in line with their professional judgement, often resulting in emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009, 2010).

In contrast, teachers at higher levels typically face challenges related to larger class sizes, especially in secondary and higher education (ISCED levels 3–8), where class sizes have been increasing as a result of expanding educational access (Hindman and Bustamante, 2019). Larger class sizes are associated with increased workload, reduced individual interaction with students, and higher stress levels (Gil-Flores, 2017). Even though their teaching role is often combined with research responsibilities, academic staff face unique pressures regarding workload and performance expectations.

Multi-grade teaching occurs more frequently in rural schools and poses additional stress for primary school teachers (Darmody and Smyth, 2011; Burns and Machin, 2013). Managing classrooms with students of varying grade levels requires handling diverse learning needs simultaneously, thus increasing cognitive and emotional demands and stress. Conversely, urban and city schools tend to have larger class sizes and serve student populations with greater socio-cultural diversity and high

² TALIS 2018 has been conducted in 48 countries and economies, including 31 OECD countries and economies (OECD, 2019).

educational needs, increasing the complexity of teachers' work environments and PSRs (See et al., 2020).

Based on TALIS 2018 data, 92.5 % of lower secondary teachers in EU countries attended at least one type of professional development activity in the 12 months prior to the survey (OECD, 2019). However, teachers still reported barriers that prevent them from accessing continuing professional learning opportunities, with time constraints (54 %), financial costs (45 %) and a lack of family time (37 %) being the most cited examples (OECD, 2020). The nature of these barriers appears to be common to teachers working at all education levels. Although professional development participation is generally high in the teaching profession (OECD, 2020), the opportunities for career progression remain limited, especially at school level (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022). Higher education often affords broader career prospects beyond teaching, including opportunities for research, publication and academic leadership, though the opportunities come with additional job demands and stressors.

▪ **Interpersonal relationships and leadership support**

Positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, along with a recognition of professional contributions, are central determining factors of teachers' job satisfaction, motivation and well-being. Social support and collaboration among colleagues may be limited because the bulk of teachers' work is performed alone with their pupils (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Moreover, only half of teachers in the education sector receive regular support from managers and colleagues (Eurofound, 2020). Regarding cooperation among teachers, those in higher education may be more vulnerable as the result of an environment characterised by increased competition for resources and reputation. The competitive atmosphere has contributed to a weakening of collegial bonds and fostered a more strategic, individualistic orientation among academics, as highlighted by Kosmützky and Krücken (2023). Furthermore, the process of digitalisation has weakened professional relationships across all school levels, affecting the quality of teacher collaboration and support (Pavlovaite and Hallissy, 2021). Poor professional relationships might increase the risk of stress (Kelchtermans, 2017) and emotional exhaustion (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

In a study of Irish teachers, one third of teachers and senior management had been targets of bullying at least 'every now and then' by other teachers and staff members. On average, no less than 6 % of respondents reported enduring bullying at work either weekly or daily (DCU, 2022). Bullying by colleagues is a serious concern that disproportionately affects teachers from racialised groups at all education levels, highlighting an intersection of psychosocial risks related to both professional dynamics and systemic discrimination (Lander and Santoro, 2017; Arneback et al., 2023). According to Kollerová et al. (2023) and Dangleben (2019), victimisation through workplace bullying is associated with an increased risk of emotional exhaustion, burnout and depression among teachers.

Principals and supervisors play a key role in shaping education centres' climates and teachers' professional experiences (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009). In situations where teachers are already stressed, low levels of supportive management are an important factor that can contribute to negative emotions (Ostermeier et al., 2023). Studies in Germany (Jentsch et al., 2023) and Italy (De Cordova et al., 2019) show that transparent, values-driven leadership and managerial support can buffer stress and reduce exposure to violence.

Recognition – both intrinsic and extrinsic – is crucial for sustaining teachers' motivation and sense of purpose. Nearly one third of employees in the education sector felt they had lost some sense of meaning in their work (Eurofound, 2020). Furthermore, public attitudes toward the teaching profession are generally positive but declining. The results from the European School Education Platform Education and Training Monitor 2023 shows that roughly 76 % of respondents considered teaching not to be a respected and valued profession in their country, while 82 % felt that teachers were not sufficiently appreciated for their work (ESEP, 2024). However, the figures vary significantly by country. Across the EU, teachers' perception of the value and importance of their profession remains low, with only 15.8 % feeling that their work is valued (OECD, 2020). The lowest levels of perceived recognition among teachers were recorded in Belgium (5.3 %), France (6.6 %), Slovenia (5.6 %) and Slovakia (4.5%). 'PISA panic' and intense media campaigns in the wake of declining outcomes on international assessments have led teachers to feel that they are being held accountable for systemic problems (Spruyt, 2021).

Teachers in higher education often hold higher education degrees, which formally acknowledge credentials and confer a degree of protective prestige that is commonly unavailable to other teaching

sectors (Fuller et al., 2013). However, professional identity is complicated within academia by balancing research and teaching activities, with teaching frequently viewed as secondary to research. As a result, teachers receive less recognition and lower status in academic settings (Benavides Martínez, 2020).

▪ **Work–individual imbalances**

Almost one in five teachers are employed on a temporary contract, and in some countries, such as Spain, Austria and Romania, more than 25 % of lower secondary teachers are on fixed-term contracts and there is a clear prevalence of short-term engagements (Eurydice, 2021). The number of young teachers with such work arrangements is particularly high compared to their older peers (Eurydice, 2021). This situation is especially concerning given the declining proportion of teachers under 30 in the EU, where only 8 % of primary and secondary teachers were under 30 as of 2022. Such employment conditions have a negative impact on younger teachers' health and well-being and significantly increase the risk of early-career attrition (Giunchi et al., 2020), exacerbating teacher shortages across many EU countries. A study shows that fixed-term contract teachers report lower well-being and maintain greater emotional distance from students, which may further affect job satisfaction and retention (Capone and Petrillo, 2020). There are significant differences in teachers' salaries between Member States. Additionally, in countries like Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden, the average salaries for teachers at all or most education levels fall below per capita GDP (Eurydice, 2023). In addition, early-childhood teachers (ISCED level 0) tend to earn less, while upper secondary teachers (ISCED level 3) generally earn more, owing to differences in their minimum qualification requirements (Eurydice, 2023).

Almost 45 % of teachers stated that their job leaves little time for personal life (TALIS, 2018). Regarding work–life balance, female teachers are particularly vulnerable owing to the 'double presence' phenomenon: the simultaneous demands of professional responsibilities and disproportionate family caregiving duties, including childcare and eldercare (García et al., 2016). Their dual burden often results in increased stress and work–family conflict for women in teaching roles, especially in primary education, where women make up a higher proportion of the workforce. Academics and higher education teachers face blurred lines between multiple demanding roles, such as teaching, research, mentoring, pastoral care, consultancy and public engagement, which substantially elevates inter-role conflicts and burnout risk (Kinman, 2014; Slišković and Maslač Seršić, 2011). The digitalisation of education has further intensified these challenges by increasing 'borderlessness' in work schedules, blurring the boundaries between professional and personal life, and heightening work–life conflicts and feelings of isolation (Eurofound et al., 2020). This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when rapid shifts to online teaching imposed additional workloads and stress without adequate resources or preparation time. Evidence reviewed during the study indicates that inter-role conflict, particularly between work and personal life, increases the risk of stress (Kinman, 2014).

▪ **Conflict and offensive behaviours**

According to TALIS 2018 data, 14.5 % of lower secondary teachers identified their main sources of stress as intimidation or verbal abuse from students. Primary teachers report the highest levels of physical attacks by students and harassment by students' parents (Berlanda et al., 2019; De Cordova et al., 2019; Gerberich et al., 2011). The violence includes non-physical violence such as intimidation, verbal abuse, threats and bullying, but also physical assault (being hit, being pushed or having objects thrown). Special education teachers are particularly vulnerable to aggressive behaviours from students as a result of their students' complex needs and behavioural challenges (Jasik-Ślęzak and Kasian, 2019). Teachers from racialised groups also face a heightened risk of harassment and discrimination in the workplace, which can lead to feelings of isolation and increased PSRs (Arar et al., 2024).

In contrast, tertiary education settings tend to experience much lower rates of violence, threats and bullying, indicating that academics are generally less exposed to difficult students (EU-OSHA, 2022a; DANES, 2018). Nonetheless, non-physical violence is present across primary, secondary and higher education levels (Nyberg et al., 2021). Primary and lower secondary teachers, who often have more direct contact with family members, are more exposed to violence and harassment from parents. Research suggests that tensions between parents and teachers are on the rise and can sometimes escalate into verbal or physical conflicts. Evidence reviewed shows that challenging relationships with parents are associated with heightened stress levels among teachers (Otero-López et al., 2009; Rodríguez-Mantilla and Fernández-Díaz, 2017).

The shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated risks associated with offensive online behaviours. Teachers have faced increased exposure to cyberbullying, harassment and negative comments, particularly through social media and digital platforms (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Exposure to violence, bullying and cyberbullying heightens the risk of stress, anxiety and sleep disturbances (Berlanda et al., 2019; Rudkjoebing et al., 2020; EU-OSHA, 2022a).

Protective factors

While the reviewed literature's primary focus is on identifying psychosocial risk factors that contribute to adverse mental health outcomes, certain factors might act as both risk and protective factors. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model (Bakker et al., 2005), job resources, such as autonomy, social support, and opportunities for professional development, can mitigate the negative impact of job demands on teachers' well-being. Six main categories of protective factors were identified as particularly relevant in promoting teachers' mental health and job satisfaction: autonomy and influence over work; collegial relationships (Olsen & Huang, 2019); positive relationships with students' parents (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2022); supportive school/university leadership (Jentsch et al., 2023; Harms et al., 2017); professional development opportunities (Kelchtermans, 2017); and favourable school characteristics, such as smaller class sizes (Eryilmaz et al., 2025), well-resourced institutions equipped with adequate materials and facilities (Vousiopoulos et al., 2019), teaching at the primary and lower-secondary levels (ISCED levels 1–2) (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009), and teaching subjects outside the core humanities and mathematics–science curricula (Barbieri et al., 2019).

Impacts of psychosocial risks

The specific job characteristics and demands that are presented here show that the education sector is more vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes than other occupations (Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020). Work-related stress is highly prevalent among teachers. TALIS 2018 shows that nearly half of European lower secondary teachers report stress, though the figures vary widely by country (87 % in Portugal versus 49 % in Cyprus). Teachers also report elevated rates of insomnia, with studies suggesting a prevalence of between 36 % and 61 % (Gierc et al., 2023). Around 27 % of European teachers reported feeling emotionally exhausted during the pandemic, which is above the average across sectors (Eurofound et al., 2020). Anxiety is widespread among educators; for instance, 78 % of Spanish teachers reported symptoms during the 2020/2021 school year (Teacher's Ombudsman, 2022). A review by Agyapong et al. (2022) found that depression was the most frequently reported mental health condition among the studies on teachers included in their review. A study conducted in the UK including 555 secondary school teachers found that 19.4 % exhibited moderate-to-severe symptoms of depression, which were strongly associated with feeling unable to talk to a colleague when feeling stressed or down, dissatisfaction with work, and high presenteeism (Kidger et al., 2016). Burnout is a critical issue, characterised by exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. Meta-analyses by García-Carmona et al. (2019) found that nearly a third of studied teachers were suffering from severe burnout, with many experiencing depersonalisation and low levels of personal accomplishment. Mental health issues are often co-occurring. Studies demonstrate a strong overlap between stress, burnout, anxiety and depression, with high comorbidity rates worsening long-term health outcomes and increasing the risk of chronic psychological distress (Bianchi et al., 2014; Jones-Rincon and Howard, 2019).

Broader societal impacts

High levels of PSRs among teachers have far-reaching impacts beyond individual well-being, affecting workforce stability, student outcomes, and broader economic and social systems. Stress and burnout undermine teachers' job satisfaction, impacting both performance and retention (Admiraal and Kittelsen Røberg, 2023). Teachers who face high workloads, long hours or inadequate support systems are at greater risk of leaving the profession or retiring early (Madigan and Kim, 2021). The loss of teaching professionals can put strain on remaining staff and deepen teacher shortages across Europe (Eurydice, 2021; Scheuch et al., 2015). Additionally, teacher well-being directly shapes student outcomes. Supportive teacher–student relations correlate with improved academic scores (OECD, 2015). Conversely, emotionally exhausted or stressed teachers provide lower-quality instruction, diminished classroom engagement and less effective support (Oberle and Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Teacher attrition also disrupts learning continuity, which has been shown to reduce student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff, 2013; Harding et al., 2019).

The education sector is fundamental to the European economy, employing over 10 million people (Cedefop, 2023a). Teachers' exposure to PSRs contributes to substantial human capital and financial costs. Attrition forces schools to spend more on recruitment, training and substitute staff. Moreover, it can exacerbate existing inequalities, with under-resourced schools (often working in disadvantaged areas) struggling to retain or recruit new teachers (UNESCO, 2024). Healthcare systems also bear the burden. The European Trade Union Institute (2025) has estimated the economic toll of work-related stress across the European Union at over €100 billion annually, with teaching professionals making up a significant component of the burden owing to their heightened exposure to PSRs.

Conclusion and policy pointers

Teachers in the education sector face unique psychosocial risks that significantly affect their mental health and well-being. While society may express general respect for teachers, psychosocial risks such as low pay, heavy workloads and poor work–life balance can undermine this respect in practice, leading teachers to feel less valued than they are in theory (OECD, 2020). Moreover, the psychosocial risks are not distributed equally across the teaching workforce. Primary and special education teachers are more exposed to violence and parental conflicts, while higher education staff experience work–life imbalances, large class sizes and competitiveness. Younger teachers face insecure contracts, low pay and limited mentoring, whereas female teachers are particularly affected by work–family conflicts. Despite the challenges, protective factors such as supportive leadership, strong collegial and parent relationships, smaller classes, and professional development opportunities can help to mitigate risks. The COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing digitalisation have further amplified existing pressures, eroding work–life boundaries and intensifying stress. Yet psychosocial risks in education remain underestimated compared to physical hazards and are often inadequately managed because of resource, legal and expertise constraints. To address these issues effectively, a systemic and sector-specific approach is required. Key considerations and policy pointers for different stakeholder groups include:

- **Employers.** Conduct systematic psychosocial risk assessments using tailored tools (e.g. EU-OSHA OiRA) to identify and address sector-specific risks.
- **Social partners.** Advocate for stable contracts, fair pay, and mentoring programmes to support younger and new teachers. Promote campaigns that address teacher well-being, reduce discrimination, and advance continuous training and transparent reporting of psychosocial risks.
- **Researchers.** Develop and evaluate evidence-based interventions to reduce workload and emotional demands while enhancing job resources. Focus on vulnerable groups such as younger teachers, women, educators from racialised groups, and special education professionals.
- **Policy-makers.** Invest in reducing class sizes and improving student–teacher ratios to ease cognitive and emotional burdens.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

More than 10 million people were employed in the EU as teaching professionals in 2022 (Cedefop, 2023a). The nature of the demands on workers in the education sector exposes them to a unique set of occupational safety and health (OSH) risks, including psychosocial risks (PSRs). This report focuses on the PSRs and daily challenges faced by education professionals by examining the prevalence and management of PSRs in the education workplace, and it examines work-related mental and physical health outcomes in the education sector, focusing on sector-specific risks. It is concerned primarily with the challenges and PSRs that education professionals face in their daily work, acknowledging that they differ from those commonly faced by workers in other sectors. This research is part of a series of projects coordinated by EU-OSHA that focus on psychosocial risks and mental health at work and that will lead to a European Campaign in 2026–2028 on the topic.

Since the 1950s, the psychosocial aspects of work have received growing attention as a focus of research. The field gained further attention in the 1960s with the emergence of psychosocial work environment research and occupational health psychology (Johnson and Hall, 1996). In the intervening years, there has been a notable shift away from focusing solely on individual factors towards examining the broader impact of the work environment on workers' health (EU-OSHA, 2000). The European Commission's (2023) *Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health* emphasises the need to address new and previously overlooked occupational sectors, including education.

In the context of this study, we use as a reference the standard definition of PSRs, which is based on early works by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Cox and Griffiths. Cox and Griffiths (1995, p. 69) provide a widely accepted definition of psychosocial risk as 'those aspects of work design and the organisation and management of work, and their social and environmental context, which may have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm'.

According to the definition above, PSRs can arise from poor work design, organisation and management (e.g. poorly managed organisational change, workload and work pace; conflicting demands; and a lack of role clarity or job control). Additionally, they can stem from a poor social context of work (e.g. a lack of support from management or colleagues, or demanding customers, patients or students). Teaching professionals work in diverse settings, from schools to universities, and face work environments defined by constant social interaction and complex cognitive and emotional demands. The resulting PSRs set them apart from other sectors, making generalised approaches from non-educational professions insufficient to address their specific job demands.

Psychosocial risks, mental health and stress are perceived as important challenges for the sector. The 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), which collected data from 260,000 teachers, shows that almost 50 % of lower secondary school teachers in Europe (ISCED level 2) experience stress at work. Moreover, among teachers in Europe, a negative impact from their jobs on mental and physical health was reported by 24 % and 22 %, respectively.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2025) reports a projected shortage of 44 million teachers by 2030, with low pay, heavy workloads, limited professional development, a lack of technological training and, in many places, a neglect of the value of the teacher cited as primary causes. The United Nations Deputy Secretary-General noted that these conditions create 'a lack of recognition that demotivates and paralyses'.

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 2** defines the European education sector, including definitions of workers in the sector and a description of recent trends.
- **Chapter 3** provides an overview of the burden of PSRs in the education sector and a comprehensive overview of each category. It also examines PSRs by gender, race/ethnicity, age and experience and, among special education teachers, analyses key societal changes and disruptors affecting teachers' exposure to PSRs, as well as protective factors.
- **Chapter 4** describes the impact of PSRs on workers' mental health and the main consequences for the workplace. It also describes broader societal impacts of PSRs among teachers.

- **Chapter 5** presents a selection of good practices identified for preventing, managing and intervening in PSRs in the education sector.
- **Chapter 6** summarises the main conclusions and study limitations, and provides policy pointers.
- The **reference list** and **appendices** contain the scoping review, the interview protocols and a list of excluded examples of good practices.

1.2 Methodology

This study employed a mixed methodology comprised of a scoping review of the scientific and grey literature, and semi-structured interviews of selected stakeholders to collect data relevant to all report sections.

1.2.1 Scoping review

The scoping literature review followed a structured process that began with the selection of an agreed-upon set of keywords, which were applied flexibly across three literature databases (PubMed, Scopus and IS Web of Science). To complement the resources identified in the academic databases, the study team also conducted searches in Google Scholar.

Grey literature was identified through a comprehensive web search (i.e. using Google) and complemented by snowballing techniques, an exploration of relevant organisational and network websites, references highlighted by interviewed stakeholders, and direct suggestions from EU-OSHA. To support the information available in academic publications, the study team collected statistical information that was available and comparable across all 27 EU Member States, including the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER), and the Flash Eurobarometer – Occupational Safety and Health Pulse.

In terms of restriction criteria, we retrieved sources published between 2014 and 2025 to ensure that the study team considered the latest evidence on PSRs in education. The goal was to include many resources from both the pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic periods, as the pandemic is widely acknowledged to have had a major impact on the profession. No restriction on setting or language of information sources was applied, although, as expected, most of the identified literature was published in English. Where appropriate, the geographical scope was established as the EU-27 Member States and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries. Other literature that focused on non-EU countries was included if deemed relevant. Eligible publications were subsequently integrated into multiple chapters of this study.

1.2.2 Stakeholder interviews

To complement the findings of the scoping review, the study team conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders at the EU and national levels, particularly with sector social partners and national education associations. The interviews aimed to gather the views of EU social partners and other sectoral associations on psychosocial risks and mental health at work in the education sector, including OSH management and prevention. Thematic analysis of the interview minutes allowed for a systematic identification of themes and patterns across the interviews, adding insights to the findings of the scoping review. When interpreting the interview findings, it was acknowledged that they should not be regarded as universally applicable or as evidence that can confirm results. Rather, they inform, highlight, complement and illustrate the evidence base.

1.2.3 Identification of good practices

The identification of good practices and initiatives built on the evidence collected as part of the review of available data and information, as well as the insights gathered through the semi-structured interviews. Additionally, key recommendations from our senior expert, as well as any additional suggestions collected by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), were considered.

Starting from a preliminary list of 20 good practice examples (15 examples at workplace level and five programmes by national or regional intermediaries), the study team and EU-OSHA discussed and agreed on a final selection of five good practice examples at the workplace level and five good practice examples by national or regional intermediaries to be developed in short information boxes, which appear in the relevant sub-sections. The full preliminary list can be found in Appendix C.

In selecting each group of good practices, the main criteria were: (1) the representativeness of different types of initiatives targeting various PSRs; and (2) the maturity and availability of information on these interventions and programmes. Based on the available information, each information box outlines the initiative's main characteristics, content and results.

2 Understanding the European education sector

2.1 Defining workers in the education sector

According to UNESCO (2020), 'educational personnel' includes all those employed in educational institutions, covering instructional and non-instructional institutions. It encompasses those involved in student instruction, professional support (academic, health or social), and the management or administration of educational services. Additionally, it covers personnel who support maintenance and operations, those temporarily absent, any temporary replacements, and subcontracted staff who work exclusively for schools. However, 'educational personnel' excludes subcontracted services (e.g. a local transport company carrying out the school bus service), retired teachers, and those teaching in a work-based education context.

This study focuses on instructional personnel (i.e. teaching professionals), including classroom teachers, academic staff, teacher aides and teaching/research assistants.

- **Classroom teachers** are those employed in a professional capacity to guide and direct the learning experiences of students, irrespective of their training and qualifications or of the delivery mechanism. Teaching involves planning, organising and conducting group activities whereby students' knowledge, skills and competences develop as stipulated by the educational programme in which they participate. In terms of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), classroom teachers are **primary school and early-childhood teachers** and **secondary education teachers**, and can also include **vocational education teachers** (ILO, 2012). They cover levels 1 to 3 of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).
- **Academic staff** are personnel employed at the tertiary level of education whose primary assignment is instruction or research, and who hold an academic rank with titles.³ This excludes teachers who also have a management function that is of greater importance than their teaching. In terms of ISCO-08, academic staff are **university and higher education teachers**. They cover ISCED levels 5 to 6.
- **Teacher aides** are non-professional personnel who are paid for their employment and support teachers in providing instruction to students.
- **Teaching/research assistants** include students employed on a part-time basis to assist in classroom or laboratory instruction or in the conduct of research. Personnel in these positions are usually graduate students who hold lower academic titles.⁴

2.2 Recent trends

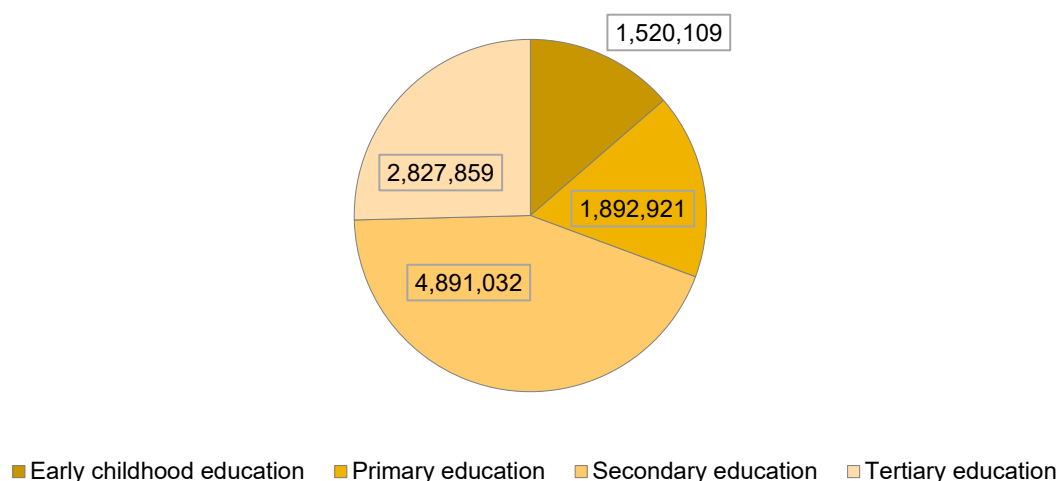
The education sector is an important contributor to the European economy and a major employer.

In 2022, more than 10 million people were employed as teaching professionals, which accounts for 5 % of total EU employment (Cedefop, 2023a). According to the latest Eurostat (2022) data, in 2022, 1.89 and 4.89 million teachers were employed in the EU in primary and secondary education, respectively. A further 2.82 million people were teaching in tertiary education throughout the Union in the same year, including academic staff and teaching/research assistants (see Figure 1).

³ Such as professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, lecturer or the equivalent of any of these academic ranks or other titles (e.g. dean, director, associate dean, assistant dean, chair or head of department).

⁴ Such as teaching assistant, teaching associate, teaching fellow, research assistant, or equivalent personnel with other titles.

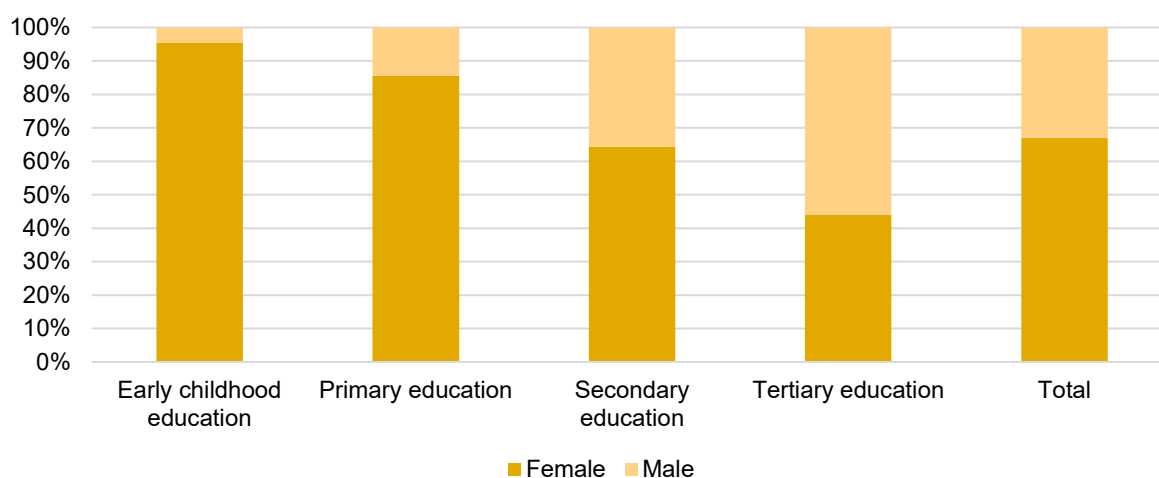
Figure 1: Number of teaching professionals by education level in the EU-27 (2020)



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Eurostat (2022)

Women dominate the teaching workforce, constituting almost 70 % of teachers employed in primary and secondary education, while men make up the remaining 30 %. In contrast, the gender balance shifts in tertiary education, where men represent 55 % of the teaching workforce and women account for 45 % (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Gender balance of teachers by education level (2022)



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Eurostat (2022)

Teacher shortages are a common issue across the EU, particularly in primary and secondary education, with some Member States reporting an acute need for qualified teachers (EENEE-NESET, 2023). Teacher shortages also vary from subject to subject, and are particularly severe in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects (Eurydice, 2022). In addition, several EU countries report a lack of foreign and native language teachers (European Commission, 2023a). As one interviewed stakeholder who represents school heads emphasised, the shortage may be further exacerbated by the high number of teachers who encounter difficulties reintegrating after sick leave. Returning them to work requires considerable attention. Although doctors may clear them to return to teaching after burnout or other mental health issues, they often may not be fully ready in practice. Only a few studies show data on teacher preparedness when returning to work after stress-related sick leave. A Brazilian study of 20

teachers found that most returned to work with unwanted and unfavourable health conditions, indicating significant unpreparedness for the demands they would face (Macaia and Fischer, 2015).

The 2020 *Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future* emphasise that 'there are difficulties related to attracting and retaining high-potential students in initial teacher education, as well as to attracting graduates and retaining practising teachers in the profession'. In 2022, only 8 % of teachers in primary and secondary education were under the age of 30, reflecting a shortage of students entering teacher education programmes (Eurostat, 2022). Across the EU-27, 13 countries report acute shortages in initial teacher education (Eurydice, 2021). The ageing of the workforce further compounds teacher shortages, as 35 % of current teachers are approaching retirement age (Cedefop, 2023b). The ageing teacher population is a critical concern, with more than half of European education systems identifying it as a pressing issue (Eurydice, 2021). Teacher attrition adds to these challenges, negatively impacting student learning and imposing financial costs on education systems and schools (Shields and Kilgour, 2018).

The education sector has also faced challenges attracting recent graduates, influenced by low wages, demanding working conditions and perceived low societal recognition (European Parliament, 2024). For instance, teaching positions are often marked by **low salaries** compared to other professions that require similar levels of education and responsibility, particularly in countries where teachers earn less than other tertiary-educated workers (Eurydice, 2018). While the extent may vary across different levels of education and different countries, the trend is common across much of the sector. At EU level, less than 40 % of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with their salary (Eurydice, 2023). Additionally, nearly one in five teachers in the EU-27 is employed on a temporary contract. In Spain, Austria and Romania, over 25 % of lower secondary teachers work under fixed-term contracts, while a significant proportion of teachers still work under short-term contracts. The number of young teachers with these work arrangements is particularly high compared to their older peers (Eurydice, 2021).

As the supply of teachers is falling, the **demand for teachers is rising**, driven mainly by an increase in student enrolment (particularly in upper secondary education) and a reduction in class sizes (EENEE-NESET, 2023). This is combined with teachers now navigating heightened educational demands, expanded responsibilities, and increased expectations from parents and pupils (Schleicher, 2018). Beyond these demands, schoolteachers are increasingly expected to address and contribute to solutions for various social challenges, from drug abuse prevention to civic education (Education Support, 2023). As highlighted by Depaepe and Smeyers (2008) and noted by one of the consulted stakeholders (representing the interests of European professionals in the education sector), some responsibilities traditionally associated with parents may be shifting to schools, adding to teachers' already significant responsibilities. This perceived shift could increase teachers' workload and place additional emotional demands on them, as they are required to navigate sensitive social issues and provide emotional support in addition to their teaching duties.

During the interviews conducted as part of this study, two national stakeholders who represented teachers' interests shared that current working conditions may be contributing to what they described as a vocational crisis in the teaching profession. From their perspective, such conditions could discourage young talent from entering the field and may contribute to the attrition of trained educators. To address the problem, a stakeholder who represented a teacher's union highlighted that the essential work of these education professionals might need to be revalorised by improving working conditions and supporting their well-being – key factors in making the profession more attractive.

Examples of initiatives carried out at the national level to prevent such shortages include the programme of 'job dating' for teachers in France,⁵ mentioned by the organisation representing the interests of teachers at EU level. The programme consists of short, intensive recruitment sessions where candidates receive brief training and are quickly matched with schools. However, other stakeholders who represented the interest of teachers nationally highlighted that initiatives like this are unlikely to solve the issue in the long term, because they do not address precariousness, but rather increase uncertainty within the profession. The approach also raised concerns among trade unions about its effectiveness and its potential impact on the quality of education.

⁵ See for example: <https://www.letudiant.fr/etudes/concours-fonction-publique/recrutement-de-profs-face-a-la-penurie-les-job-datings-font-grincer-des-dents.html>

3 Psychosocial risks in the education sector

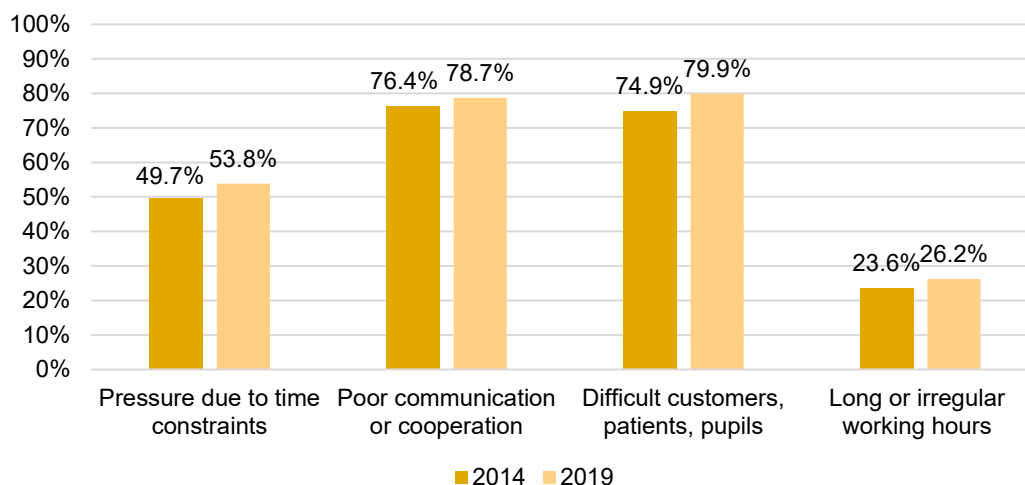
The teaching profession is generally respected by society, as teachers are widely seen as playing an essential role in individual development and community well-being (Hargreaves, 2009). Families, in particular, value educators' dedication to shaping their children's future. Similarly, teachers often find great personal fulfilment in their work, as many choose the profession out of a strong sense of vocation and a genuine passion for educating and supporting students (Barni et al., 2019). However, despite this respect and intrinsic motivation, teachers also face significant PSRs in the workplace, such as managing challenging pupils or parents, time pressures, limited autonomy, poor work–life balance, ineffective communication, and long or irregular working hours, all of which can lead to job dissatisfaction and elevated stress levels (Hascher and Waber, 2021; EU-OSHA, 2022a). The perceived lack of recognition can increase stress, burnout and intentions to leave the profession, and lead to decreased self-efficacy (Kim et al., 2023). Together, these factors undermine job satisfaction and can threaten teacher well-being and the quality of education that teachers can deliver.

3.1 The burden of psychosocial risks in the education sector

The 2018 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), which collected data from 260,000 teachers, shows that almost 50 % of lower secondary school teachers in Europe (ISCED level 2) experience stress at work. Moreover, teachers in Europe report that their job has a negative impact on their mental and physical health at a rate of 24 % and 22 %, respectively.

According to the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER),⁶ in 2019,⁷ difficult customers, patients and pupils were identified as the leading PSR in the education sector, affecting 79.9 % of respondents. This was closely followed by poor communication or cooperation, which impacted 78.7 %, while time pressure affected 53.8 % (EU-OSHA, 2022a) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Evolution of PSRs in education, human health and social work activities (2020)



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ESENER 2014 and 2019 (EU-OSHA, 2020a)

The 2019 ESENER results highlight a range of PSRs in the education sector, including dealing with difficult pupils or parents, pressure due to time constraints, poor communication, and long or irregular working hours (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Similarly, Kyriacou (2001) identifies key sources of teacher stress,

⁶ Unlike most of the other studies referenced in this report, which are based on worker-level data, ESENER is an establishment-level survey. This means that it gathers information from managers or employer representatives, offering a complementary perspective on workplace issues such as work-related PSRs and occupational safety and health (OSH) factors.

⁷ Responses from 45,420 establishments in 33 countries, comprising the EU-27 as well as Iceland, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

such as unmotivated students, maintaining discipline, time pressures, and workload, administration and management responsibilities, as well as role conflict and ambiguity.

Moreover, as highlighted by ESENER, the level of awareness in many educational establishments of well-known and significant OSH risks is generally higher than in other sectors, although the results also indicate that there is still room for improvement in some establishments and countries (EU-OSHA, 2022a).

For the purposes of this report, **well-being** is defined as a multidimensional concept that goes beyond the mere absence of disease to encompass broader physical, mental and social dimensions. Understanding well-being as the main health outcome is particularly helpful for this report, as it allows for a more comprehensive assessment, linking the effects of physical health, mental health and PSRs into a single framework. Therefore, well-being can be a proxy for the extent to which education professionals can thrive in their workplace and personal lives, making it a meaningful outcome for the evaluation of occupational exposures and interventions (Bautista et al., 2023).

3.2 Previous overviews

Systematic reviews that focus on PSRs in the education sector remain relatively limited. Among the few that do exist, Wischlitzi et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review on psychosocial risk management in the teaching profession. Their 2020 review employed the World Health Organization (WHO) general categorisation of PSRs developed by Leka et al. (2010). Although the 2020 study screened over 2,200 records, only four met the inclusion criteria. Hence, the researchers concluded that there was an urgent need to develop, validate, and evaluate comprehensive, teacher-centred psychosocial risk-management studies that focus on teachers' mental health and teaching environments.

The WHO framework identifies ten categories of PSRs, including job content, workload and work pace, work schedule, control, environment and equipment, organisational culture and function, interpersonal relationships at work, role in the organisation, career development and the home–work interface.

EU-OSHA carried out the most recent study of PSRs in the education sector as part of ESENER (EU-OSHA, 2022a). The 2022 survey adopted the PSR categorisation from the third version of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ III). Developed in response to the job demands–resources (JD–R) theory (Bakker et al., 2023), COPSOQ III extends the theory's scope to include additional dimensions such as work engagement and quality of work (Burr et al., 2019). The tool classifies psychosocial work environment factors in six categories: demands at work, work organisation and job content, interpersonal relationships and leadership, work–individual interference, social capital, and conflict and offensive behaviour.

3.2.1 Categorisation of PSRs and sector-specific adaptations

It is important to note that **teaching professionals' work environments are significantly different from those of office-based jobs, healthcare and service sectors, and industrial workplaces** (Wischlitzi et al., 2020). Classroom teachers and teacher aides work in primary and secondary schools, while academic staff and teaching/research assistants are primarily employed in higher education institutions such as universities. Despite differences of setting, all teaching professionals share a common reliance on continuous social interaction as a core component of their roles. These roles are inherently complex, relying on social interactions and exposing workers to cognitive and emotional stressors. As a result of the unique combination of social, emotional and intellectual demands, the nature of work in the education sector differs significantly from that of many other professions. Hence, generalised approaches from other sectors are insufficient to effectively address all relevant job demands of the education sector.

EU-OSHA (2022a) highlights that the levels of exposure to PSRs can vary markedly between workplaces and even among different employers within the same institution, mirroring unique organisational cultures and the specific demands placed on staff. A growing body of literature identifies several **cross-cutting drivers** that shape these inter- and intra-institutional differences. The factors include digitalisation and technological integration, demographic shifts and workforce diversity, institution size and governance models, and funding mechanisms (public versus private).

In the context of this study, the authors have adopted the categorisation of PSRs derived from COPSOQ III (Burr et al., 2019). While the framework takes inspiration from COPSOQ III and retains

many of its core categories, it has been adapted to account for the specific PSRs in the education sector (see Table 1). Furthermore, a new category, 'other risk factors', has been added to include exposure to environmental and ergonomic risk factors, which can have negative consequences on education professionals' health and well-being. Additional minor changes include grouping and adding new categories to better reflect the PSRs faced by education professionals.

Table 1: Categorisation of PSRs in the education sector

Main PSR category	Specific risks in the education sector
Demands at work	- Quantitative demands (e.g. workload and time constraints) - Cognitive demands - Emotional demands (emotional labour)
Work organisation and job content	- Influence at work (autonomy) - Characteristics of teaching institution - Lack of possibilities for development and career progression
Interpersonal relationships and leadership support	- Poor relationships with colleagues - Lack of support from supervisors (e.g. school principals) - Poor perceived societal recognition
Work–individual interference	- Work arrangements and job insecurity - Work–life imbalances
Conflict and offensive behaviour	- Physical violence - Non-physical violence (e.g. bullying, cyberbullying, threats)
Other risk factors	- Ergonomic factors - Environmental factors - Unsafe noise levels

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on EU-OSHA (2022a) – ESENER survey

It is worth noting that most subcategories of PSRs are intertwined and could fit in other categories. For instance, 'excessive workload' is primarily placed under 'demands at work', but it is also linked to 'work–individual interference' if workload leads to difficulty in balancing professional and personal life (Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012). The overlap means that some findings may reflect the combined effects of multiple exposures rather than isolated risks, which should be considered when interpreting the results.

When assessing psychosocial risk, it is important to recognise that many **PSR factors can function as either a demand or a resource**. For example, high levels of autonomy may serve as a resource, while low autonomy can act as a risk factor. Similarly, high levels of social support can be a resource, whereas low levels of support may pose a risk (EU-OSHA, 2022a). **JD–R theory** provides a useful framework for understanding the interaction between job demands and resources and their impact on employee well-being, motivation and performance (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti and Bakker, 2023). According to this theory, job demands – such as heavy workload, discipline issues, time pressure and poor working organisation – lead to strain and health impairment, while job resources – such as autonomy, opportunities for professional learning, and support – foster motivation, work engagement and well-being. In addition, personal resources are consistently associated with better employee outcomes and have been shown to mediate and moderate how job demands and job resources translate into engagement, performance and well-being (Granziera et al., 2021). JD–R theory also recognises two more effects: the 'buffering' and 'boosting' effects. The buffering effect refers to instances in which job resources buffer or lessen the impact of job demands on job strain (Bakker et al., 2005). For instance, Bakker et al. (2007) found that when 805 Finnish elementary, secondary and vocational school teachers (ISCED levels 3-4) reported high or positive ratings of supervisor support, organisational climate and innovativeness (job

resources), their perceptions of pupil misbehaviour had less of a harmful association with their work engagement. The boosting effect refers to instances in which challenging job demands strengthen the positive impact of job resources on work engagement.

3.3 Overview of psychosocial risks experienced by instructional personnel

3.3.1 Demands at work

Bakker and Demerouti (2007) noted that the interaction between job demands and job resources determines employee well-being since job resources buffer the impact of job demands on job stress. This occurs because when teachers have ample job resources, they can better meet their day-to-day job demands. The demands placed on teachers can be broadly categorised into quantitative demands, such as workload and time constraints; cognitive demands, involving the mental effort required to perform tasks; and emotional demands, which include managing emotionally charged situations and performing emotional labour.

▪ Quantitative demands

Balance of teaching and non-teaching responsibilities

The work of a teacher does not only involve tasks directly connected to delivering education. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that actually only half of teachers' working time is dedicated to teaching (OECD, 2019). Teachers' activities can be categorised into teaching-related workload and non-teaching-related workload. On the one hand, **teaching-related workload** involves planning and preparing lessons, organising and conducting classroom and group activities, work and test grading, and fostering the development of students' knowledge, skills and competences in line with the educational programme in which they participate. On the other hand, **non-teaching-related tasks** include administrative duties (such as paperwork, record-keeping, and compliance with legal and educational standards), reporting on student performance, participating in extracurricular activities, taking part in continuous professional development courses, and interacting with parents, students and other stakeholders (Eurydice, 2021).

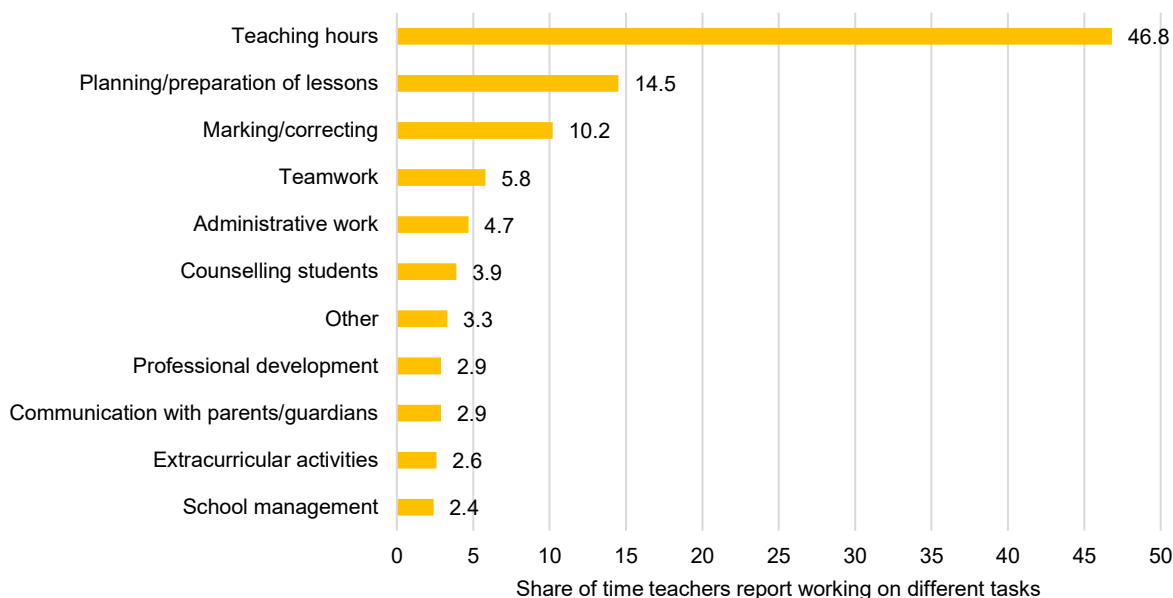
As emphasised in the interviews by one stakeholder representing teachers' interests, teaching hours have remained stable in recent years, but **administrative demands**, **communication with parents** and **digital workload** have sharply increased. In this regard, teachers are facing numerous requirements related to paperwork, record-keeping, and compliance with legal and educational standards. As a result, they often feel overwhelmed by administrative tasks, while their primary role should focus solely on teaching. Furthermore, teachers face expectations that extend well beyond classroom instruction, requiring constant vigilance over student welfare throughout the school day, even during scheduled breaks (Burns and Machin, 2013). Consulted stakeholders from two national professional unions noted that parents are often very demanding and may expect teachers to take on tasks that are typically carried out by other professionals, such as psychologists and social workers.

A study by Sanchis-Giménez et al. (2024) that looked at 169 Spanish teachers and 218 Mexican early-childhood, primary and secondary education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic found that both teaching and non-teaching responsibilities were associated with a higher risk of emotional exhaustion. Similarly, using data from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's 2015 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Toropova et al. (2021) found that increased workloads **reduced reported levels of job satisfaction**. The negative effects of non-teaching demands, such as administrative tasks, meetings and additional education-related responsibilities, often exceeded those linked to purely instructional activities. A study by Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014), using data from 1,878 teachers aged 45–65 (referred to in the study as 'senior' teachers), suggests that non-teaching workload is more strongly associated with unfavourable outcomes for teacher well-being.

As shown by data from TALIS 2018 (see Figure 4), 71.5 % of the workload of lower secondary teachers (ISCED level 2) is teaching-related, including teaching hours, lesson planning and preparation, and marking and correcting (OECD, 2019). During teaching hours, teachers report spending 78 % of classroom time on actual teaching and learning. The remaining time is divided between maintaining

order and discipline (13 %) and administrative tasks (8 %), such as recording attendance and distributing school information or forms.

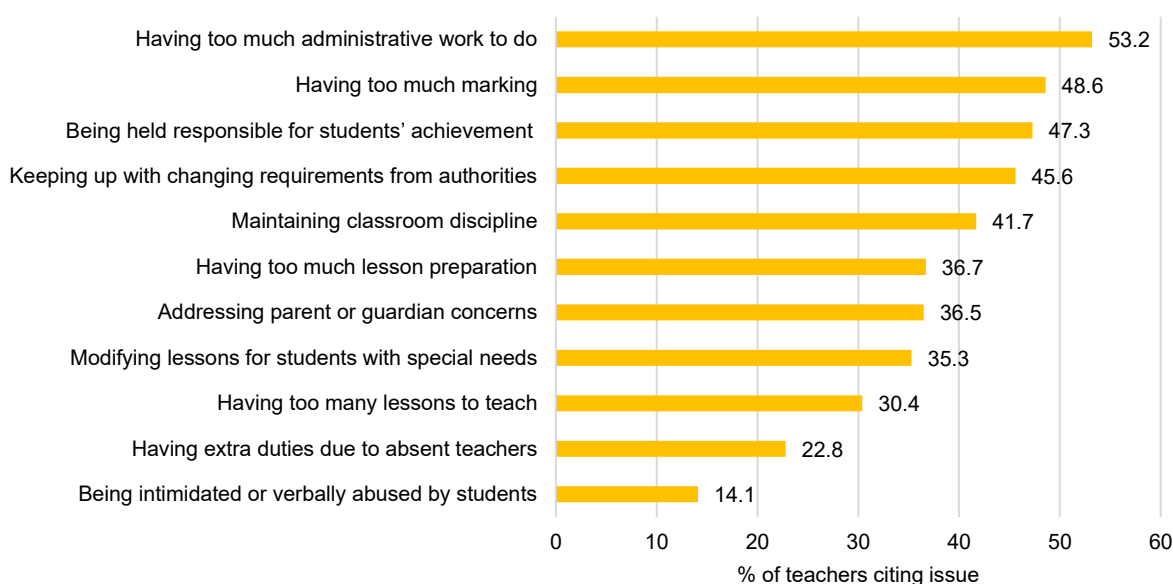
Figure 4: Proportion of time that lower secondary education teachers report spending on activities related to their job (2018)⁸



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on TALIS 2018

The TALIS survey also asked teachers to indicate the extent to which a predetermined list of issues could be considered a source of stress. Figure 5 shows that, at EU level, lower secondary teachers (ISCED level 2) list administrative work as their main source of stress. Moreover, the data reveal that three of the top four sources of stress (administrative work, responsibility for students' achievements, and requirements from authorities) are not directly linked with the core tasks of teaching. Teachers' tasks have become increasingly intensified in recent decades by the rising demands for accountability and standardisation, which limit teachers' flexibility and autonomy through rigid curricula and administrative tasks. In particular, administrative tasks have increasingly been recognised as significant stressors that contribute to job dissatisfaction (Ballet et al., 2006; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). One stakeholder consulted in this study, who represented the interests of teachers at EU level, noted that the normative context constantly evolves, exposing teachers to additional stress as they must keep up with changing rules and guidelines, distracting them from their core activities.

⁸ The figure is based on full-time teachers' answers to question 17 'Of this total, how many 60-minute hours did you spend on teaching at this school during your most recent complete calendar week?' and to question 18 'Approximately how many 60-minute hours did you spend on the following tasks during your most recent complete calendar week, in your job at this school?'.

Figure 5: Issues cited by lower secondary teachers as a source of 'quite a bit' or 'a lot' of stress (2018)

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on TALIS 2018

There is also a steadily growing demand for teachers to **contribute actively to matters beyond school**, such as preparing educational reforms and implementing teaching innovations (Eurydice, 2008). This is double-edged: on the one hand, it is important for teachers to participate in policy-making, as it contributes to their sense of empowerment and reinforces professional respect and autonomy; on the other hand, such involvement can further increase the burden of their non-teaching responsibilities and, most of the time, involves unpaid working hours. As a result, as noted by the three interviewed stakeholders who represented teachers at the European and national levels, teachers face pressure to multitask and meet tight deadlines, resulting in stress and a perception of failing to deliver effective results daily. This might prevent some teachers from supporting students as they would like.

Working hours

A revised contractual definition of their working time reflects the expanding scope of responsibilities and activities assigned to teachers. Experiencing high demand while having limited opportunities for control leads to significant **time pressure** and an **intensification of work** (Kivimäki, 2007). In fact, the ESENER (2019) results reveal that time pressure is more frequently reported in the education sector (49 %) than in the EU-27 average for other sectors (45 %). Similarly, according to the Danish National Working Environment Survey (DANES, 2018), with a sample of 76,770 individuals working in different sectors, the education sector ranked highest in terms of not having enough time to complete tasks.

Teachers are more likely to have higher stress levels if they work long hours (Eurydice, 2021). Prolonged work inhibits recovery processes, leading to **emotional and physical exhaustion** and stress-related health issues. A study of 6,109 full-time teachers in Germany found that 36 % exceeded the 48-hour weekly limit set by European guidelines, with 15 % working over 55 hours. Teachers working over 45 hours per week reported higher rates of recovery issues (46 %) and emotional exhaustion (32 %) than those working under 40 hours (26 % and 22 %, respectively) (Kreuzfeld et al., 2022).

Workload and performance expectations

In a qualitative study of 30 early-childhood education and primary school (ISCED level 1) teachers in Norway, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) found that most participants reported experiencing significant stress because of workload and time pressures. The teachers described their workdays as 'hectic', leaving little time for recovery in the form of detachment and relaxation. Most teachers faced an overwhelming accumulation of tasks, with too many responsibilities to handle within the limited time available.

While the literature emphasises the negative effects of work intensification, different authors stress that it may also have positive effects. For example, some teachers look for further training or collaborative lesson planning as coping strategies that may result in re-skilling or re-professionalisation (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009). Job resources can buffer the negative impact of job demands on burnout (Bakker et al., 2005).

In higher education, the pressure to meet **high expectations in academia** is a significant contributor to poor mental health and well-being among researchers (Nicholls et al., 2022). For example, a study of 391 Dutch PhD candidates (who can be teaching/research assistants) found that 25 % felt they lacked sufficient time for work. In contrast, nearly 45 % reported the normalisation of overwork within their scientific environments (Kis et al., 2022). Furthermore, 18 % and 19 % of respondents, respectively, reported a lack of support and insufficient supervision. Data show that 54 % noted questionable research practices, such as failing to report flaws, omitting methods, or engaging in selective citing. Consequently, 10 % of respondents frequently considered quitting their jobs, and 18 % contemplated leaving academia altogether (Kis et al., 2022).

Differences in teachers' workload might be related to the **subject taught**. A study of 6,491 Italian secondary school teachers found that science teachers showed, on average, a greater level of satisfaction with their profession than other subject groups (e.g. humanities). In contrast, satisfaction with the working environment appeared to be higher for teachers of subjects outside of core humanities and maths–science curricula (Barbieri et al., 2019). Teles et al. (2020) found that among the 7.9 % of higher education teachers (41 out of 520) suffering from burnout, 39 % worked in social sciences, 24.4 % in technological sciences, 19.5 % in health sciences, 14.6 % in arts and humanities, and 2.4 % in other areas. Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021) conducted another study of 4,567 Finnish primary school teachers that distinguished between class teachers and subject teachers. Subject teachers were divided into four subgroups by subject category: languages, science and mathematics, humanities, and arts, crafts and physical education. Their results indicated that subject teachers reported a higher prevalence of overall burnout (26 %) than class teachers (21 %). Additionally, among subject teachers, burnout levels were found to vary by specialisation, with teachers of languages and humanities/arts reporting the highest rates.

▪ Cognitive demands

Cognitive demands are external job factors that influence performance and learning. When cognitive demands are high, individuals have to process large amounts of information, affecting their ability to learn and perform effectively. These demands relate to tasks that require workers to use their cognitive abilities extensively, such as **managing multiple tasks simultaneously, remembering large amounts of information, or generating new ideas** (Burr et al., 2019). Additional cognitive demands may arise from changing job requirements, such as new subject content or curriculum updates. Pimenta et al. (2023), who studied 340 British and Portuguese lower and upper secondary teachers (ISCED levels 2–3), revealed that cognitive demands were reported as the leading risk factor by 89.7 % of respondents, followed by emotional demands (80.6 %), and quantitative demands (72.9 %).

Updated and personalised curricula

Unlike a one-off disruption, curriculum updates are often continuous or recurring, requiring teachers to learn new content and realign their teaching approaches to updated curriculum standards and learning objectives. Furthermore, teachers face high cognitive demands in their continuous efforts to **adapt to the diverse needs of individual students**, manage attention among those exhibiting challenging behaviours, and identify effective strategies to support struggling learners (i.e. students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or students with moderate-to-severe intellectual disabilities).

Digitalisation of education and the rise of artificial intelligence

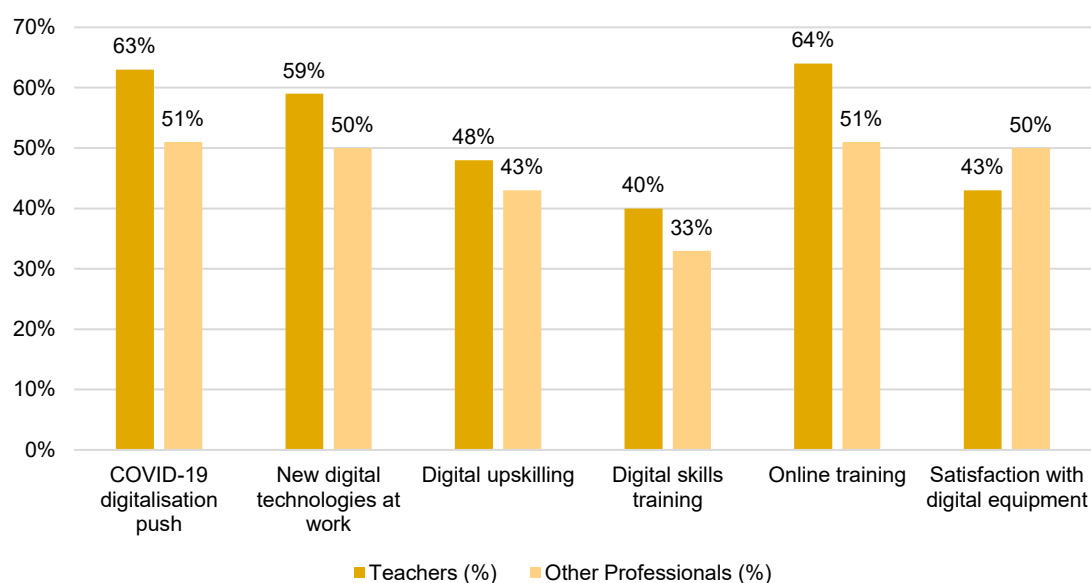
The rapid digitalisation of education – driven partly by the COVID-19 pandemic – has put additional cognitive demands on teachers, requiring them to acquire new skills to navigate the digital world. The new skills include **managing virtual classrooms, keeping students' attention online, addressing technical issues, preparing digital resources, and managing classrooms in hybrid settings**. The ESENER (2019) findings show that the education sector uses more digital technology than other sectors. This trend reflects a broader societal shift to digital tools and communication, posing OSH challenges beyond the pandemic context.

Many educators are required not only to teach but also to provide resources digitally, operate online platforms effectively, and constantly update their knowledge on the latest technological tools (Souto et al., 2018). At the start of the pandemic and in its aftermath, teachers had to integrate these digital resources into their teaching, often learning how to use new platforms quickly. Nonetheless, an important digital transformation in the education sector was already underway before the pandemic (OECD, 2023). This shift significantly increased cognitive demands on teachers, as they balanced traditional teaching with new technologies. Cedefop's 2022 European skills and jobs survey (ESJS2) found that 63 % of teaching professionals⁹ had to learn new digital technologies for their job post-pandemic, and 64 % invested in more digital skills development, through online learning, than other professionals across the EU (**Error! Reference source not found.**). In addition, a study by Szabó et al. (2021) of 769 Hungarian primary and secondary classroom teachers (ISCED levels 1–3) found that more than 70 % of the participants were found to have set digital assignments either never or rarely before the pandemic.

Under certain circumstances, such as when technologies are incompatible, the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) can cause **technostress**, a phenomenon whereby digital devices or their usage become overwhelming and stressful (Willermark et al., 2023). Notably, during the pandemic, teachers were forced to go beyond traditional conventional teaching methods, and it has been argued that this caused stress and excessive workload (Pavlovaite and Hallissy, 2021; Szabó et al., 2021; Mahmood et al., 2023).

A survey of 70 teachers by the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) found that around 50–60 % of respondents considered **digital skills** to be partially covered in personnel standard frameworks, initial training and continuous professional development (Pavlovaite and Hallissy, 2021). These findings suggest that a parallel increase in digital upskilling resources and activities among teachers accompanied the sharp rise in digital skills requirements.

Figure 6. New digital technologies and upskilling of teaching professionals (2022)



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Cedefop's ESJS2 (2022)

In a study of 200 Dutch teachers, van der Spoel et al. (2020) found that 12 % initially feared that they lacked the skills for online teaching; however, their fear subsided as they gained experience. The study also revealed that Dutch teachers intended to integrate technology more into their teaching once in-person classes went back to normal, by using technologies for formative testing, feedback, and active and collaborative learning. Negative aspects identified during the study included increased time pressure

⁹ Including university and higher education teachers, vocational education teachers, secondary education teachers, primary school and early-childhood teachers, special needs teachers, and other teachers.

and difficulty in monitoring students' well-being and online learning processes. However, a study of 3,250 German teachers revealed a paradox: those with prior ICT experience reported higher stress levels and exhaustion, as they were frequently called upon to assist colleagues or resolve technical issues (Stang-Rabrig et al., 2022). Hence, while digitalisation enabled education to continue during the pandemic, it came at a cost, since teachers reported a decrease in teaching quality regarding cognitive activation, classroom management and learning support compared to pre-pandemic norms (Sacré et al., 2023). For further details on the extensive changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, see Section 3.5 – Societal trends and recent disruptors.

Findings from Ferreira-Santos (2022) support that the **ageing of the teaching workforce poses significant challenges to the profession's digital transformation**. However, the study also suggests that effective ICT-focused training programmes can be useful tools to overcome these limitations.

EU-OSHA (2024) on **artificial intelligence (AI)** and education highlights that, while offering some workload relief through automation, AI impacts teachers by increasing workload, causing cognitive overload and posing psychosocial risks. AI-based technologies offer increased flexibility for teachers and raise expectations regarding their technical, didactic and social capabilities. The integration of tools like learning analytics adds further complexity, requiring not only technological proficiency, but also sound pedagogical and ethical judgement. With the emergence of generative AI, especially tools like ChatGPT, teachers now face a new layer of uncertainty, as they must interpret AI-generated content and explain its origins (EU-OSHA, 2024).

Along the same lines, one of the interviewed stakeholders (representing the interests of teachers at EU level) emphasised that the introduction of new technologies in the sector and the use of AI may be an additional source of stress for teachers, who feel that their students might be better able to manage the tools than they are. Although the introduction of such technologies is meant to make some tasks easier, teachers – particularly those of older generations – may not be sufficiently skilled first to use and then to teach the tools, with training often being inadequate or entirely lacking.

The same stakeholder also mentioned that there is some fear that AI teachers might prove to be better than real ones and could even replace them one day. Chan et al. (2023) conducted a study interviewing teachers in eight universities in Hong Kong and found that some teachers and students foresaw the possibility that **generative AI technologies could replace teachers' roles**, with one teacher stating, 'I'd like to see if AI can teach students like a human'. Similarly, the stakeholder reported that training on handling the risks associated with new technologies is also missing. As a result, some teachers may attempt to learn how to use the tools independently during their free time, increasing the amount of unpaid time they devote to work and training. A systematic review by Simon and Zeng (2024) also supports the findings that teachers will spend part of their personal time learning new technologies if there is inadequate institutional support.

▪ Emotional demands

Until about two decades ago, most research primarily focused on quantitative job demands, with relatively little attention given to the emotional aspects of work. While emotional work is central to teaching, it is often an invisible component of the job (Sutton, 2004). However, in recent years, emotional demands have gained increasing attention as a predictor of impaired health outcomes (Niedhammer et al., 2021; Tuxford and Bradley, 2015). According to Eurofound (2017), the education sector has experienced the greatest increase in emotional demands since 2010, followed by the health sector, commerce and hospitality.

When analysing the significance of teachers' intense interpersonal roles, Tuxford and Bradley (2015) conceptualised emotional job demands and distinguished between three components: exposure to emotionally demanding situations, a requirement to engage in emotional labour, and meeting other people's emotional needs.

Exposure to emotionally demanding situations

Exposure to emotionally demanding situations represents significant psychosocial risk for teachers and has been found to contribute to increased emotional exhaustion (Arens and Morin, 2016; Kollerová et al., 2023; Tuxford and Bradley, 2015). The situations can include student misconduct, intervening in playground fights, dealing with medical emergencies, or lacking discipline and motivation. Moreover,

common classroom disturbances, such as interruptions, refusal to follow instructions, and actions that create a hostile environment, are frequently cited as important stressors (Eurydice, 2021).

Difficult students, particularly those who exhibit disruptive behaviour, are widely recognised as one of the most prevalent PSRs in education. According to the ESENER (2019) results, 76 % of employers and OSH managers in educational institutions across the EU-27 report that difficult students are the most significant OSH risk (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Similarly, TALIS 2018 data show that 40 % of teachers report disruptive student behaviour as a concern, while less than 60 % describe the classroom environment as 'pleasant'. Keeping the classroom in order is generally the biggest concern for new teachers and takes, on average, 13 % of their time. Nearly one third of teachers report losing quite a lot of time to behavioural problems or waiting for students to take their seats (OECD, 2019). Similarly, the data from a report (2022) of the ANPE professional union, most of whose members work in the field of public education, indicated that there have been increases in recent years in both disrespect for teaching staff and challenges in delivering lessons.

Research shows that teachers working in disruptive classrooms are more likely to have higher stress levels (Eurydice, 2021). A study conducted by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), who interviewed 30 teachers in elementary and middle schools and four retired teachers, all of whom taught in one region of Norway, found that most teachers identified student misbehaviour as a significant source of stress, with many considering it the most serious problem in schools. Disruptive behaviour makes teaching more difficult and drains teachers' energy, even when they successfully maintain discipline.

As noted by an interviewed stakeholder representing a national association, teachers who work in deprived areas of large cities often face particularly challenging situations, frequently serving as the last resort for disruptive students. In this context, another stakeholder who represented teachers at the national level shared that teachers are often not only responsible for delivering educational content, but also required to take on additional roles, such as those of psychologists, social workers and similar support figures. As a result, teachers are required to manage their relationships with students and regulate interactions among the students themselves (Lupton, 2004).

Moreover, as emphasised by a representative of teachers' interests at the national level, this situation is particularly evident for teachers in secondary education. Students at this level are adolescents, and the background conditions mentioned above may be even more challenging than in other contexts. Kidger et al. (2016) studied well-being and depressive symptoms in 55 teachers in English secondary schools and found that adolescents' mental health and broader school context created particularly demanding conditions for teachers and students alike, indicating more challenging background conditions for secondary education. García-Carmona et al. (2019) examined 45 studies from EU and non-EU countries on burnout in secondary school teachers and noted that the unique psychosocial dynamics and challenges of adolescent students (including emotional instability, academic stress, and disengagement) created challenging teaching environments that heighten teachers' stress and burnout risk. More specifically, the review highlighted that teaching adolescents involves managing intense emotional climates, disciplinary challenges, and students' academic and motivational struggles, all of which contribute to teachers' emotional exhaustion, cynicism and feelings of inefficacy.

Requirements to engage in emotional labour

Emotional labour involves regulating emotions and expressions to comply with implicit and/or explicit organisational rules. Two main emotional labour strategies are widely recognised: surface acting and deep acting (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting requires generating feelings that match work expectations – for example, a teacher feeling frustrated with a disruptive student might choose to empathise with the student's challenges. Conversely, surface acting involves faking or suppressing emotions to display the required emotion, without changing how one truly feels internally, such as 'putting on a happy face' to greet a difficult student (Sutton, 2004). Empirical evidence indicates that surface acting is more strongly associated with emotional exhaustion than deep acting, suggesting that pretending to feel an emotion can be more personally draining than genuinely experiencing that emotion (Karakus et al., 2024; Lee and Van Vlack, 2018; Tuxford and Bradley, 2015). Jasik-Ślęzak and Kasian (2019) highlight that special needs teachers must frequently engage in both surface and deep acting under heightened stakes: they must suppress personal distress when confronting students' medical crises while fostering genuine compassion in order to maintain trust.

In one interview, a national-level stakeholder reported that in secondary education, where most teachers are subject-specific and change classes every hour, the situation becomes even more demanding, because teachers can barely build **meaningful relationships with their students**. This is supported by the OECD (2021), which, based on TALIS 2018 data, states that secondary education teachers typically teach subject-specific classes and change classrooms frequently in contrast with primary education, where teachers often stay with the same group of students. In other words, the structural aspect of secondary education makes it more demanding in terms of building meaningful teacher–student relationships.

Meeting students' emotional needs

Meeting students' emotional needs can involve prioritising their educational progress and psychosocial well-being above teachers' own needs (Sutton, 2004). For instance, teachers are often required to provide emotional support to students by offering support during personal crises, such as family issues, bullying or academic stress. Nevertheless, meeting other people's emotional needs can lead to conflicts in how teachers manage their own responsibilities. A systematic review conducted by O'Farrell et al. (2023) highlighted the tension, revealing that while most teachers see delivering core subjects as their primary role, many feel uneasy about the growing expectation for them to address students' mental health needs, worrying that it detracts from their educational focus. Similarly, Shelemy et al. (2019) found that secondary school teachers (ISCED levels 2–3) in English state-funded schools saw themselves primarily as educators, focused on delivering academic content, and felt that the **increasing expectation to handle mental health challenges interfered with their core duties**. In this regard, stakeholders noted that teachers may experience stress when they cannot provide the support needed by students, which can affect them emotionally. Facing high expectations from both employers and parents, teachers may feel guilty when they cannot meet such demands, increasing the risk of work-related rumination outside of working hours.

Challenging situations may arise in schools with a high percentage of students from **migrant backgrounds**, which creates additional tasks related to their integration. In such contexts, teachers may also need to support students who have experienced trauma and they may lack the appropriate tools to do so. Sinkkonen and Kyttälä (2014) interviewed nine Finnish teachers and found that language was a barrier to fruitful interactions with migrant students. Furthermore, many supposedly good practices involved embedding Finnish language and cultural norms, which could prevent teachers from recognising the talents of migrant students. Teachers applied different tools to enhance classroom inclusion, such as joint lesson planning and co-teaching between mainstream teachers and specialist or language-support teachers, improving lesson quality and student progress monitoring. This approach, however, might add to a teacher's workload. As emphasised by one of the consulted stakeholders (representing the interests of the education sector at EU level), ongoing and future migration flows, influenced by geopolitical crises, will add further complexity to the socio-economic conditions within schools, intensifying challenges such as linguistic diversity, cultural integration and resource allocation.

Emotional demands can also arise from **relationships with parents**. Feeling mistrusted or facing difficult cooperation with parents may put serious strain on teachers, increasing anxiety and creating a feeling that one is not doing a good job. Research by Hyseni Duraku et al. (2022), who looked at a sample of 460 early education teachers in Kosovo, highlights that positive parental cooperation is associated with increased job satisfaction by early-childhood education teachers (ISCED level 1). The lack of cooperation, however, may result in lower self-efficacy and a need for self-protection, with serious consequences for teachers' attitudes and work morale (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009; Stoeber and Rennert, 2008). As noted by one stakeholder representing the interests of teachers at the national level, parents today can be highly demanding, often placing the **blame on teachers when students fail to attain expected results**. A study that conducted 13 focus groups with students in years 9 and 10 and with parents and teachers from three diverse New Zealand secondary schools found that parents today are more likely to externalise blame onto teachers, viewing them as primarily responsible for students' failures rather than considering home-based factors or student accountability (Peterson et al., 2011).

The same interviewee stressed that a growing concern is public criticism from parents, particularly through digital platforms: while in the past, feedback was more private, now it might be shared publicly on social media or other platforms, adding a new layer of stress. Another EU-level stakeholder noted that parents may not share the same language as teachers or may have different cultural backgrounds, which adds a challenge to **building the trust and relationship** that should exist between parents and

teachers. Research on families with linguistic backgrounds other than the school's language of instruction has shown that when parents are not fluent in the language of the school, they suffer exclusion from decision-making, and they refrain from private or public participation. This gap weakens trust between educators and parents (Baxter and Kilderry, 2024).

3.3.2 Work organisation and job content

This PSR category focuses on organisational issues, exploring teachers' autonomy and influence over their work, the characteristics of teaching institutions, opportunities for professional development, and the changes in work organisation that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditionally, the teaching profession has been associated with a high degree of autonomy, as teachers are largely free to organise their own tasks. However, the increasing number of non-teaching tasks, along with other organisational challenges and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, may have driven greater coordination and complexity in work organisation, potentially diminishing teachers' sense of autonomy and influence over their work (EU-OSHA, 2022a).

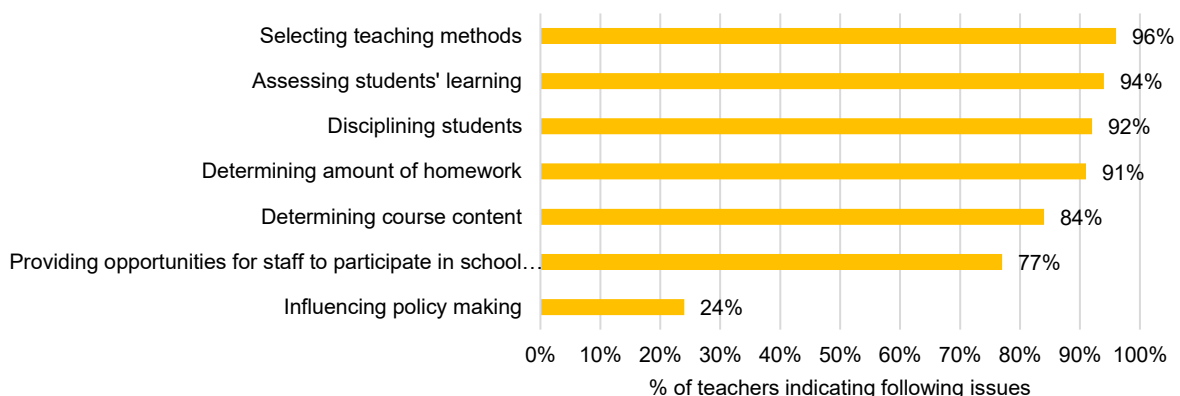
▪ Influence at work (autonomy)

A critical prerequisite for teachers' leadership is having the autonomy necessary to carry out their work (Johnson and Donaldson, 2007). Teachers' autonomy is related to their feelings of control over determining course content, selecting teaching methods, assessing students' learning, disciplining students, and determining the amount of homework to be assigned (OECD, 2020). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) surveyed 2,569 elementary and middle school teachers (ISCED levels 1–2) across 127 Norwegian schools to study the relationship between autonomy and teachers' well-being. The study defined perceived autonomy as freedom to select goals, instructional methods and strategies that are aligned with teachers' personal educational beliefs and values. The study showed that **perceived autonomy strongly predicts engagement and satisfaction** ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < .001$). An earlier study of 523 senior high school teachers (ISCED level 3) by the same authors found that limited autonomy, by contrast, often forces educators to adopt teaching methods and work towards goals they do not believe in or that would not be their personal priority (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009).

Autonomy over own work

Teachers who experience more autonomy in their work are more likely to indicate lower stress levels (Eurydice, 2021), as well as lower levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation and higher levels of personal accomplishment (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009, 2010). As can be observed in Figure 7, perceived autonomy and sense of control at the classroom level remain relatively high among teachers. Data from TALIS 2018 show that 96 % of primary and lower secondary teachers report having control over **selecting teaching methods**, 94 % over **assessing students' learning**, 92 % over **disciplining students**, 91 % over determining the **amount of homework to be assigned**, and 84 % over determining **course content** (OECD, 2020). Such levels of professional autonomy are likely to contribute positively to teachers' job satisfaction.

Figure 7: Autonomy in the workplace among primary and lower secondary teachers (2018)



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on TALIS 2018

In addition, empirical evidence from 226 mathematics teachers in German secondary schools indicates that teachers' sense of control over various activities at school (e.g. what class to teach) can buffer against stress and enhance job satisfaction (Jentsch et al., 2023).

Research conducted applying JD–R theory examined 954 British teachers, drawn from a nationally representative survey, to evaluate how specific job characteristics relate to educators' subjective well-being (Ostermeier et al., 2023). Using validated scales to assess job resources (e.g. autonomy and social support) and demands (e.g. workload), the study found that teacher autonomy emerged as an important resource, uniquely predicting higher job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$) and greater positive affect, while simultaneously buffering the impact of excessive workload on negative affect (interaction $\beta = -0.15$, $p = .02$) (Ostermeier et al., 2023). Therefore, autonomy improves job satisfaction and positive feelings, and reduces the negative impact of a heavy workload on teachers' emotions.

Moreover, the growing focus on accountability and standardisation has imposed rigid curricula and administrative tasks on teachers (see 3.3.1 Demand at work – cognitive demands), potentially limiting their flexibility and autonomy. Qualitative research conducted by Salokangas et al. (2020) with Irish and Finnish primary and secondary school teachers found that **intensifying external control** significantly undermined teachers' autonomy and contributed to role overload. External control from state agencies could include emphasis on measurable outcomes through **high-stakes assessments and targets** for student performance, **frequent inspections by the national inspectorate** or the imposition of **external marking procedures**, whereby student work must be graded by external examiners rather than by teachers themselves, reducing teachers' professional discretion. These findings were also highlighted by one interviewed stakeholder representing the national interests of teachers, who mentioned that these varied accountability mechanisms have led teachers to perceive a decrease in their professional autonomy. The constraints have resulted in teachers facing greater responsibilities for their work and less control over how they choose to work.

Autonomy over broader environment

Evidence suggests that teachers show relatively high interest in shaping their working environments compared to other professions, though opportunities remain limited (OECD, 2020). While it may not be traditionally expected that teachers engage in governance or policy decision-making, involvement in such processes is increasingly recognised as part of distributed leadership and **professional empowerment**. Only a small fraction of teachers report actively engaging in professional collaboration (Nilsson Bordén, 2022), while the majority indicate limited involvement in shaping educational policy. As mentioned in the cited study, such involvement can increase teachers' sense of agency and extend their autonomy beyond instructional tasks. However, it also carries a paradox: the same activities that promote empowerment can simultaneously heighten workload and introduce new stressors if not accompanied by adequate support or reduced teaching demands.

A study by Darmody and Smyth (2016) drew on a nationally representative sample of 898 primary school principals in Ireland, using multivariate analysis to explore factors that influence both job satisfaction and occupational stress. The findings showed that allowing teachers to co-decide how work is organised can induce **job satisfaction** and a **sense of ownership**. Nonetheless, participation in school policy-making can also increase the feeling of being overburdened, which creates considerable challenges for teachers. According to the JD–R model, job demands (e.g. administrative workload and participatory decision-making) act as stressors, while job resources (e.g. autonomy and support) can increase engagement and job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024). Based on the findings from the 2016 study, principals who combined teaching duties with leadership roles reported higher stress yet could still derive personal fulfilment from participating in decision-making when resources (administrative support and collegial climate) were adequate.

▪ Characteristics of teaching institutions

Class size

The literature points to a direct link between the characteristics of teaching institutions and teachers' PSRs. The attractiveness of the teaching profession is influenced not only by salary levels but also by working conditions, with class size being a key factor in shaping conditions (OECD, 2024). A 2025 cross-national analysis of 46 countries by Eryilmaz et al. (2025) demonstrates that teachers in schools with smaller average class sizes report significantly higher job satisfaction and lower stress levels, even after controlling for salary and student socio-economic background. **Crowded classrooms create a**

stressful environment for teachers, since they cannot get to know all students and care for them individually, often leading to reduced academic goals, as confirmed by the consulted stakeholders. Consequently, research indicates that larger class sizes are related to higher levels of burnout, emotional exhaustion and depression, and lower levels of personal accomplishment (Hindman and Bustamante, 2019; Pietarinen et al., 2013; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021). Eurostat (2025a) reports that in the EU, there are, on average, 13.4 pupils per teacher in primary education (ISCED level 1). For secondary education, the pupil–teacher ratio at lower secondary (ISCED level 2) is 11.6 pupils per teacher on average, while the ratio at upper secondary (ISCED level 3) is slightly lower at 11.2 pupils per teacher.

Size of education establishment

The identification of PSRs varies depending on the size of the educational establishment, which, in turn, has implications for teacher burnout and stress levels. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) found that primary and lower secondary teachers (ISCED levels 1–2) perceive higher cognitive and emotional support levels in small schools. In addition, higher levels of teacher job satisfaction are found at smaller schools without resourcing problems (Gil-Flores, 2017). Similarly, a study involving 2,310 Finnish primary classroom teachers (including special education teachers) revealed that teachers working in **small schools reported fewer burnout symptoms than those working in medium or large schools** (Pietarinen et al., 2013). On the other hand, in terms of risk assessment, medium and large centres tend to be more aware of psychosocial, physical and chemical risks than smaller establishments, which often lack the resources, expertise or time necessary for comprehensive risk assessment (EU-OSHA, 2022a).

Multi-grade teaching

A study based on data from Growing Up Ireland found that primary school teachers who taught multi-grade classes (often found in rural schools) reported higher stress levels (Darmody and Smyth, 2011). From a sample of 2,000 teachers, 53 % of multi-grade teachers reported feelings of stress compared to 41 % of single-grade teachers. The study highlighted that while **multi-grade teaching increased stress levels**, it did not affect overall job satisfaction levels.

School location

In terms of teachers' work environment, a key consideration is the distinction between rural, urban and city schools. A study by Burns and Machin (2013) examined the relationship between individual and workplace characteristics and the effects on teacher and school well-being outcomes among 250 Norwegian teachers at lower and upper secondary levels (ISCED levels 2–3). The study showed that rural teachers reported working in **smaller classes**, as well as **higher levels of curriculum coordination, professional interaction and role clarity**, than teachers in urban schools (Burns and Machin, 2013). In addition, in many countries and territories participating in TALIS, decision-making in rural schools is more distributed than it is in city schools (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, according to Echazarra and Radinger (2019), teachers in rural schools generally reported higher levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts in urban schools. This could be attributed to various benefits of teaching in rural areas, such as smaller class sizes and a lower administrative burden. Evidence from Spain across two different schools (25 preschool and primary school teachers) demonstrates that rural teachers have better autonomic stress control and lower sympathetic modulation (i.e. heart rate variability) than their urban counterparts (Mendoza-Castejon et al., 2020).

In contrast, urban and city schools tend to have larger classes and serve students from more socio-culturally diverse and high-need backgrounds. As observed by one EU-level stakeholder who was interviewed, teachers in such contexts might need to adapt their methods to meet the needs of students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Such factors, together with the **rising cost of living in large cities**, make it increasingly difficult to find teachers in these areas, as noted by another stakeholder who represented teachers at the national level. In many EU countries, teacher supply issues are particularly acute in cities, where high housing costs and financial insecurity make it difficult for young professionals to settle. As a result, many young teachers are moving to rural areas, where living costs are lower. A systematic review by See et al. (2023) found that the high cost of living and the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils in some large cities (such as Brussels and London) reportedly made it **difficult to attract and retain teachers**. This can be compared with the evidence from Eurydice (2023), which reports that teacher shortages may not affect all schools within a country. In this regard, another EU-level stakeholder mentioned during the interviews that while schools facing the most significant

challenges tend to have fewer and less motivated teachers, these are precisely the schools where the support of more teachers and more motivated teachers could have a significantly greater impact.

School funding model

Private and public schools show mixed evidence regarding teachers' exposure to PSRs, with no clear consensus on the effect of school funding type. Pimenta et al. (2023) conducted a study that compared public and private schools in England and Portugal. The sample included 340 teachers, half from public and half from private schools, following the English and Portuguese curricula. The study found that PSRs tended to be more prevalent in private institutions. The authors argue that private school teachers from Portuguese lower and upper secondary schools (ISCED levels 2–3) often have **more coursework to cover**, as well as **extended duties, including covering lessons, exam invigilation and longer shifts**, leading to an increased workload outside of normal classroom teaching. In contrast, public school teachers have their contact time with pupils and then free periods to allocate to additional tasks. Based on over 14,000 responses to a National Education Union (NEU) survey of teachers in both private and public sectors in the United Kingdom, private school teachers reported a 25 % higher average weekly workload than their public school peers (12.5 h versus 10.0 h). The study also shows that **labour insecurity** (i.e. contract instability) was 1.8 times more prevalent in private institutions (95 % CI = [1.2–2.7]) (PEPF, 2024). Similarly, a study by Papanastasiou and Zembylas (2005) that looked at a sample of 347 early-childhood education teachers from Cyprus (ISCED level 0) found that private sector teachers reported **lower satisfaction with their working hours**, salary and supervision than their public sector counterparts.

Contrarily, research conducted in Portugal by Lopes and Oliveira (2020), using data from the TALIS 2013 survey, indicated that lower secondary classroom teachers in private schools (ISCED level 2) reported higher job satisfaction levels than their counterparts in public schools. The difference may be a result of the greater autonomy of private schools, where institutions can select students and teachers, and establish their own disciplinary rules. Additionally, based on data from the TALIS 2018 survey, private school teachers spend **more time on actual teaching** and learning than public school teachers (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, a collaborative school culture characterised by mutual support was significantly stronger in private schools than in public ones (OECD, 2020). A Greek study of 297 primary school teachers and 142 physical education (PE) teachers who worked at 186 minority schools (i.e. privately funded)¹⁰ and 253 public schools in Thrace showed that PE teachers who worked in private schools exhibited greater job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout than their public sector counterparts. The latter often stressed the **lack of proper equipment and facilities** as an impediment to teaching quality (Vousiopoulos et al., 2019). Moreover, Ferreira and Martinez (2012), in a study of 281 Portuguese primary school teachers (ISCED level 1), found that public school teachers exhibited higher levels of both burnout and presenteeism – defined as productivity losses due to physical and psychological issues while at work compared to private school teachers. While private school teachers often face greater workload and contract insecurity, they may benefit from enhanced autonomy, collaborative culture and lower rates of burnout in certain contexts.

▪ Possibilities for career development and progression

Lifelong learning is recognised as important to all workers, especially to those working in professions that transmit knowledge and facilitate learning (Eurydice, 2021). There is a distinction between 'professional development' and 'career development'. Professional development focuses on improving teachers' skills, knowledge and expertise to adapt to changing job requirements, such as new subject content or curriculum updates. In contrast, career development is unique to each individual and shaped by personal ambitions, goals and external factors like family commitments, available opportunities and support (European Commission, 2020).

Professional development

One of the OECD (2019) conclusions based on the TALIS 2018 survey is that it is important to have mechanisms and incentives in place to foster participation in professional development. Toropova et al. (2021) stressed the role of professional development not only in enhancing instructional quality, but also as a factor in promoting teacher retention through raising job satisfaction.

¹⁰ Minority schools in Greece are educational institutions primarily for the Muslim minority in the region of Thrace.

Data from TALIS 2018 show that **92.5 % of lower secondary teachers in EU countries attended at least one type of professional development activity** in the 12 months prior to the survey (OECD, 2020). Although *Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future* (2020/C 193/04), emphasise professional development activities based on collaboration, peer observation and peer learning, teachers report the highest participation in 'information-based' activities. These tend to offer fewer opportunities for meaningful interaction, with teachers often taking a more passive role (Eurydice, 2021). Lower levels of participation in peer-based and collaborative modern-type professional development activities were reported: 37.9 % of teachers reported engaging in peer and/or self-observation and coaching; 31.4 % in professional network activities; and 19.8 % in observation visits to other schools, while only 12.9 % took part in visits to business premises, public organisations or non-governmental organisations as part of their professional development (OECD, 2020). In addition, around half of the teachers participating in TALIS 2018 reported that participation in **professional development was restricted by schedule conflicts and a lack of incentives to engage in such activities**.

OECD (2020) research shows that time constraints (54 %), financial costs (45 %) and a lack of family time (37 %) are among the most cited barriers to prevent teachers from accessing continuing professional learning opportunities. A quantitative study of 367 primary school teachers in Slovenia found that teachers recognise themselves as primarily responsible for their own professional development, which requires the cooperation of school principals (Moretti et al., 2013). Respondents in the study identified additional training and education, along with factors related to student success and parent satisfaction, as the most critical steps for their professional development. Education legislation and insufficient professional development were seen as having a negative impact on teaching outcomes.

Career progression

Teaching offers limited structured opportunities for career growth compared to other professions. During the interviews conducted for this study, representatives from the European education sector shared that teachers often **remain in the same position for their entire careers**, with little opportunity for advancement, making the profession less attractive to new candidates. The European Commission (2020) also supported these findings. Teaching is not necessarily associated with the idea of having a varied career, and the career structure is relatively flat, making it less attractive to young people entering the job market (European Parliament, 2020). In this regard, the dominant image tends to be that of a teacher delivering the same material year after year to different groups of students, reinforcing the perception of a static and repetitive career path (European Commission, 2020) and further diminishing the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Moreover, public school teachers are often geographically limited by pension and certification systems, making mobility difficult (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022). However, higher education teachers may have more career opportunities beyond teaching, including research publication and institutional leadership, although the opportunities come with additional job demands and stressors.

3.3.3 Interpersonal relationships and leadership support

Interpersonal relationships are at the heart of teachers' work, fundamentally influencing both their day-to-day experiences and their overall job satisfaction. These relationships for teachers span various levels within the education ecosystem, featuring interactions with colleagues, supervisors and the broader societal context, including how teachers are recognised and valued by the broader community.

Teachers rely on three main social groups to provide complementary support within their work context: school principals can provide positive and supportive working environments; colleagues can support each other, work together, and moderate stress and the demands of professional life; and students may give meaning to the teaching profession and reward teachers' work (Hascher and Waber, 2021). However, it is worth noting that these professional relationships can operate as double-edged swords since they are the most important sources of positive job outcomes (e.g. satisfaction and motivation) and negative job outcomes (e.g. stress and burnout) (Kelchtermans, 2017).

▪ Relationships with colleagues

Positive and supportive relationships are associated with teachers' collective efficacy,¹¹ serving as both a prerequisite for and an outcome of shared values and adaptive collaboration (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2019, 2021).

Teacher support and cooperation

A study by Olsen and Huang (2019) examined data from the restricted 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) drawing on an analytical sample of 30,670 teachers from 6,620 public schools in the United States. The study found that the **strongest predictors of teacher job satisfaction** were the perceived support of school principals ($\beta = 0.57$) and teacher cooperation ($\beta = 0.20$). In a European context, the study by Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014), which used data from 1,878 teachers aged 45–65 (referred to in the study as 'senior' teachers), suggests that positive relationships with colleagues significantly diminished the impact of high workloads on emotional exhaustion. Similarly, a Finnish study by Pyhältö et al. (2015) examined how collegial support, a professional climate and problem-solving capacities function as job resources to buffer the effects of teacher-targeted bullying on emotional exhaustion. Drawing on a sample of 45 in-service Finnish comprehensive school teachers, the study found that teachers who reported high collegial support (e.g. mutual feedback and shared problem-solving), a constructive school climate (e.g. open dialogue and trust in autonomy) and collective problem-solving routines were negatively associated with both teacher-targeted bullying and emotional exhaustion, suggesting that these job resources inhibit (i.e. reduce) the prevalence of bullying and exhaustion.¹²

A systematic review conducted by Vangrieken et al. (2015) found that teacher collaboration is necessary to develop innovative ideas, increase self-efficacy and motivation, reduce workload, create opportunities for mutual learning, and reduce personal isolation. However, social support and collaboration among colleagues may be limited because the bulk of teachers' **work consists of working alone with their pupils** (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Eurofound (2020) reported that only half of teachers in the education sector receive regular support from managers and colleagues. Similarly, data from DANES (2018) revealed that the education sector lags significantly behind other sectors regarding workers receiving colleagues' support to achieve optimal outcomes. Along the same lines, a quantitative study of 517 Lithuanian secondary school teachers (ISCED level 2) by Bernotaite and Malinauskiene (2017) found that 59.6 % reported low levels of social support at work from both supervisors and co-workers. In higher education, Kosmützky and Krücken (2023) argued that increased competition for resources and reputation has led to a weakening of collegial bonds and the emergence of more strategic, individualistic orientations among academics.

The shift to online education during the pandemic likely contributed to declining professional relationships between colleagues. In the research conducted by Pavlovaite and Hallissy (2021), the loss of in-person social interactions with both colleagues and students was identified as the primary challenge of digitalisation in education. The **lack of face-to-face connection** may have weakened peer relationships, making collaboration and communication more difficult, potentially leading to isolation among educators.

Workplace bullying by colleagues

Victimisation through workplace bullying refers to a situation in which one or more employees are repeatedly targeted with aggressive acts at work over a long period, typically over 6 or 12 months or even longer (Kollerová et al., 2023). These aggressive behaviours can include insults, humiliation, exclusion, spreading rumours, intimidation or undermining a person's professional reputation. Unlike general interpersonal conflicts at work, workplace bullying is characterised by five specific features: frequent occurrences, negative social acts, a power imbalance between perpetrators and targets, the prolonged duration of negative behaviour, and a perception of harmful intent by the target (Baillien et al., 2017). With a sample of 740 teachers from Czechia, Kollerová et al. (2023) found that **victimisation through workplace bullying significantly contributed to teacher exhaustion and burnout**, because

¹¹ This term, which was introduced by Bandura (1997), denotes a group's shared belief in its joint capability to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment. In the education context, it is the shared conviction of a school's teaching staff that, by working together, they can influence student outcomes.

¹² The authors did not test or report moderation (interaction) effects. Instead, they identified these factors as direct inhibitors or protective correlates, not buffers that statistically moderate the relationship between bullying and exhaustion.

bullying experiences erode emotional and psychological resilience over time. A survey of 630 teachers and senior management teams in both primary and secondary schools across Ireland, conducted by the Anti-Bullying Centre at Dublin City University, found that over one third of teachers and senior management have been targets of bullying at least 'every now and then' by other teachers and staff members (DCU, 2022). The research also found that almost half of participants reported occasionally witnessing colleagues being bullied by other staff members, highlighting education as one of the sectors with the highest levels of workplace bullying. On average, 6 % of respondents reported enduring bullying at work either weekly or daily.

▪ Relationships with supervisors

A positive and supportive work environment is crucial for teachers, with the school principal playing a key role in fostering such conditions. As expressed by the stakeholders interviewed as part of this study (representing the interests of teachers at EU-level), **supervisors play a crucial role in shaping teachers' job experiences** through the support they provide and the extent to which they involve teachers in school policy decisions, which in turn influence teachers' sense of job autonomy (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009).

Support from supervisors and management

As the literature suggests, principals' support is a protective factor (Slišković et al., 2016) and has been consistently associated with teachers' job satisfaction (Crisci et al., 2019; Olsen and Huang, 2019). Their support is particularly important for less experienced professionals who often consider themselves outsiders, worry about their tenure and promotion, and have difficulty joining in the mainstream of school life (Crisci et al., 2019). Stakeholders (representing the interests of teachers at EU-level) observed that **younger teachers often lack adequate support** upon entering the profession, including having limited access to mentors and tutors who can guide them at the start of their careers. Data from TALIS 2018 reveal that only 15.8 % of novice teachers across the EU are assigned a mentor, highlighting a significant gap in the support provided to new educators (OECD, 2020). Moreover, the guidance of school principals is deemed essential, particularly at times of stress such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Schulze-Hagenest et al., 2023).

In situations where teachers are already stressed, low levels of supportive management are an important factor that contributes to negative emotions (Ostermeier et al., 2023). In a study that involved 266 mathematics teachers in German secondary schools, it was found that strong **administrative support**¹³ contributes to minimising teachers' stress levels, as long as administrative work entails transparency and follows clear frameworks on values, rules and social interaction at school (Jentsch et al., 2023). In a study of 475 Italian teachers, collegial support from co-workers and school management was identified as a protective factor, with support from school management significantly reducing perceived student-perpetrated violence (De Cordova et al., 2019). In the United States, McMahon et al. (2020) conducted a large-scale national survey on violence directed against teachers, drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 2,431 Pre-K–12 educators (ISCED levels 0–3).¹⁴ The study examined teachers' experience of violence and the role of administrators. It found that teachers often feel they do not receive the administrative support they need when responding to incidents of violence. As a result, teachers experience negative emotions, such as feeling blamed, unsafe or disempowered; difficulties addressing incidents with students, parents or perpetrators, including administrators acting as passive bystanders, taking sides or enforcing ineffective discipline; and systemic challenges, such as policy gaps, the escalation of issues and the involvement of external systems (McMahon et al., 2010).

Quality of leadership

However, it is not merely the management support that matters; the quality of leadership also plays a critical role. Research shows that leadership quality significantly impacts employee stress and well-being. A large meta-analytic review of studies concluded that leaders' positive and negative behaviours and their relationships with subordinates were significant determinants of stress outcomes in education professionals (Harms et al., 2017; Pletzer et al., 2024). Similarly, a systematic review found that leaders' high stress levels and poor affective well-being are associated with high stress levels among

¹³ Administrators are defined as the school-level leadership positions responsible for day-to-day operations and decisions affecting teachers, such as school principals or university deans.

¹⁴ Teachers, instructors and school staff who work with students from preschool (pre-kindergarten) to twelfth grade.

subordinates (Skakon et al., 2010). Equally, positive leadership behaviours, including **individual consideration and emotional support, are positively related to employee affective well-being and low stress levels** (Skakon et al., 2010). This was also supported by the interviewed stakeholders representing the interests of teachers at the national level, who stressed that teachers are influenced more positively by a collaborative culture within the school than by a top-down culture in which decisions are made primarily by school leaders or authorities without meaningful input from teachers. Such a top-down culture can also lead to feelings of intimidation among teachers.

A positive impact of leadership can be expected if leaders exhibit the ability to foster collaboration among teachers by establishing avenues for joint project engagement, allocating dedicated time for meetings and planning sessions, and acknowledging and recognising teachers' achievements (Panagopoulos et al., 2024). The Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) study, using data from 1,878 teachers aged 45–65 (referred to as 'senior' teachers), suggests that supervisors supported teachers by involving them in school policy-making and encouraging initiative, though this responsibility could lead to supervisors themselves becoming overburdened.

▪ Work recognition

The recognition of teachers' work, both internally (through a sense of personal fulfilment and usefulness) and externally (through societal value and respect), is critical for shaping their job satisfaction, engagement and motivation. While society may express general respect for teachers, everyday realities such as low pay, heavy workloads and limited recognition for their expertise can undermine this respect in practice, leading teachers to feel less valued than they are in theory (OECD, 2020).

Intrinsic recognition

The teaching profession has historically had a high vocational component. Jobs in the education sector are often characterised by a high degree of meaningfulness, because the core task is the education, learning and shaping of the next generation (EU-OSHA, 2022a). A study by Eurofound (2020) reported that **nearly a third of employees in the education sector felt they had lost some sense of meaning in their work**. This loss of meaning can significantly contribute to PSRs, as teachers' motivation and well-being are closely tied to their sense of purpose in the workplace. Despite the decline in perceived meaningfulness, education still ranks fourth in perceived job usefulness, following agriculture, construction and health (Eurofound, 2020).

According to interviewed stakeholders who represent the interests of teachers at the national level, teachers' societal respect and influence have declined over time. Teachers, once highly respected figures, now frequently face the questioning of their roles by parents. A review by Bilić (2023), which synthesises the existing literature on acts of aggression by parents, highlights that parents often shift responsibility onto teachers, seeing them as central actors in their child's failure, which fosters misunderstandings and high stress within the school environment. Another stakeholder, representing the interests of the education sector at EU level, noted that public recognition of teachers' work slightly improved during the pandemic, when parents observed online teaching and became more aware of the profession's demands.

Extrinsic recognition

In terms of broader societal perspectives, studies indicate that public attitudes toward the teaching profession are generally positive, with teaching typically regarded as a mid-level career (Dolton et al., 2018; Ingersoll and Collins, 2018; Smak and Walczak, 2017).

However, teachers also **lack the societal respect and influence** that other professions enjoy (García and Weiss, 2020). In a European School Education Platform survey involving 1,685 education professionals, 76 % considered teaching not to be a respected and valued profession in their country, while even more respondents (82 %) felt that teachers were not sufficiently appreciated for their work (ESEP, 2024). Similarly, based on TALIS 2018, teachers' own perception of the value and importance associated with their profession remains low, such that only 26% of teachers, on average, 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their profession is valued in society (OECD, 2020). The lowest figures were recorded in Slovakia, Slovenia and France, which all fell below 10%. This is a significant finding on its own, since even the perception of whether a profession is valued can affect the recruitment and retention of candidates in the profession (Schleicher, 2018). Two different stakeholders who represented national-level interests of teachers were interviewed for this study. There has been a marked loss of

societal recognition for the teaching profession, which feeds into stress of conscience¹⁵ when teachers feel their efforts go unnoticed despite heavy workloads.

Spruyt (2021) conducted a comprehensive study of 66,593 teachers across 25 EU and non-EU countries, finding that teachers often feel their **work is underappreciated in society**, despite public rhetoric about valuing education. The study demonstrates that 'PISA panic' and intense media campaigns in the wake of worsening outcomes on international assessments have led to teachers feeling that they are being held accountable for systemic problems, undermining their perceived societal appreciation.

One interviewee highlighted the misconception that if teachers are not physically present at school, they must not be working. Many teachers, however, prefer to complete preparation work at home, because schools often lack adequate spaces and quiet environments for such tasks, with multiple teachers frequently sharing the same room.

Other aspects also influence the recognition of work. For instance, the **formal acknowledgement of credentials** and skills plays a significant role. Fuller et al. (2013) conducted a large-scale study on the experiences of Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs) and found that primary and secondary school teachers enhanced their professional status when their skills were formally recognised, demonstrating that credentials play a significant role in shaping professional identities. Additionally, in higher education, the discrepancy between research and teaching status further complicates professional identity, as teaching is often perceived as secondary to research, receiving less recognition and lower status within academia (Benavides Martínez, 2020).

3.3.4 Work–individual interference

This section explores how work impacts teachers' lives. It focuses on job insecurity (uncertainty regarding employment and working conditions), job dissatisfaction, and work–individual imbalances and conflicts. Stakeholders who represented the views of the education sector at EU level highlighted that conditions often include long working hours that reduce personal time, limited benefits, low wages, and the prevalence of short-term or temporary contracts, all of which contribute to high stress and financial insecurity.

■ Employment conditions

Precarious employment in Europe has become an issue of policy concern, and the education sector is no exception. This is particularly the case in higher education, where teaching/research assistants face increasing difficulties, such as temporary employment contracts and the stagnation of public funding for research (Albayrak-Aydemir and Gleibs, 2023).

Job insecurity and contract types

Job insecurity is a significant component of precarious employment and varies by employment type. Teaching professionals can be subject to general employment legislation or special employment legislation that governs contractual relations in the public sector, with or without special protected status as civil servants.¹⁶ Those employed under special labour laws might have greater job security than those employed under general labour laws. Across the EU-27, fully qualified teachers are contracted as civil servants in 11 countries¹⁷ and as (non-civil servant) public employees in a further 5 countries.¹⁸ In 10 countries,¹⁹ all fully qualified teachers are employees with contracts subject to general employment legislation. In Luxembourg, teachers can be employed under different statuses²⁰ (Eurydice, 2021).

As for the types of contracts held by teachers across Europe, there are two basic variants: permanent contracts (i.e. contracts of indefinite duration) and fixed-term/temporary contracts (i.e. contracts of definite duration). Fixed-term contracts expire at a predetermined date, and their extension is uncertain.

¹⁵ Stress of conscience, adapted from healthcare and psychosocial research, can be defined as the stress experienced when teachers feel troubled by not being able to act in accordance with their moral or professional values.

¹⁶ A civil servant is a government employee who works in an official capacity within a country's civil service – that is, the permanent, professional branch of the public administration that operates independently of political or judicial offices. The term *civil servant* does not automatically equate to, for example, the Spanish *funcionario* or German *Beamter*, because these systems define public employment through distinct legal and institutional frameworks.

¹⁷ These are BE, DE, EL, ES, FR, CY, HU, MT, PT, SI and FI.

¹⁸ These are HR, IT, AT, PL and SK.

¹⁹ These are BG, CZ, DK, EE, IE, LV, LT, NL, RO and SE.

²⁰ Under legislation introduced to employ teachers from non-EU countries to work in public international schools.

Such contracts lead to reduced job security and generally more flexible working conditions. Across Europe, almost one in five teachers is employed on a **temporary contract**, and in some countries, such as Spain, Austria and Romania, more than 25 % of lower secondary teachers are on fixed-term contracts, with a clear prevalence of short-term engagements (Eurydice, 2021). The number of young people with these work arrangements is particularly high compared to their older peers (Eurydice, 2021). Research in Italy among 285 lower and upper secondary teachers (ISCED levels 2–3) showed that fixed-term teachers on contracts of up to one year felt their skills were underutilised; they experienced a low level of well-being compared to permanently employed teachers. In addition, compared to their permanent counterparts, fixed-term contract teachers tend to be more emotionally distant from their students since they know they will have to change schools and they tend to invest less effort in relationships (Capone and Petrillo, 2020). In addition, primary and secondary teachers (ISCED levels 1–3) with permanent contracts are more than twice as likely to report being fairly or very satisfied with their jobs compared to those with temporary contracts (Gil-Flores, 2017; Rodríguez-Esteban and Ferreira, 2024). In one study of 53 Italian schoolteachers, Giunchi et al. (2020) found that among teachers in precarious employment, individuals' perceived level of job insecurity fluctuated²¹ over time, and that managerial support could reduce uncertainty and promote a sense of control in precarious employment situations.

Earnings and financial security

As in other sectors across the EU (e.g. healthcare, social care or childcare), positions in the education sector are often marked by low salaries, particularly in countries where teachers earn less than other tertiary-educated workers (Eurydice, 2018). The 2017 Commission communication *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* reveals that teachers often earn significantly less than the average university degree holder, with salaries ranging from 74 % in pre-primary education to 92 % at upper secondary level (European Union, 2017). At EU level, less than 40 % of teachers are satisfied or very satisfied with their salary (Eurydice, 2023) and, on average, **teachers perceive that they earn around 10 % less than the typical worker** (OECD, 2019). In nine EU countries – Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden – the average teacher's salary level across all education levels is below domestic per capita GDP (Eurydice, 2023). The results of the survey conducted by the European School Education Platform (ESEP) (2024) indicated that 64 % of participants reported inadequate salary and benefits as the main challenges that impacted the appeal of teaching as a career. These economic challenges for teachers are exacerbated in the Member States listed above. In addition, early-childhood teachers tend to earn less, and upper secondary teachers generally earn more, owing to differences in their minimum qualification requirements (Eurydice, 2023). Also, as observed by the consulted stakeholders who represented the interests of teachers nationally, early-career teachers usually receive relatively low compensation, which increases the likelihood that they will leave their jobs in the sector for better-paid opportunities. Furthermore, teaching professionals must face the question of **how much their salary will increase and how long it will take**. In some countries, such as Czechia, Croatia and Slovakia, teachers need a significant length of service to achieve modest salary increases (Eurydice, 2023).

Research indicates that younger teachers tend to have lower salaries initially than their more experienced counterparts. In the EU, the average starting salary in early-childhood education (ISCED level 0) education from 2016 to 2017 was €24,000, with salaries peaking at €38,000. The equivalent rates for the other levels of education were, respectively, €26,000 to €42,000 in primary (ISCED level 1), €27,000 to €45,000 in lower secondary (ISCED level 2), and €28,000 to €47,000 in upper secondary (ISCED level 3) (European Parliament, 2020).

■ Work–life imbalances

Work–life conflict is prevalent among knowledge workers, such as teachers, who face blurred boundaries between work and private life (Albertsen et al., 2010). As a result of increased workloads and time constraints, many teachers report working outside regular school hours, including evenings, weekends and even holidays, when they often focus on tasks like grading or research. This not only disrupts their work–life balance but also leaves little time and energy for family, personal rest, or leisure activities (EU-OSHA, 2022a; Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012).

²¹ In the context of the study, job insecurity fluctuations are defined as intra-individual variations in perceived job insecurity over a three-week period preceding the end of teachers' temporary contracts.

In addition, TALIS 2018 data indicate that at EU level, almost 45 % of teachers stated that their job left little time for their personal life (OECD, 2019). Similarly, results from the 2024 ESEP survey indicated that 68 % of respondents consider that teachers' workload does not permit a healthy balance between work and personal life. According to DANES (2018), the education sector is the highest-scoring sector on work–family conflicts, including both time- and energy-related role conflicts. Together, these findings suggest that teachers might view the effect of their chosen career on work–life balance as negative.

Roles in research and academia present unique characteristics and distinct exposure to PSRs compared to other professions in the education sector. Academics are often required to fulfil **multiple roles**, including teaching, research, mentoring, pastoral care, external consultancy and public engagement, which significantly increases the risk of inter-role conflict (Kinman, 2014). Research, in turn, is another component of teacher overload that is pointed out as one of the main stressors. The literature shows that the imperative to **publish or perish** stems from the strong link between the number of scientific publications and the allocation of research grants, factors that are crucial for career advancement in the academic sphere (Souto et al., 2018). Additionally, higher education teachers are required to work with a growing number of students in varied situations, such as traditional classes, practical classes, internships, and master's or doctoral mentoring (Slišković and Maslač Seršić, 2011). Moreover, inter-role conflict, particularly between work and personal life, is a powerful source of distress for academics (Kinman, 2014). A systematic review conducted by Franco et al. (2021) suggested that the deterioration of work–life balance in higher education was influenced by factors such as gender inequality, the level of stress at work, career progression, classroom workload, publication pressure, participation in conferences, compliance with deadlines, and performance expectations from academic programmes.

In addition, digitalisation blurs the boundaries between work and private life, as teachers are often expected to handle tasks and communications outside regular working hours. As noted by an interviewed stakeholder, education programmes have recently become more digital, and it is not uncommon for teachers to be online at all hours, raising issues such as the right to disconnect. Similarly, another stakeholder noted that digitalisation has been associated with tendencies towards a **growing lack of boundaries** (a feeling of 'borderlessness'), causing work–life conflicts and feelings of isolation, a situation worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound et al., 2020). For a more thorough discussion on the impacts of the pandemic, refer to Section 3.5 – Societal trends and recent disruptors.

3.3.5 Conflicts and offensive behaviour

Workplace violence is a significant PSR in education and can escalate from disruptive student behaviour to more harmful actions (Nyberg et al., 2021). Included are both physical violence (e.g. being hit, being pushed or having objects thrown) and non-physical violence (e.g. verbal abuse, threats, mobbing, bullying or cyberbullying). In addition, violence can manifest as a combination of both physical and psychological harms. A systematic review of 13 studies by Chirico et al. (2021) concluded that the various forms of bullying, harassment and violence are prevalent in the education sector, with teachers across all levels and grades reporting experiences of some form of violence.

Some studies have shown that problematic student behaviour and challenging relationships with parents are two of the main factors that affect job stress in teachers (Otero-López et al., 2009; Rodríguez-Mantilla and Fernández-Díaz, 2017). An EU report using TALIS 2018 data revealed that at EU level, **36.5 % of lower secondary teachers identified addressing parent or guardian concerns as their main sources of stress** (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). Vorlíček et al. (2022), using data collected from 594 teachers of grades six to nine in 118 schools in Czechia, reported that 31 % of teachers identified problematic relationships with students and parents as major stressors, with 29 % citing inappropriate student behaviours.

Research shows that students constitute the most common category of perpetrators, which is to be expected given the significant time spent by teachers interacting with students in classroom environments (Gerberich et al., 2011). Tiesman et al. (2014), who conducted a survey involving 2,514 education workers²² in the US, revealed that students were the most common perpetrators of physical

²² Including teachers, special education teachers, education professionals (nurses, administrators/superintendents, physical therapists, guidance counsellors, librarians, social workers, and psychologists) and education support personnel (instructional aides, administrative support staff, library/media support staff, transportation workers, security, food service workers and custodial staff).

assault, accounting for 98 % of incidents. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, bullying by colleagues is not uncommon.

Teachers also face an increased risk of violence in situations where they work late or alone, make off-site or home visits, or work with children with special needs, who may exhibit behaviours that are challenging to manage (Gervais, 2013).

▪ Physical violence

Teachers are exposed to several forms of physical violence, including objects being thrown, physical attacks or property damage (Chirico et al., 2021). Physical assaults on teaching professionals – defined as being ‘hit, slapped, kicked, pushed, choked, grabbed, sexually assaulted, or otherwise subjected to physical contact intended to injure or harm’ (Gerberich et al., 2011) – are a significant problem, as noted by one of the stakeholders consulted as part of this study, who represented the interests of the education sector at EU level.

Physical violence has been shown to significantly diminish teachers’ job satisfaction and adversely affect their overall health-related quality of life (Tiesman et al., 2014). Similarly, a systematic review conducted by Rudkjoebing et al. (2020) found that exposure to violence or threats in the workplace was consistently associated with elevated risks of depressive disorder, anxiety and depressive symptoms (including burnout and psychological distress), and sleep disturbances.

Data from DANES (2018) revealed that the education sector ranked as the second-highest sector for physical violence and the fourth highest for the risk of threats, with **15 % of respondents reporting episodes of threats at work within the past year**. These findings underscore the significant safety and well-being challenges faced by education professionals. Although the rates of physical violence are typically lower than the rates of non-physical violence (Longobardi et al., 2019), they remain a significant cause for concern, especially when considering that physical violence is not likely to occur as an isolated event, but rather that teachers often experience multiple forms of violence (Martinez et al., 2016).

Additionally, several studies have found that working with primary and secondary school classes increases the risk of violence. Specifically, **primary teachers reported the highest levels of physical attacks by students and harassment from students’ parents** (Berlanda et al., 2019; De Cordova et al., 2019; Gerberich et al., 2011). Tertiary education appears to be much less exposed to difficult pupils, with lower rates of violence, threats and bullying than other levels of education (EU-OSHA, 2022a; DANES, 2018).

De Cordova et al. (2019) conducted a study of 475 Italian primary and secondary school teachers and found that teachers reported a low to moderate perceived frequency of aggression: violence from students averaged a score of 1.49 on a 4-point scale (where 1 = never and 4 = frequently), and violence from students’ parents averaged 1.11 on the same scale. Female teachers reported a slightly higher level of parent-perpetrated violence (a mean of 1.12) compared to male teachers (a mean of 1.07). Primary school teachers reported higher levels of parent-perpetrated violence (a mean of 1.19) than lower secondary (a mean of 1.10) and upper secondary teachers (a mean of 1.08).

▪ Non-physical violence

As mentioned above violence directed at teachers is most often non-physical, but there is a lack of research in the area and studies calls for further systematic studies on the topic (Longobardi et al., 2019; Nyberg et al., 2021). Bullying is characterised by repeated acts of intimidation or coercion, while verbal abuse covers yelling, swearing and name-calling. Threats refer to words, gestures or actions intended to intimidate or frighten, while sexual harassment involves any unwelcome sexual behaviour directed at teachers (Gerberich et al., 2011). An EU report using TALIS 2018 data revealed that at EU level, **14.5 % of lower secondary teachers identified their main sources of stress as being intimidated or verbally abused by students** (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021).

Different studies have found a positive association between workplace bullying and teachers’ stress and depression (Dangleben, 2019; Kollerová et al., 2023). Bernotaite and Malinauskiene (2017) conducted a study of 517 Lithuanian secondary school teachers and found that the prevalence of occasional bullying was 8.3 %, while severe bullying was reported by 2.9 % of participants. The study showed that both occasional and severe bullying remained **strong predictors of psychological distress**. Notably, Gerberich et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study of 6,469 upper secondary teachers in Minnesota (US) and found that, in comparison to physical violence, non-physical violence resulted in a greater

percentage of post-event symptoms, such as anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, stress, sadness and fatigue. Furthermore, more teachers reported making significant changes to their work situations, such as transferring to another school or quitting, because of non-physical violence than because of physical violence.

Non-physical violence by students

A meta-analysis conducted by Longobardi et al. (2019) found that the most common acts of student-perpetrated violence against teachers were obscene gestures (44 %), offensive and obscene remarks (29 %), verbal violence (29 %), damage to or theft of personal property (17 %), and intimidation (10 %), while physical attacks accounted for only 3 % of all instances of violence.

A 2019 study of 1,360 teachers from 14 primary and secondary schools in Italy by Berlanda et al. found that 84 % of the teachers who responded to the survey had experienced school-related violence within the 12 months prior to the study. In the tertiary education sector, a study of 332 university teachers (186 women and 136 men) conducted in Sweden by Muhonen (2016) highlights another facet of non-physical workplace hostility, focusing on **gender harassment**. The study revealed that the vast majority of women (66 %) had experienced some level of gender-based harassment in the preceding year, including being subjected to sexist language and being ignored, ridiculed or discriminated against (including in terms of salary) by either students or other staff in their workplace.

Non-physical violence by student parents/tutors

Non-physical violence against teachers is perpetrated not only by students, but also by students' parents. According to the literature, the main sources of conflict and the most common reasons for parents' attacks on teachers include dissatisfaction with grades, perceived unfair teacher reactions to a child's behaviour, and parents' overprotective and controlling attitudes (Bilić, 2023). The meta-analysis based on 12 articles conducted by Badenes-Ribera et al. (2022) on violence by parents showed that, within the previous year, nearly 15 % of teachers had reported offensive remarks, 9 % slander, 6 % intimidation, 4 % shouting, 4 % insults and less than 3 % other types. An Italian study on workplace violence involving 331 non-university teachers found that in cases of threats, verbal aggression and stalking, a student's parent was the perpetrator in about one third of cases of harassment (Acquadro Maran and Begotti, 2020). Research conducted in Estonia in 2013 with 564 schoolteachers showed that 28.4 % were victims of offensive behaviours, 13 % of insults and 10 % of shouting (Kõiv, 2015). Recently, misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts between parents and teachers have become more frequent in schools and can sometimes escalate and turn into violence (Bilić, 2023).

Offensive online behaviours and cyberbullying

Several studies highlight a shift in how students can challenge teacher authority using digital media. Although the risks associated with online misconduct have been present since the introduction of digital technologies, the **rise of digitalisation**, along with the move to remote learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, has heightened the risk of offensive online behaviours, such as cyberbullying, harassment and negative statements directed at both pupils and teachers, particularly on social media (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Teachers are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying through various methods, such as verbal attacks and offensive messages in private groups and social networks; threats and intimidation; sharing degrading material depicting a teacher; creating fake profiles that dishonour teachers; creating photos or videos without consent (cyber-baiting); or creating and distributing harmful memes. Combining these methods can amplify harm, undermining teachers' reputation and work (Kopecký and Sztokowski, 2017; Tomczyk et al., 2024). All these forms of cyberbullying may take place as a one-time incident or repeatedly.

Empirical studies provide insights into the prevalence of these behaviours. A study conducted in Poland in 2023 with 733 teachers from primary, secondary, vocational and technical schools (ISCED levels 2–5), showed that 17.5 % of surveyed teachers reported experiencing the dissemination of negative comments about them, while **10.8 % received harmful digital messages intended to trigger negative emotions** (Tomczyk and Potyrała, 2024). Similarly, a pre-pandemic study in Czechia that involved 5,136 primary and secondary school teachers (ISCED levels 2–3) revealed that 21.73 % of respondents had experienced cyberbullying, most often perpetrated by students (in 40 % of cases) and parents (in 8 % of cases) (Kopecký and Sztokowski, 2017). Both studies reveal that while persistent and systematic cyberbullying affects only a small number of teachers, one-off incidents, such as receiving negative comments or harmful messages, are far more frequent.

A qualitative study conducted in Romania (Zăvoianu and Sun, 2022) suggests that online aggressions against teachers are generally more prevalent in **lower and upper secondary education than in primary schools**, as younger pupils often lack access to mobile phones or the technological skills to engage in such behaviours. Another piece of qualitative research adds further context to these findings: Macaulay et al. (2021) studied 63 teachers in the United Kingdom who taught across primary, secondary, and university and higher education levels, and they highlighted that visual acts of cyberbullying, such as those employing videos or photos, were perceived as more severe than written forms because of their potential to reach a wider audience.

3.3.6 Other risk factors

Data from the sixth wave of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) indicated that the education sector, compared with other sectors, has a relatively good physical environment in relation to posture-related factors, ambient conditions (such as noise and temperature), and biological and chemical exposures (Eurofound, 2017). **Exposure to these other risks can intensify the effect of exposure to PSRs.** For instance, teachers under high stress levels from an excessive workload can see their symptoms exacerbated if they are simultaneously confronted with high noise levels in their daily work life.

▪ Ergonomic factors

EU-OSHA (2022a) indicates that while some ergonomic factors are less severe in the education sector, other factors may be widespread and not fully accounted for. Regardless, ergonomic risks have become more prevalent as remote working has increased. Other common risk factors include prolonged standing, sharp corners on desks, the use of laptops and touchpads, and inadequate furniture (Kraemer et al., 2020). According to ESENER (2019) results, prominent musculoskeletal risks include **prolonged sitting** (59 %) and repetitive hand or arm movements (51 %). In addition, poor posture presents a significant ergonomic risk factor, as schoolteachers' tasks often involve a head-down posture from frequent reading, marking of assignments and **writing on a blackboard** (Erick and Smith, 2011).

Different levels of education may pose different risks. For example, teachers in lower education levels are less likely to experience prolonged sitting than those working at higher levels, but they face increased risks related to lifting children (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Data from DANES (2018) revealed that teaching professionals in primary and secondary schools are among those who spend the most time on their feet, with 95 % spending at least a quarter of their working time walking or standing. In contrast, teaching professionals in tertiary education (i.e. academic staff and teaching/research assistants) are among those who spend the most time sitting down, with 73 % spending at least three quarters of their working time seated. A study conducted by Kraemer et al. (2020), based on a sample of 25 teachers in Brazil, found that all of the teachers had reported pain in the past 12 months, with the most frequently affected areas being the lower back (60 %), neck (56 %) and shoulders (48 %).

▪ Environmental factors

An interviewed stakeholder who represented the interests of teachers at the national level emphasised the importance of adequate workspaces in schools, where students can carry out preparatory tasks, have private working areas, and rest between lessons. However, while such spaces are common in some institutions, particularly in Nordic countries, they are largely absent in many schools across EU countries, further exposing staff and students to the risks mentioned above. The Sinphonie project (Schools Indoor Pollution and Health Observatory Network in Europe), covering 23 European countries, found that many schools **lacked adequate spaces for student preparation tasks and private work** (Kephapoulos et al., 2014).

One in four teachers (26 %) reported **disruptive noise in their classrooms** (OECD, 2019). In addition, the ESENER (2019) results confirm that education sector employees seem to be more exposed to loud noises (47 %) than employees in other sectors, such as financial services and insurance (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Related to this, one study revealed that the 8-hour average indoor noise exposure in some schools exceeded the safety levels recommended by WHO (Yassin et al., 2016). A study of 178 university teachers in Germany found that noise exposure increased the stress experienced, especially during demanding tasks (Tomek and Urhahne, 2022).

3.4 Psychosocial risks for specific groups of teachers

Exposure to PSR factors among professionals in the education sector varies depending on the characteristics of their roles. Certain subgroups are more vulnerable to PSRs and experience a higher prevalence of negative mental health outcomes.

3.4.1 Gender

Education is a highly gendered profession, with female teachers making up a large share of the workforce (Eurostat, 2023). Women dominate the teaching workforce, comprising almost 70 % of teachers employed at primary and secondary education levels (ISCED level 0 – 3), where men make up the remaining 30 %. In contrast, the gender balance shifts in university and higher education (ISCED levels 4–8), where men represent 55 % of the teaching workforce and women account for 45 % (Eurostat, 2022). Female teachers often bear a disproportionate share of family responsibilities at home, intensifying their workload (EU-OSHA, 2022a). The concept of **double presence**, as theorised in the field of work–life balance research (García et al., 2016), refers to the simultaneous demands of professional and private responsibilities, which create a dual burden for individuals, particularly women. In higher education, for example, García et al. (2016) found that among 621 Spanish teachers, 63 % of women reported experiencing double presence, compared to 44 % of men. This was also highlighted by an interviewee who represented the interests of the education sector at EU level. They mentioned that female teachers in primary education who also have childcare responsibilities at home, and who lack family support, may face the risk of spending excessive time exclusively with children, potentially leading to forms of 'social regression'.²³ As a result, the interviewee suggested that teachers in this situation may experience stress or discomfort when interacting with adults. Teachers, therefore, tend to gather in schools during breaks, which offer some of their few opportunities to engage with other adults. In addition to childcare responsibilities at home, female teachers may also care for elderly family members. As teachers are often perceived as having significant free time after school hours, it becomes common for families to assign them caregiving duties for elderly relatives as well. EU-OSHA (2022a) also shows that teleworking and flexible work arrangements for teachers, while having potential benefits, often result in disproportionate negative impacts on women.

In addition, studies consistently show that **female educators face significantly greater stress and emotional demands**, together with a poorer psychosocial safety climate in their work environments, than their male colleagues (Noor and Zainuddin, 2011). In a study of 1,168 teachers employed at universities in Croatia, Slišković et al. (2016) found that women reported higher stress levels than men, notably related to workload and work–life imbalance as a result of traditional gender roles and family obligations. Using data from 1,430 Canadian teachers, Klassen and Chiu (2010) found that female teachers experienced higher workload and stress and reported lower classroom management self-efficacy. A Swedish study of 478 primary school teachers (ISCED level 1) (81 % female) across 20 schools further highlights these gender disparities, with female teachers reporting less workplace influence and a higher work pace than their male counterparts (Boström et al., 2019). Interestingly, despite these challenges, data from TALIS 2013 in relation to the Spanish context (3,339 teachers across 192 schools) indicate that women report higher levels of job satisfaction than men (Gil-Flores, 2017). This may be attributed to societal norms that traditionally associate feminine roles with caretaking and service-oriented tasks, which may lead women to prefer caring professions and teaching (Pena et al., 2012). Also, as suggested by one of the consulted EU-level stakeholders, women may face discrimination in accessing higher-level positions (e.g. school principals or university deans) and often have to **demonstrate significantly greater productivity than men** to attain the same roles. Similarly, as noted by one interviewee, they may face greater exposure to a lack of recognition for their role than their male colleagues.

3.4.2 Race, ethnicity and migration

On the one hand, teachers from ethnic and racialised groups, whether native-born or migrants, can face discrimination and racial microaggressions. On the other hand, migrant teachers might encounter structural and regulatory barriers related to migration status and their teacher accreditation processes.

²³ The concept of social regression originates in psychological and systems theory. It denotes a defence mechanism where individuals revert to earlier emotional states when faced with stress or anxiety, seeking comfort in familiar patterns associated with earlier life stages (Bowen, 1978).

The challenges of migration can be further exacerbated for teachers who belong to racial and ethnic groups.

▪ Race and ethnicity

Teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds often face unique challenges within the education system, particularly in the form of racialisation and racism²⁴ from colleagues and students (Arneback et al., 2023). These educators experience both subtle everyday racism and microaggressions that position them as simultaneously **hypervisible and invisible** within predominantly white academic spaces (Lander and Santoro, 2017). One stakeholder interviewed for this study, who represented the interests of the education sector at EU level, stressed that teachers from racialised and ethnic minority backgrounds remain significantly **underrepresented in the teaching workforce**, partly owing to rigid requirements in some countries that can pose a barrier to accessing the profession. These findings are supported by a scoping review conducted by Arar et al. (2024).

According to Arneback et al. (2023), based on in-depth interviews with staff at 27 Swedish upper secondary schools, it was found that teachers may be witness to racism within their schools, which can create a **hostile and isolating environment**. This can include racist jokes, derogatory remarks about students' names, and racial slurs among teachers. One of the interviewees from the Arneback's study shared the following remark: 'In the staffroom, teachers are more private and make more sweeping statements that cannot be articulated in other parts of the school (such as during staff meetings or in teaching).' One cited example of problematic talk in the room was 'when a teacher starts talking about the students' names and how difficult and strange the names are, and hard to spell' (Arneback et al., 2023, p. 174). A study of 2,360 US educators by Kohli (2018) found that teachers and principals of colour were more likely to report experiencing **racial discrimination** than their white peers. The study points out that the limited presence of teachers of colour in a school 'creates a climate of intense isolation and racialisation' (Kohli, 2018 p. 322) among these teachers, leading to professional, personal and ethical risks that white teachers can avoid. Similarly, a study by Lander and Santoro (2017) found that academics from racialised groups in Australia and England reported feeling positioned as 'outsiders' in their workplaces, with most experiencing complex and subtle forms of racism from colleagues and students.

▪ Migrant status

Teaching is an increasingly mobile profession. This has been particularly prevalent over the past two decades when there has been a tremendous increase in teacher mobility and migration in Europe, both from intra-EU mobility and from migration from outside the EU (Mc Daid and Nowlan, 2022). In terms of migration, an EU-level stakeholder emphasised that it can be difficult for teachers trained outside the country where they wish to work to access the profession. This also makes recruitment particularly challenging in areas where new teachers are most needed (e.g. rural schools). A study in Ireland on the recognition of 240 migrant teachers from 47 different countries in the EU and beyond²⁵ found that migrant teachers are slow to engage in the formal accreditation process and face considerable challenges when they do (Mc Daid and Nowlan, 2022). Also, the requirements in Ireland to teach in the Irish language and the country's narrow registration processes create additional barriers for migrant teachers. These systemic barriers (e.g. language requirements and regulatory hurdles) may contribute to the broader pattern of high psychological stress among teaching professionals across Europe (Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020).

3.4.3 Age and work experience

The association between teachers' age and work experience and their well-being and exposure to PSRs is complex. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) found that teachers' job satisfaction and stress levels are the same regardless of age and experience. However, the consequences of that stress and the coping strategies that are available and employed differ by age. Young teachers face a substantial workload and have high professional ambitions, often working long hours, including late evenings, to prepare

²⁴ The concept of racialisation refers to the processes by which a group of people is defined by their 'race'. Racialisation operates simultaneously at individual and societal levels, shaping both how people perceive one another in daily interactions and how institutions and systems are structured around race.

²⁵ These teachers were drawn from 47 different countries, with Spain (22%), Poland (18%) and India (6%) the top three countries of origin.

thoroughly for their teaching. While they commonly report feelings of tiredness and exhaustion, they typically manage to recover over weekends and vacations, though some also work continuously through their weekends. Middle-aged teachers also have high ambitions and work extended hours; however, weekends and vacations are no longer sufficient for recovery. In the study, they report severe exhaustion accompanied by psychosomatic symptoms. In addition, the study by Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014), using data from 1,878 teachers aged 45–65 (referred to as 'senior' teachers), suggests that older educational staff may be particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of increased non-teaching workloads, especially as they face rising demands such as high-stakes accountability²⁶ and lower levels of personal accomplishment than their less experienced counterparts.

Other studies suggest the contrary. Some research suggests that younger teachers sometimes report higher emotional exhaustion (Brunsting et al., 2014; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). This may be because older teachers have more work experience, follow well-established routines, and are better adapted to the profession, enabling them to cope with stress more effectively (Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021; Shirom et al., 2008). Stakeholders shared that early-career teachers typically receive relatively low compensation, which increases the likelihood that they will seek better-paid opportunities elsewhere. Moreover, **teachers' perceptions of the prevalence of job resources vary by age**. Research conducted by Admiraal and Kittelsen Røberg (2023) shows that a safe working climate, trust, good relationships and a participatory school culture were more important for job satisfaction for early-career teachers than for mid- and late-career teachers. Additionally, younger and less experienced teachers, especially in primary education (ISCED level 1), are particularly sensitive to student relations, which affect their well-being (Collie, 2021).

On the other hand, a study by Darmody and Smyth (2016) mentions that mid-career workers (aged 30–50) report higher stress levels than both younger and older age groups. Van Droogenbroeck and Spruyt (2014) suggest that older teachers (45–65 years old) may face elevated stress that increases their likelihood of early departure from the sector or premature retirement. In this regard, one consulted stakeholder also noted that mid-career teachers may be more prone to experiencing stress and other mental health issues, as they perceive retirement as still distant and do not foresee a short-term solution. This perception may further exacerbate mental health problems, particularly for individuals already experiencing stressful situations.

Moreover, as mentioned by an interviewed EU-level stakeholder, the increasing prevalence of older teachers – reflecting the overall ageing of the population – is expected to widen the **generational gap** in the coming years, when more older teachers will work with young students.

The same stakeholder observed that today's late-career teachers began their working lives when digital tools were not as widespread as today. As a result, they now face the **challenge of adapting to new teaching methods and technologies**. This may pose challenges not only in terms of cognitive and emotional demands, but also physically, as older teachers are more likely to report musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and other health issues related to the profession.

3.4.4 Special education teachers

The inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms has introduced both opportunities and considerable challenges for teachers, particularly in relation to occupational stress and mental health. Teachers who work with students with special educational needs often face additional professional and psychological challenges compared to other teachers. In a Canadian study interviewing 269 teachers (Brackenreed, 2011), the inclusion in classrooms of students with moderate-to-severe intellectual disabilities has been found to be somewhat stressful for regular education teachers. The study highlights that the increased stress arose from the **additional time and effort required to support these students** and from **concerns about their educational outcomes**. In addition, role conflicts and ambiguity are significant PSRs for special education teachers, who often face unclear expectations about balancing individualised teaching for students with disabilities and managing behavioural interventions (Brunsting et al., 2014).

Teachers who work with special education students have a **higher likelihood of being exposed to physical assaults** (Tiesman et al., 2014). Aggressive behaviour may arise from a lack of understanding

²⁶ This term was coined by Valli and Busse (2007) and refers to the fact that role expectations have increased, intensified and expanded in four areas: instructional, institutional, collaborative and learning.

of their surroundings, which is often influenced by mood disturbances or fears, and which are closely linked to underlying physiological, mental or social conditions (Jasik-Ślęzak and Kasian, 2019). Furthermore, a specific problem associated with violence and other offensive behaviours is the phenomenon of underreporting, particularly when working with younger children with special needs. Offensive behaviour may be interpreted as a pedagogical failure or there may be a culture of blaming the victims. However, underreporting may also stem from a lack of available reporting systems in educational institutions or a lack of knowledge or procedures to help in solving problems when they arise (EU-OSHA, 2022a).

Regarding special education teachers, studies have shown that this group faces a **higher risk of developing major mental health issues** (e.g. depression and anxiety) and burnout. In a study of 3,447 Greek pre-primary, primary and secondary teachers, Kourmoussi and Alexopoulos (2016) found that having students who required support from special education teachers or who faced difficulties in speaking or comprehension was strongly associated with teachers' levels of stress and fatigue. McGrew et al. (2023) found that depression and anxiety symptoms, along with intense Individualised Education Program (IEP) workloads and classroom management stress, strongly predicted emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation among 312 US special education teachers. Park and Shin's (2020) meta-analysis of 27 studies (N = 5,420) shows that burnout levels among special education teachers have increased in more recent studies ($\beta = 0.03$ per year, $p < .01$), suggesting growing pressures over time. Moreover, secondary teachers reported greater emotional exhaustion than elementary teachers.

3.5 Societal trends and recent disruptors

Different societal trends are transforming the sector and impacting teachers' daily tasks and experiences. These interconnected demographic, technological and social changes create new challenges while exacerbating existing workplace stressors for educators across all levels.

3.5.1 Demographic

European education systems are currently undergoing a rapid transformation driven partly by a demographic shift that is characterised by ageing populations and declining fertility rates. The demographic shift is set to be unequal across the EU, with rural areas more affected than urban ones.

Almost 40 % of lower secondary teachers are aged 50 or older, while less than 20 % are below the age of 35 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). According to Cedefop (2023b), **35 % of current teachers are approaching retirement age**, with some countries facing even more severe variations in their demographic challenge. In Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Lithuania, more than half of lower secondary teachers will retire within the next 15 years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). The ageing workforce creates immediate staffing challenges and widens the generational gap between students and teachers, potentially affecting pedagogical approaches and the integration of new technologies in education.

On the other hand, **fertility rates in the EU are in decline**, creating long-term implications for education systems. The total fertility rate in the EU was 1.38 live births per woman in 2023, down from 1.46 in 2022 (Eurostat, 2025b). Fertility rates vary significantly between rural and urban areas, with rural areas showing higher fertility rates. In 2022, EU fertility rates averaged 1.39 in urban areas, 1.49 in intermediate areas and 1.57 in rural areas. This pattern suggests that rural education systems may experience different demographic pressures to their urban counterparts. OECD (2024) data show that between 2013 and 2022, teacher numbers often grew faster than student enrolment, resulting in **falling student-teacher ratios** in primary and lower secondary education in most countries. The average student-teacher ratio across OECD countries declined by 1.2 students per teacher between 2013 and 2022. Smaller student-teacher ratios at lower education levels have been shown to be a protective factor for teachers' mental health, although they potentially increase **job insecurity** owing to the heightened risk of school closures.

3.5.2 Educational expansion

The concept of educational expansion refers to broadening access to education. This phenomenon is driven by democratisation and increasing numbers of students remaining in education beyond the mandatory levels (Ballerino et al. 2013; Gil-Flores, 2017). Expansion leads to a rising demand for teachers at higher education levels (ISCED levels 4-8), which can result in increased class sizes if not

matched by proportional increases in teaching staff and infrastructure (Kara et al. 2020). Educational expansion has democratised access to education, which is accompanied by more diversity within classrooms, including students with varied socio-emotional needs, learning disabilities and behavioural challenges (Mezzanotte, 2022). In summary, while higher education copes with expanding student numbers and rising teacher demand that may push class sizes up, primary and secondary education sectors generally experience declining pupil–teacher ratios and smaller class sizes.

3.5.3 Digitalisation

Significant changes in work organisation – such as the widespread adoption of remote teaching and teleworking – require teachers to adapt rapidly to new and complex environments (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Such shifts have introduced additional PSRs, such as the challenges of increased digitalisation, remote work and managing digital classrooms; growing workloads and communication demands; and **blurred work–life boundaries**. The changes brought about by the pandemic revealed **insufficient digital preparedness and skills**, as confirmed by the interviewed stakeholders. A lack of basic equipment, facilities and internet access has intensified the problem. While COVID-19 has forced many educators to use digital technologies to continue teaching, some believe they are too under-resourced to continue such practices in the future (post-pandemic scenario) (Pavlovaite and Hallissy, 2021). While teleworking offers potential benefits, such as flexibility and task autonomy, it also introduces significant PSRs. Employees who work remotely are more likely to experience work interference with family life and increased work intensity, negatively impacting health and well-being (Eurofound, 2023). Further the use of AI-based digital technologies in schools has introduced new reality for teachers. AI-based technologies can contribute to greater flexibility for teachers but can also increase the demands placed on the technical competencies of teachers, on their media skills in terms of didactics and their social competencies. New demands on competences can also arise from the use of learning analytics for. These demands can be seen as extending beyond technological knowledge, and concern their pedagogical and technological judgement (EU-OSHA, 2024).

The digital transformation has highlighted and sometimes exacerbated existing inequalities (the **digital divide**). Teachers in socio-economically disadvantaged schools often have less access to digital resources and technical support, which creates additional stress as they attempt to provide equitable education with limited tools.

3.5.4 The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted significant structural changes in the education sector without the necessary support systems. The pandemic outbreak – which occurred between February and March 2020, depending on the region – forced teachers to drastically alter the way they practised their profession, often overnight. They transitioned rapidly to online education, remote teaching, and teleworking – a situation that persisted for several months, depending on the country (WHO, 2021). A return to normality began with the initial reopening of most primary and secondary schools in late spring to autumn 2021, following the rollout of vaccines and improved pandemic control measures. However, in some cases, particularly in higher education, institutions such as universities proved slower to resume fully in-person teaching. Many maintained hybrid or online formats throughout the 2021/2022 academic year, especially for larger lectures (Ratten, 2023).

In this regard, the pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of 21st-century societies across all aspects of life, bringing structural changes to education and the labour market. Teachers faced unprecedented challenges that required them to go beyond conventional teaching methods and become more resilient, but that also caused stress and excessive workloads (Bartosiewicz et al., 2022). Schools did not know which technologies and methodologies for teaching were the most appropriate in terms of effectiveness, security and accessibility (Cachia et al., 2021). This uncertainty, coupled with the rapid shift to online education, has had a profound impact on teachers' mental health.

Workloads and job demand

For teachers, teleworking during the pandemic significantly **increased workloads** as they had to prepare digital teaching and learning materials, create lesson plans and correct students' work (Pavlovaite and Hallissy, 2021). As noted by the consulted stakeholders, this blurred the boundaries of working time. In fact, during the pandemic, education ranked as the sector with the highest quantitative demands, with one in three educators feeling exhausted and emotionally drained because of their

workload (Eurofound et al., 2020). Similarly, using data on teachers from Eurofound's COVID-19 Working and Living survey, Mahmood et al. (2023) found teachers' satisfaction with teleworking has fallen as a consequence of the job demand increase – such as managing a higher volume of work owing to sudden changes in teaching modalities and additional responsibilities associated with online teaching. The study also found that adequate resources, such as having the equipment needed to do their work properly or counting on the support of managers and/or colleagues, allowed teachers to confront the challenges of teleworking, thus increasing their job satisfaction. Moreover, in a study conducted by Szabó et al. (2021), primary and secondary classroom teachers (ISCED levels 1–3) experienced a **lower sense of competence** during the online teaching period than when they were practising traditional education.

Despite these challenges, some literature argues that the shift towards digital tools can also play an important role in teachers' mental health by reducing their workload. A Swiss study of 560 homeroom teachers²⁷ (Baeriswyl et al., 2021) shows that making work more accessible and efficient helps to avoid prolonged working hours (a key risk factor for emotional exhaustion) and affords teachers more time to pursue health-promoting activities, such as healthy cooking or sport.

Feeling of isolation

In addition, digitalisation has been associated with tendencies towards a higher level of so-called **borderlessness** – or lack of boundaries – that causes feelings of isolation (Eurofound et al., 2020). As also stressed by consulted stakeholders, new formulas such as **teleworking** have led to work **crossing boundaries of space and time**, modifying the working stage, the means of supervision, and the reconciliation of work with family and personal life. This situation represented a unique experience for all teachers, one they had never encountered before, carrying with it the risks of being unable to manage it effectively or to recognise the associated dangers. During the pandemic, unsocial working hours were prevalent among education professionals (Eurofound, 2023).

Work–life imbalance

Eurofound et al. (2020) found that the pandemic exacerbated work–life conflicts. A study by Mahmood et al. (2023) using data from the Eurofound COVID-19 Working and Living Survey (Round 2, June–July 2020; N = 523) found that teleworking had imposed two different interrelated pressures on teachers. On one hand, they had to learn and deploy new digital teaching tools (e.g. Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate Ultra) almost overnight. On the other hand, they were **simultaneously managing full-time domestic responsibilities**, such as sharing limited home workspaces with partners and supervising children. Based on the job demands–resources framework, the study concludes that the conditions might have amplified job demands and eroded their overall satisfaction with teleworking. Additionally, a German longitudinal survey that investigated teachers' emotional development (N = 207) points out that teachers (in primary, secondary, special needs, and vocational education) who had **caretaking responsibilities** were hit more severely by the crisis (Hilger et al., 2021).

3.6 Protective factors

While the reviewed literature's primary focus was on identifying psychosocial risk factors that contribute to adverse mental health outcomes, certain factors might buffer the negative effects. Overall, job resources, such as autonomy and social support, can buffer the impact of job demands on burnout, as proposed by the job demands–resources (JD–R) model (Bakker et al., 2005). Six main categories were identified to protect against psychosocial risks. These findings are based on the findings from the sections above. They include:

- **Autonomy and influence over work.** High perceived autonomy correlates with greater job engagement and satisfaction while also buffering stress. Data from TALIS 2018 show that, on average across the OECD, 96 % of teachers report having control over selecting teaching methods, 94 % over assessing students' learning, 92 % over disciplining students, 91 % over determining the amount of homework to be assigned, and 84 % over determining course content (OECD, 2020). Such levels of professional autonomy are likely to contribute positively to teachers' job satisfaction.

²⁷ In the context of the study, homeroom teachers are class leaders who are responsible for coordination, management and leadership tasks. Homeroom teachers are commonly present across all grade levels and their roles are similar across grade levels.

- **Strong relationships with colleagues.** Positive relationships and peer problem solving were identified as a key resource against exhaustion. The study by Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014), using data from 1,878 teachers aged 45–65 (referred to in the study as ‘senior’ teachers), suggests that positive relationships with colleagues significantly diminished the impact of high workload on emotional exhaustion. Moreover, a study of 30,670 US public school teachers revealed that the perceived support of school principals ($r = 0.57$) and teacher cooperation ($r = 0.20$) are the strongest predictors of job satisfaction (Olsen and Huang, 2019).
- **Positive relationships with student’s parents/tutors.** Research by Hyseni Duraku et al. (2022), drawing on a sample of 460 early education teachers in Kosovo, highlights that positive parental cooperation is associated with increased job satisfaction by early-childhood education teachers (ISCED level 1).
- **Supportive leadership.** Transparent, communicative leaders provide emotional support and involvement opportunities that mitigate job demands. Meta-analytic reviews demonstrate that positive leader behaviours and high-quality leadership relationships significantly reduce stress among education professionals (Harms et al., 2017). In Germany, 266 secondary-school mathematics teachers reported that supportive, communicative school managers substantially reduced stress when clear administrative frameworks and participatory decision-making were encouraged (Jentsch et al., 2023).
- **Professional development.** Access to meaningful professional development builds competence and makes it possible to address issues such as a lack of IT skills. A study found that teachers who participate in modern, collaborative learning (peer observation, coaching and networks) experience higher job satisfaction and are more likely to remain in the profession (Kelchtermans, 2017).
- **Favourable school characteristics and grades/subjects taught.** A 2025 cross-national analysis of 46 countries by Eryilmaz et al. (2025) demonstrates that teachers with smaller average class sizes report significantly higher job satisfaction and lower stress. Furthermore, teachers who are employed in well-resourced institutions equipped with adequate materials and facilities also report higher satisfaction and reduced stress (Vousiopoulos et al., 2019). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) found that primary and lower secondary teachers (ISCED levels 1–2) perceive higher cognitive and emotional support levels in small schools. Moreover, satisfaction with the working environment appeared to be higher for teachers of subjects outside of core humanities and maths–science curricula (Barbieri et al., 2019).

3.7 Summary of main psychosocial risks in the education sector

Table 2: Summary table of PSRs for professionals in the education sector

Category	PSR type	PSR identified for teachers
Demands at work	Quantitative demands	- Balance of teaching and non-teaching responsibilities - Working hours - Workload and performance expectations
	Cognitive demands	- Updated and personalised curricula - Digitalisation of education and rise of artificial intelligence
	Emotional demands	- Exposure to emotionally demanding situations - Requirements to engage in emotional labour - Meeting students' emotional needs
Work organisation and job content	Influence at work (autonomy)	- Autonomy over own work - Autonomy over broader environment
	Characteristics of teaching institutions	- Class size - Size of education establishment - Multi-grade teaching - School location - Type of school (e.g. funding model)
	Possibilities for career development and progression	- Professional development - Career progression
Interpersonal relationships and leadership support	Relationship with colleagues	- Teacher support and cooperation - Workplace bullying by colleagues
	Relationship with supervisors	- Support from supervisors and leadership - Quality of leadership
	Work recognition	- Intrinsic recognition - Extrinsic recognition
Work–individual interferences	Employment conditions	- Job insecurity and type of contract - Earnings and financial security
	Work–life imbalances	- Employment conditions - Work–life imbalance
Conflicts and offensive behaviour	Physical violence	- Physical attacks by students - Harassment from students' parents
	Non-physical violence	- Non-physical violence by students - Non-physical violence by parents - Offensive online behaviours and cyberbullying
Other risk factors	Ergonomic factors	- Prolonged sitting/standing - Repetitive hand and arm movements (e.g. blackboard writing)
	Environmental	- Inadequate space for class preparation - High noise levels in classrooms

Source: Authors' own elaboration

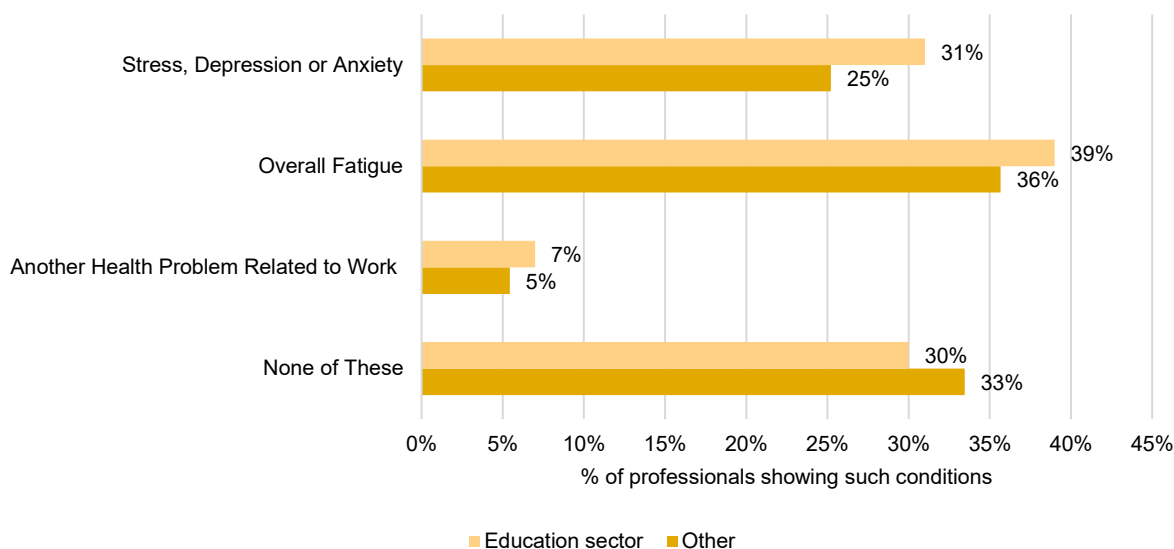
4 Impact of psychosocial risks on workers' mental health and on workplaces

In the literature, adverse health outcomes in education professionals have been consistently associated with exposure to work-related PSRs. This section explores the connections between work-related PSRs and mental and physical health outcomes, as well as wider workplace and societal consequences, highlighting how prolonged and cumulative exposure to PSR can undermine teachers' well-being.

4.1 Effects on mental health

Professionals in the education sector often face complex PSR factors in their working environments, including heavy workloads, rising administrative tasks, emotional and cognitive demands associated with disruptive classrooms, digital transformation, and expectations to address students' well-being beyond core teaching duties. These pressures are exacerbated by high quantitative demands and poor work-life imbalances, unsupportive work environments, and insufficient training, especially during the rapid changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, as a result of specific job characteristics and demands, **the education sector is more vulnerable to poor mental health outcomes than other occupations** (Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020). Figure 8, based on the OSH Pulse survey (2022), illustrates these findings. A systematic review of six studies by Silva et al. (2021) found that stressful academic environments and job-specific demands in the education sector contributed to an increased prevalence of depression, anxiety and stress among teachers. OSH Pulse survey (2022) data show that people who work in services related to education report higher levels of stress, depression or anxiety (31 % versus 25 %) and greater overall fatigue (39 % versus 36 %). OSH Pulse survey (2022) data show that people who work in services related to education report higher levels of stress, depression or anxiety (31 % versus 25 %) and greater overall fatigue (39 % versus 36 %).

Figure 8: Health problems caused or worsened by work (2022)



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on OSH Pulse survey (2022)

According to Eurofound (2023), **37 % of surveyed education professionals indicated that their health or safety was at risk from work-related factors**, with many experiencing increased PSRs and mental health issues during the pandemic. In the aftermath of the pandemic, as highlighted by the OSH Pulse survey, education professionals reported a higher incidence of mental health challenges than workers in other fields. In a sample of 1,633 Spanish teachers (from early-childhood to higher education), Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al. (2021) found that during the pandemic, a high percentage of teachers reported symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress.

Notably, the literature suggests a significant **overlap between stress, burnout, anxiety and depression** (Agyapong et al., 2022). For example, a study of 5,575 teachers in France reported that symptoms of depression were reported by approximately 63 % of teachers experiencing burnout,

compared to 15 % of those without burnout (Bianchi et al., 2014). A cross-sectional survey in Texas (US), drawing on a sample of 3,361 teachers, found that teachers who screened positive for an anxiety disorder reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress (PSS mean 26.3 versus 16.9; $p < .001$) and markedly greater rates of comorbid major depression (65.8 % versus 11.2 %; $p < .001$) compared to those without an anxiety disorder (Jones-Rincon and Howard, 2019).

▪ Stress

Many of the PSRs identified can lead to high levels of job-related stress. According to TALIS 2018 data, **nearly 50 % of European lower secondary school teachers experience work-related stress**. Nonetheless, there are important differences between countries. While 87.2 % of Portuguese teachers feel 'quite a bit' or 'a lot' of stress at work, only 48.9 % of teachers in Cyprus feel stressed. Additionally, **24 % and 22 % of teachers, respectively, report a negative impact of stress on their job and on their mental and physical health** (OECD, 2019). Stress is commonly linked to administrative work, excessive marking, classroom management, heavy teaching load, and addressing parental concerns (Eurydice, 2021). The prevalence of stress symptoms increased during the pandemic. Klapproth et al. (2020) examined the stress experienced by 380 German schoolteachers teaching online during lockdown and found that higher education teachers reported significantly more stress than teachers from special education and primary schools.

Another study involving 388 Greek teachers found that primary teachers reported higher stress levels than secondary teachers (Antoniou et al., 2013). Different stress levels might be explained by the fact that teachers working at higher levels of education tend to spend more time on actual teaching and learning activities, as the time spent on classroom management tasks decreases (OECD, 2019). Meanwhile, in higher education institutions, the stressors relate to role changes, job demands and a lack of managerial support (Kinman and Court, 2010).

Different studies have shown an association between PSRs and stress. Some of the factors include: a lack of control over various activities at school and administrative work (Jentsch et al., 2023); class size (Eryilmaz et al., 2025); multi-grade and crowded classes (often found in rural schools) (Darmody and Smyth, 2011); a lack of proper equipment and facilities (Vousiopoulos et al., 2019); providing ICT assistance to colleagues (Stang-Rabrig et al., 2022); professional relationships (Kelchtermans, 2017); inter-role conflict, particularly between work and personal life (Kinman, 2014); challenging parental relationships (Otero-López et al., 2009; Rodríguez-Mantilla and Fernández-Díaz, 2017); problematic relationships with students (Vorlíček et al., 2022); and being intimidated or verbally abused by students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021). Nonetheless, the risk of stress for teachers will also depend on numerous organisational, interpersonal and individual factors.

▪ Sleep disturbances and insomnia

European teaching professionals report significantly higher rates of sleep disturbances and insomnia than professionals in other sectors (Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020). A 2023 overview of 33 relevant articles from 15 EU and non-EU countries found a high prevalence of insomnia among schoolteachers, **with 36 % to 61 % of teachers reporting symptoms of insomnia** (Gierc et al., 2023). Contributing factors included being female, classroom violence, low job satisfaction, pain, depression and rumination, while a supportive work environment, by contrast, was linked to fewer sleep difficulties. Rudkjoebing et al. (2020) found that exposure to violence or threats in the workplace was consistently associated with elevated risks of depressive disorder, anxiety and depressive symptoms (including burnout and psychological distress), and sleep disturbances.

▪ Anxiety

Levels of anxiety are notably higher among European education professionals than among workers in many other professions (Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020). This anxiety is often manifested through symptoms such as constant worry, irritability, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, and physical symptoms like headaches or insomnia. In Spain, a union of teachers in the public sector reported that, during the 2020/2021 school year, **78 % of teachers reported anxiety** (ANPE, 2022). The causes of their anxiety are multifaceted, including false accusations from students, harassment and threats from students, parental harassment, issues with the work environment and/or administration, the pressure to train in new methodologies and digitalisation outside of teaching hours, and a lack of resources. Teachers perceive that the situation is beyond their control, which therefore generates feelings of powerlessness and incompetence (ANPE, 2022).

The studies reviewed in this report indicate that anxiety is mainly related to feeling mistrusted or facing difficult cooperation with parents (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2022); exposure to violence (Rudkjoebing et al., 2020; Chirico et al., 2021) and exposure to non-physical violence (Gerberich et al., 2011; Chirico et al., 2021).

▪ Depression

Depression is another significant mental health outcome linked to PSRs in the education sector. The demanding nature of teaching and the emotional labour involved in supporting students' emotions (Karakus et al., 2024; Lee and Van Vlack, 2018) place teachers at a high risk for depression. A review by Agyapong et al. (2022) found that depression was the most frequently reported mental health outcome among the studies on teachers included in the review. In Spain, the ANPE union of teachers in the public sector found that **12 % of teachers reported depression** and 15 % were on sick leave because of depressive symptoms (ANPE, 2022). A UK study of 555 secondary school teachers found that 19.4 % exhibited moderate to severe depressive symptoms, which were strongly associated with feeling unable to talk to a colleague when feeling stressed or down, dissatisfaction with work, and high presenteeism (Kidger et al., 2016). The rate of depressive symptoms increased during the pandemic. A Spanish study of 1,633 teachers from early-childhood education to university found that 32.2 % displayed depressive symptoms during the first year of the pandemic (2020). While most cases were mild (12.7 %) or moderate (11.9 %), 7.6 % were classified as severe or extremely severe (Santamaría et al., 2021).

Studies reviewed for this report explain the factors that place teachers at a high risk for depression. Contributing factors mainly include larger class sizes (Hindman and Bustamante, 2019; Pietarinen et al., 2013; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021) and workplace bullying (Dangleben, 2019; Kollerová et al., 2023).

▪ Burnout

Teacher burnout is a significant issue affecting psychological well-being and professional outcomes. Burnout is characterised by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, a cynical attitude towards work (or depersonalisation), and a sense of personal and professional inefficacy. Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling emotionally overextended and drained by one's work, leading to fatigue and reduced energy. At the same time, cynicism or depersonalisation involves a negative, detached attitude towards one's job, characterised by feelings of indifference. Inefficacy reflects feelings of incompetence and a lack of accomplishment, leading to diminished productivity and a sense of personal inadequacy.

Regarding emotional exhaustion, the WHO, in May 2019, included work-related exhaustion syndrome in its classification of diseases (ICD-11) that came into effect in 2022. Emotional exhaustion, along with perceived stress and anxiety, has gained increasing attention because of the job-related health risks that it poses for education professionals across all levels of education (Rodríguez-García et al., 2017; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017). Studies indicate that **teachers are particularly vulnerable to their profession's emotional and interpersonal demands, leading to higher levels of emotional exhaustion** than among workers in other fields (Iriarte Redín and Erro-Garcés, 2020). Data from the EWCS under COVID-19 found that 27 % of employees in the education sector reported feeling emotionally drained by work, slightly higher than the 25 % average across all sectors. Education ranked third after the health and hospitality sectors (Eurofound et al., 2020). Similarly, another study involving 279 German (primary and secondary) teachers found that roughly 60 % felt emotionally exhausted, and that most teachers felt stressed during the pandemic, likely due to a decline in teaching quality, including cognitive activation, classroom management and learning support (Sacré et al., 2023). In addition, in Croatia, 25.7 % of upper-level primary and secondary classroom teachers (ISCED levels 1–3) reported feeling emotionally exhausted most of the time, and **20 % reported feeling exhausted on a weekly basis** (Burić et al., 2019). Studies analysed in this report found emotional exhaustion among teachers to be linked to both teaching and non-teaching responsibilities (Sanchis-Giménez et al., 2024); prolonged working hours (Kreuzfeld et al., 2022); exposure to emotionally demanding situations (Arens and Morin, 2016; Kollerová et al., 2023; Tuxford and Bradley, 2015); low autonomy over work (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009, 2010); large class sizes (Hindman and Bustamante, 2019; Pietarinen et al., 2013; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021); poor collegial relationships (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014); teacher-targeted bullying (Pyhältö et al., 2015); and victimisation through workplace bullying (Kollerová et al., 2023).

A meta-analysis by García-Carmona et al. (2019) examined 45 studies from EU and non-EU countries and found that **28.1 % of secondary school teachers suffer from severe burnout**, 37.9 % have high levels of depersonalisation (absence of empathy towards other people), and 40.3 % have low levels of personal accomplishment (ability to face new challenges). Similarly, a study conducted in Italy with 500 upper secondary school teachers found that a third of teachers had high levels of burnout, and burnout was mostly associated with low scores in perceived efficacy, low job satisfaction and low professional commitment (Molero Jurado et al., 2019). In a study conducted among 2,310 Finnish in-service primary and lower secondary school teachers, almost half of the respondents displayed an increased burnout risk (Pyhälä et al., 2021). Other research indicates that teachers in the upper grades (ISCED levels 4–8) have been shown to experience more burnout than teachers in lower grades (ISCED levels 0–3) (Arvidsson et al., 2016; García-Carmona et al., 2019; Pietarinen et al., 2013; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021). Supporting this, a systematic review of 13 studies conducted by Chirico et al. (2021) further confirmed that secondary school teachers experienced higher levels of depersonalisation and lower levels of personal accomplishment than primary school teachers. Finally, while early-childhood teachers report significant emotional distress, leading to burnout and emotional dysregulation, some studies suggest that burnout rates in early-childhood education are lower than they are in other types of schools (Piačková, 2010).

Academics who teach in higher education are also exposed to high rates of burnout. As highlighted by Teles et al. (2020), using a sample of 520 professors from Portuguese higher education institutions, it was found that 7.9 % of participants scored high on burnout, defined by high emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation alongside low personal accomplishment. Recently, higher education has been facing many significant changes that influence the well-being of academics (García et al., 2016). The restructuring of universities, challenges related to the new generation of students, increasing work requirements, the role conflicts of teacher-researchers, and the intensity of student contact hours are just a few of the stressors in the daily work of university teachers that could lead to professional burnout (Puertas-Molero et al., 2018; Stelmokienė et al., 2019; Vesty et al., 2018).

The findings from the reviewed literature found a variety of factors that are linked to teacher burnout. They include being a subject teacher (Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021); high levels of academic emotional exhaustion, cynical attitudes and lack of personal accomplishment (García-Carmona et al., 2019); larger class sizes (Hindman and Bustamante, 2019; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021); small school size (Pietarinen et al., 2013); teaching in public schools (Ferreira and Martinez, 2012); victimisation through workplace bullying (Kollerová et al., 2023); and violence or threats in the workplace (Rudkjoebing et al., 2020).

4.2 Other health outcomes linked with psychosocial risks at work

The effects of work-related PSRs are multifaceted, since they affect not only mental health but also physical health. If stress reactions persist over a prolonged period, they cause permanent and hard-to-reverse health problems such as chronic fatigue and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) (Ahola et al., 2013; Rahimi et al., 2015).

▪ Musculoskeletal disorders

Psychosocial factors have been positively associated with MSDs among teachers, including problems with tendons, tendon sheaths, muscles, nerves, bursae and blood vessels, as also confirmed by the stakeholders consulted in the interviews. The literature suggests that PSRs such as high workload, high work stressors, lack of social support, low job control, low job satisfaction, poor leadership and monotonous work are most clearly associated with MSDs among schoolteachers (Eatough et al., 2012; Erick and Smith, 2011; Ng et al., 2019). Moreover, with an **increase in teleworking** in the wake of the COVID-19 school closures, many teachers, both in schools and in higher education, were required to spend entire days seated at their computers, leading to MSDs such as back pain, neck pain and other related issues (Jiménez et al., 2022). Zyznawska and Bartecka (2021) found that cervical pain intensity increased from 2.49 to 5.44 on the numerical rating scale, while the intensity of low back pain rose from 2.81 to 5.53 among 361 Polish teachers and university lecturers.

▪ Voice problems

Hoarseness and other voice problems are common in occupations where the person must speak, sing or shout in a work environment containing dust, noise and gaseous or particulate irritants. In recent

years, stress has often been associated with voice problems (Putus et al., 2024). For example, a study of 1,198 Finnish full-time primary and secondary school teachers found that voice disorders, stress at work and poor indoor environment quality contributed to a decreased ability to work (Vertanen-Greis et al., 2022). A further study (De Brito Mota et al., 2019) suggests a connection between burnout syndrome and the **likelihood of developing a voice disorder**. In Spain, a study of 282 classroom teachers in early-childhood and primary education revealed that 62.7 % were experiencing occupational voice disorders. These teachers also reported significantly worse psychosocial working conditions, including poor work organisation, higher psychological demands, less control over their work, and limited social support compared to colleagues with healthy voices (Bermúdez De Alvear et al., 2010). Additionally, another study indicates that voice disorders are more prevalent in classrooms with higher student numbers (Jemeljanenko and Geske, 2019).

4.3 Broader impacts

High levels of psychosocial risk among teaching professionals can have far-reaching consequences, both for teachers' careers and for their students, as well as broader organisational and economic consequences.

4.3.1 Teachers' trajectories and workforce stability

Teacher stress and burnout have a detrimental effect on the stability of the teaching workforce. Mental health impacts of PSRs in teachers significantly impact **job satisfaction**, which can be understood as the sense of fulfilment and gratification that teachers gain from their occupation. Using data from TALIS 2018 and drawing on a sample of 77,285 teachers from 4,404 schools, Admiraal and Kittelsen Røberg (2023) found that feelings of emotional distress – indicated by mental and physical health issues – showed a strong negative relationship with job satisfaction. High levels of job satisfaction have a positive association with teachers' performance (Macpherson, Parrott and Beattie, 2011) and self-efficacy (Mostafa and Pál, 2018), and have strong implications for retention, attrition, absenteeism, burnout, commitment to education goals and teachers' job performance.

Where **teacher attrition** does occur, it entails efficiency costs for schools, which then need to spend time and resources on integrating new teachers into the school organisation and culture. Teaching professionals who experience elevated stress at work are more likely to report their intention to leave the profession and move to other careers in the following five years (OECD, 2020) or to take early retirement. A large meta-analysis by Madigan and Kim (2021) revealed that all three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, cynicism/depersonalisation and inefficacy) are strongly associated with intentions to quit. Importantly, the findings suggest that burnout may carry a risk for teacher attrition that outweighs the protection conferred by job satisfaction, and that this risk may increase job attrition. In addition, high workloads and long hours are cited as reasons that teachers may leave their profession (EENEE-NESET, 2023).

Furthermore, **teachers leaving the profession or their early retirement**, together with an ageing workforce, exacerbate current teacher shortages (Eurydice, 2021), putting additional work pressure on those who stay in the profession. In addition, when teachers retire early, the education system loses skilled professionals who are often mentors for younger staff and crucial for maintaining high-quality teaching. The main reasons for early retirement are mental and psychosomatic illnesses, which together account for 32 % to 50 % of cases, respectively, among classroom teachers working in Germany (Scheuch et al., 2015).

4.3.2 Students' learning and classroom dynamics

Teacher–student relations are fundamental for students. Students who report positive, supportive relations with teachers scored 15–25 points higher in mathematics than peers who report weaker relations (OECD, 2015). **Emotionally exhausted teachers have shown lower motivation levels towards teaching and lower-quality student interactions** (Pianta et al., 2020). As highlighted by the interviewed stakeholders who represented the interests of teachers at national level, teachers serve as important reference figures for students, who may view them as role models during their development, given the significant amount of time they spend together. Students are sensitive to when teachers are stressed or disengaged from teaching, which may, in turn, negatively affect the students' own mental health and well-being, potentially creating a vicious cycle and making the profession appear even less

desirable to students. For example, one study found that teachers' stress levels also affected the stress levels of primary school students when they arrived at school in the morning (Oberle and Schonert-Reichl, 2016). A study of 1,182 secondary school teachers in the UK further supported this link between teacher and student well-being, finding that higher teacher well-being was associated with enhanced student well-being and reduced psychological distress. Teacher presenteeism and teacher–student relationship quality played key roles in these outcomes, with higher levels of depressive symptoms in teachers linked to poorer student well-being (Harding et al., 2019).

Moreover, the levels of teacher attrition, including the effects on recruiting, hiring and preparing new teachers, can impact students' learning trajectories. Ronfeldt, Loeb and Wyckoff (2013) estimated the effects of teacher turnover on over 850,000 New York City (US) fourth- and fifth-grade (ISCED level 1) student observations over eight years. They found that **teacher attrition significantly impacts student achievement and imposes substantial costs on school districts**.

4.3.3 Social and economic costs

Teaching professionals' mental health is related to human capital costs and, consequently, economic costs. The education sector is an important contributor to the European economy and a major employer. More than 10 million people were employed as teaching professionals in 2022, which accounts for 5 % of total EU employment (Cedefop, 2023a). Economic costs are associated with teachers' exposure to PSRs and the corresponding mental health consequences, both for education and healthcare systems.

Teachers in disadvantaged schools are more likely to be exposed to PSRs and, in turn, have an increased risk of poor mental health (Sinkkonen and Kytälä, 2014). These schools might struggle to maintain stable staffing and quality instruction (Harding et al., 2019). In turn, this might **exacerbate educational inequalities within and between EU Member States**. With teacher shortages projected to reach 4.8 million across Europe and North America by 2030, mental health-related attrition compounds sustainability challenges (UNESCO, 2024).

At the same time, the healthcare sector absorbs additional costs through the elevated use of mental health services. **Mental health disorders cost Europe over €600 billion annually, equivalent to more than 4 % of GDP across the EU-27** (European Commission, 2025). While this figure encompasses all sectors, the education workforce's elevated mental health risks contribute disproportionately to the costs. The European Trade Union Institute (2025) has estimated the economic toll of work-related stress across the European Union at over **€100 billion annually**, with teaching professionals representing a significant component of the burden as a result of their heightened exposure to PSRs.

5 Selection of good practices on psychosocial risk prevention, intervention and management in the education sector

In the context of PSRs, good practices refer to effective approaches and principles that organisations and employers, including teachers, can adopt to promote positive mental health, well-being and safety in the workplace. They can be direct actions, including organisational planning (for prevention), management (of existing exposure) and intervention (addressing the consequences of poor psychosocial environments) to mitigate exposure to PSRs at work. Good practices can also include a series of strategic policies, measures, programmes, projects and other initiatives undertaken by public authorities in the three previously described fields of action.

While well-established methodologies exist for addressing physical, chemical and biological health concerns, preventing and managing psychosocial risks poses a more complex challenge. According to the latest ESENER (2019), 70 % to 90 % of educational establishments have risk management plans for dangerous chemicals and machines, but only 50 % to 70 % cover ergonomic and psychosocial risks. The literature suggests that the latter risks are often perceived as more challenging to handle and require multifaceted approaches (EU-OSHA, 2022a). A study of 58 Finnish VET teachers found that educational institutions often interpret organisational problems as deficiencies in the competence of personnel or as a result of occupational burdens rather than systemic issues that require organisational solutions (Tappura and Pulkkinen, 2019). The systematic review by Wischitzki et al. (2020) identifies a gap in the literature that investigates psychosocial risks in the education sector, especially **a lack of prevention and management strategies to address psychosocial risks**. The present section seeks to address the gap.

Given the wide variety of risks present in schools, experts have developed a wide range of strategies to tackle them. However, not all measures offer the same level of protection or effectiveness. These measures are classified using the **OSH hierarchy of controls** to help school leaders and administrators to choose the most appropriate and impactful solutions. The tool identifies a preferred order of actions that can best control hazardous workplace exposures. In particular, the hierarchy follows a clear order of effectiveness: elimination, technical, organisational and personal measures. This sequence is based on the principle that measures to address hazards at their source are more effective and reliable than those dependent on human behaviour. The OSH hierarchy includes:

- **Elimination measures.** They involve completely removing hazards from the workplace. This approach ensures that no exposure can occur since the hazard no longer exists.
- **Technical measures.** They involve physical modifications to equipment, systems or work environments to reduce or prevent worker exposure to hazards. These controls operate independently of human intervention and target hazards at their source.
- **Organisational measures.** They involve changes in work procedures, policies and management systems to limit worker exposure to hazards in time and space. These measures do not eliminate hazards but control how and when workers are exposed to them.
- **Personal and behavioural measures.** They represent the least effective level in the hierarchy and include behavioural safety approaches. These measures create a barrier around individual workers but are considered the last line of defence.

Ten good practices were identified. The table below summarises how the interventions address different PSRs and what approach they take.

Table 3: Good practices identified according to the OSH hierarchy of controls

	Elimination	Technical	Organisational	Personal
Demand at work			▪ Positive Learn project (EU-level) ▪ Job crafting (The Netherlands) ▪ Joint Practical Guidelines on how to promote joint social partner initiatives (EU-level)	
Work organisation and job content		▪ OiRA tools (EU-OSHA)	▪ Right to disconnect (Italy) ▪ Job crafting (The Netherlands)	
Interpersonal relationships and leadership			▪ The Osaava Verme (Skilled Worker) network (Finland)	▪ Teachers' health campaign (Austria)
Work–individual interference			▪ Right to disconnect (Italy)	
Conflict and offensive behaviours	▪ Violence prevention law (Italy)	▪ OiRA tools (EU-OSHA) ▪ 'Teacher's Ombudsman' service (Spain)		
Other risks (ergonomic, environmental)		▪ Quiet rooms for teachers (Denmark)		

Source: Author's own elaboration

While the aim was to achieve a balanced overview of good practices across the four levels of the hierarchy, the table shows that there are fewer elimination and technical measures to address PSRs than organisational ones. This reflects the inherent challenges in completely removing PSRs from educational work environments, unlike traditional occupational safety hazards. Moreover, fewer interventions that aim at modifying teachers' behaviour were ultimately included as they address individual-level protective measures and are considered the least effective.

While organisational and personal interventions can be adopted at workplace level, elimination controls are often implemented at national or regional level through policies, regulations or large-scale system design. This is because elimination strategies often require broad authority, such as legislative action or fundamental changes in work processes, that go beyond the scope of individual workplaces. However, there may be differences; some elimination controls, such as redesigning work environments, eliminating work tasks or eliminating sources of stress, are possible at the institutional level if the organisation has sufficient resources. In practice, **effective risk management usually involves**

combining interventions at these levels to address risks at both system-wide and workplace levels (Dalgaard et al., 2025).

The following section differentiates between workplace and national/regional interventions. Workplace interventions refer to those that can be designed, funded and managed directly by individual schools or educational institutions, such as training programmes, acoustic redesign, and job crafting workshops. National/regional interventions require coordination among government bodies, social partners or pan-European agencies to set standards, enforce compliance and allocate public funding, and they can include legislation, EU-wide guidelines, and online risk-assessment platforms.

5.1 Good practices for the workplace

Box 1: Intervention #1 — Online training on digital technologies and innovative pedagogies

Positive Learn project ('Distance learning positification: technostress relief and well-being')		
Organisations implementing the initiative:	Educational establishments where it has been implemented:	Countries/Regions:
National Centre for Scientific Research 'Demokritos', Hochschule Ruhr West, Ellinogermaniki Agogi, University of Jyväskylä	Any primary or secondary school teacher can enrol in the training.	Greece Finland Germany

- **Objective:** The project was launched in response to the increased psychosocial risks faced by teachers during the shift to online education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many school professionals struggled with cognitive demands, stress and anxiety linked to rapidly changing work organisation and the need to adapt to new digital tools. Recognising that well-being is essential for both teachers and students, the project aims to modernise teacher education by integrating well-being and mental health into all subjects. Its main objective is to equip teachers with the skills and resources needed to address the stressful impact of technology use, promote positive psychological practices and build resilience. Through innovative pedagogical frameworks, practical learning scenarios and an open exchange platform, the initiative supports teachers in becoming agents of change, fostering healthier digital learning environments and helping schools to manage their digital transformation sustainably and effectively.
- **Content and actions:** The initiative developed a set of innovative curriculum tools, including open learning scenarios and ready-to-use materials, which help teachers to integrate well-being strategies into daily lessons. It was implemented through collaborative workshops, pilot testing in schools, and continuous feedback from teachers to adapt resources to real classroom needs. Teachers and other school professionals were actively consulted during the design phase to ensure the solutions addressed their actual challenges and to strengthen ownership of the outcomes. While the project's main focus is on all school staff, special attention was given to supporting teachers with high cognitive demands and increased workload as a consequence of the sudden shift to online education.
- **Results:** The initiative has delivered a range of concrete results designed to reduce teachers' exposure to PSRs and improve their mental and physical well-being in digital learning environments. Through outputs, the project provides comprehensive support for healthier online teaching. One output offered an overview of European distance learning needs through detailed requirements mapping and stakeholder consultation, highlighting key stressors such as high cognitive demands and sudden work organisation changes. Another output created open learning scenarios and an interactive exchange platform, giving teachers practical tools and peer support to address technostress and foster well-being. Other outcomes produced clear implementation guidance to help schools to integrate these practices effectively, and developed a roadmap tool to support long-term planning and institutional change. Together, the results might contribute to lowering anxiety and stress, strengthening teachers' resilience, and promoting a healthier balance between digital demands and well-being in education.

Source: <https://positive-learn.eu/>

Box 2: Intervention #2 — Mentor training

The Osaava Verme (Skilled Worker) network		
Organisations implementing the initiative:	Educational establishments where it has been implemented:	Country/Region:
Ministry of Education and Culture, University of Jyväskylä	Any primary or secondary school teacher can enrol in the mentor training.	Finland

- **Objective:** The network was created to strengthen continuing professional development for teachers through peer group mentoring, addressing growing psychosocial risks such as heavy workloads, changing job conditions, and increasing emotional and social demands in the education sector. The initiative emerged from the recognition that teachers often face complex challenges alone, with limited opportunities to share expertise or find support for work-related stressors. By fostering small peer groups, the initiative provides a safe environment where education professionals, from teachers to counsellors and early-childhood educators, can regularly exchange experiences, discuss practical problems and co-create solutions relevant to their daily work. This collective learning approach aims to reduce feelings of isolation, improve coping strategies for demanding workloads and evolving job roles, and strengthen well-being and resilience within schools. The initiative thus builds a foundation for lifelong learning that directly supports teachers' mental health and professional growth.
- **Content and actions:** The initiative puts peer group mentoring into practice by forming small groups of 4 to 10 education professionals who meet from 6 to 8 times each academic year to share experiences, discuss challenges and develop solutions together. The groups are self-directed, with no predefined curriculum; instead, participants plan sessions based on real work-related issues, ensuring that their voices shape the learning process. To support this, mentors are specially trained through national programmes funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Training includes seminars on narrative methods, dialogical working, well-being at work, and interaction skills, ensuring mentors are equipped to guide discussions effectively. While any teaching professional can join, the programme particularly supports new teachers, those returning after a break, and professionals from early-childhood education, youth work or guidance counselling. By focusing on voluntary, participant-led groups, the initiative ensures teachers are fully consulted and empowered throughout the process.
- **Results:** Although no formal impact evaluation is available, the peer-group mentoring model has shown promising results in strengthening professional development and well-being among education professionals. By creating a safe space for open dialogue and mutual support, participants report increased confidence, reduced feelings of isolation, and better coping with work-related challenges. By 2020, **approximately 900 mentors were trained** in 150 municipalities. It is estimated that 2,000 educational professionals have been involved in total (Heikkinen et al., 2020). The training of new mentors ensures the sustainability and wider reach of the initiative, helping more teachers and education experts to build supportive peer networks across Finland.

Source: <https://osaavaverme.wixsite.com/verme/mentorikoulutus>

Box 3: Intervention #3 — Open plan areas for teaching and group work

Quiet rooms for teachers		
Organisation implementing the initiative:	Educational establishments where it has been implemented:	Country/Region:
Danish Building Research Institute	Hellerup and Absalon schools	Denmark

- **Objective:** The Acoustic Design of Open Plan Schools project emerged as a response to the growing trend for open learning spaces, which reappeared despite earlier failures as a result of high noise and distraction levels. The initiative recognises that poor acoustic conditions in open-plan schools can increase emotional demands on teachers, contribute to unsafe noise exposure and create ergonomic strains as staff raise their voices or struggle to maintain attention in noisy settings. To tackle the risks involved, the project aims to set clear acoustic requirements that ensure good speech intelligibility within groups and sufficient sound insulation between them. By improving room acoustics and introducing semi-open layouts, the initiative supports healthier working environments for teachers and better learning conditions for students. Ultimately, its goal is to reduce stress, improve concentration, and protect teachers' mental and physical well-being through well-designed acoustic solutions.
- **Content and actions:** The project focused on providing clear technical solutions to address acoustic problems in modern open learning spaces. The initiative analysed sound propagation and speech intelligibility challenges through field measurements and laboratory simulations, then developed practical acoustic guidelines for architects and school planners. It proposed semi-open layouts and acoustic zoning to balance openness with controlled noise levels. Teachers' experiences and observations were actively gathered through surveys and case studies to ensure the design guidelines addressed real classroom challenges. While the recommendations applied to all staff in open-plan schools, special attention was given to teachers working with younger children, who are particularly affected by high noise and distraction. By linking design decisions to everyday work practices, the project ensured that acoustic improvements directly supported teachers' ability to focus, communicate clearly and manage their classrooms effectively.
- **Results:** The project demonstrated that careful planning and improved acoustic standards can significantly reduce noise-related issues in open learning environments. By combining simulation tools and real-world case studies, the initiative provided clear evidence that semi-open spaces with appropriate zoning and sound insulation can improve speech clarity and reduce disruptive background noise. In a school that implemented the approach (Hellerup School), reverberation time in open common areas decreased from 0.57 seconds to 0.36-0.40 seconds (a reduction of 33 %), while the absorption area increased from 0.9 to 1.3-1.4 times the floor area (an increase of 50 %). Speech transmission index (STI) measurements showed that direct sight communication maintained STI values of approximately 0.73 under real-life noise conditions, while speech between separate work areas (between hexagons) achieved STI values well below 0.2, indicating effective sound privacy. Questionnaire responses indicated general satisfaction with the improved acoustic conditions after renovations. Teachers reported fewer distractions and better communication conditions in redesigned spaces.²⁸ Although the project focused mainly on technical solutions, it also raised awareness among school designers and education authorities about the crucial link between room acoustics, teachers' well-being, and effective learning.

Source: Petersen & Rasmussen (2012)

²⁸ The study by Petersen & Rasmussen (2012) does not provide a precise percentage on the teacher improvements.

Box 4: Intervention #4 — Awareness campaign on the health and well-being of teachers

Lehrer:innengesundheit (Teachers' health)		
Organisation implementing the initiative: GIVE – Servicestelle für Gesundheitsförderung an Österreichs Schulen (Service Centre for Health Promotion at Austrian Schools)	Educational establishments where it has been implemented: Any primary or secondary school can participate in the initiative.	Country/Region: Austria

- Objective:** The health promotion initiative for teachers aims to make schools healthier places to work and learn. The goal is to ensure that teachers can manage not only complex subject content but also relationships with students, parents and colleagues, as well as constant changes in regulations. To achieve the goal, the initiative combines measures that target both individuals and school environments. It focuses on reducing personal risk factors such as burnout, work overload, chronic stress, poor work–life balance and conflict at work, while strengthening teachers' personal resources like coping skills, stress management and emotional regulation.
- Content and actions:** The health promotion initiative provides teachers and school leaders with a wide range of practical tools, resources and guidance. The programme offers easy-to-access materials such as handbooks, factsheets, online toolkits, and checklists that cover topics like time management, stress reduction, mindfulness, conflict resolution and healthy teaching practices. The resources help teachers to incorporate healthier routines and teaching methods into daily work. Peer support, coaching and supervision services are also encouraged in order to foster a culture of mutual help among educators. Special focus is given to newcomers through mentoring and to teachers who face high workloads or burnout risks. Workers are involved through feedback channels, regular exchanges and professional networks, ensuring that the measures reflect real needs.
- Results:** While concrete outcomes directly linked to the initiative are not yet available, related findings from the Austrian Teacher and Principal Health Study (IfGP, 2023) (cross-sectional survey of 700 school principals and nearly 3,400 teachers in Austria conducted during the fall of 2022) offer useful insights. The survey part of the study showed that over 80 % of teachers and principals report good to very good general health and high job satisfaction, with most feeling well supported by their social environment. However, roughly 50 % still find their workload overwhelming and 10 % describe it as very overwhelming. These figures highlight ongoing challenges related to stress and workload in schools, which the initiative's resources and guidance aim to address by promoting better health and well-being.

Source: <https://www.give.or.at/angebote/themen/lehrerinnengesundheit/>

Box 5: Intervention #5 — Fostering teachers' well-being via a job crafting intervention

Job crafting intervention based on JD-R theory		
Organisation implementing the initiative:	Educational establishments where it has been implemented:	Country/Region:
Erasmus University Rotterdam	Four primary education schools	The Netherlands
▪ Objective: The intervention was developed to help teachers to adapt their work environment proactively in response to rising technological and organisational changes that have increased workload complexity and emotional demands in schools. Rooted in JD-R theory, the intervention aims to empower educators to balance job demands with resources, improving well-being and work engagement. By fostering self-initiated changes in tasks, social connections and work structures, the intervention addresses PSRs such as high workload, emotional strain and limited control over job conditions. Teachers learn to increase their job resources, embrace new challenges and align tasks with personal strengths, which helps to counteract stress and burnout risks. Overall, the project's goal is to boost teachers' motivation and satisfaction by satisfying core psychological needs for autonomy, competence and social belonging within their daily teaching practice. ▪ Content and actions: The intervention was designed as a structured training programme delivered directly in schools to guide teachers in reshaping aspects of their work. It was implemented through workshops that combined individual reflection and group discussion, in which teachers actively analysed their current tasks and identified ways to increase resources or tackle stressors. Workers were fully involved in co-designing their own job crafting plans, ensuring the process reflected real teaching challenges and personal goals. Participants created concrete action plans to adjust tasks, build supportive relationships or seek new learning opportunities. While the initiative was open to all teaching staff, it specifically supported educators in demanding roles or under high workload pressure. The training also encouraged peer support, creating a shared culture where teachers exchange ideas and sustain job crafting efforts over time, helping to embed lasting changes in daily practice. ▪ Results: The intervention produced promising results in helping teachers to reduce their exposure to PSR factors and improve their overall well-being. Teachers who participated (N = 71) reported increased job resources and a stronger sense of autonomy and control over their daily tasks. By actively redesigning aspects of their work, they were better able to manage heavy workloads and emotional demands, which in turn helped to lower stress and the risk of burnout. Teachers also noted improvements in work engagement and job satisfaction, which are key protective factors for mental health. Although the intervention focused mainly on psychological well-being, some participants highlighted indirect benefits for their physical health, such as reduced fatigue and tension linked to chronic stress. Moreover, the programme strengthened teachers' resilience and created positive changes in school environments, demonstrating that proactive, participatory approaches can effectively address work-related stress in education.		

Source: Van Wingerden et al. (2017a)

5.2 Good practices for national/regional intermediaries

Box 6: Intervention #6 — Help service for teachers

The 'Teacher's Ombudsman' service		
Organisation implementing the initiative: ANPE Sindicato Independiente (professionals union)	Educational establishments where it has been implemented: Any primary or secondary school teacher can use the service.	Country/Region: Spain
▪ Objective: The service was created to provide immediate, free support to teachers facing violence, conflicts and daily challenges that undermine their well-being. Launched by ANPE in 2005, the initiative was born in response to growing concerns about rising physical and non-physical violence in classrooms, high quantitative demands, excessive workloads, stress and burnout among educators. By offering personalised guidance through specialised psychologists, counsellors and legal advisors, the service helps teachers to address conflicts that often leave them feeling isolated and vulnerable. It also acts as an observatory, collecting data to highlight the scale of problems and push for better policies to protect teachers. In this regard, the service aims to reduce teachers' exposure to violence, improve their working conditions and strengthen respect for the teaching profession, helping educators to regain confidence, protect their mental health and focus on their core role of educating students. ▪ Content and actions: The initiative is accessible to teachers in all of Spain's autonomous communities, offering personalised attention to anyone experiencing conflict or violence at school. The initiative was implemented through ANPE's coordinated network of specialised psychologists, counsellors and legal advisors, who handle each case individually and confidentially. Teachers can contact the service by phone, email or an online form, ensuring easy access without barriers. The service actively collects anonymous data on teachers' situations, such as the nature and duration of problems, symptoms experienced, and prior interventions. Although the service is open to all teachers at all educational levels, it especially assists teachers who are facing severe classroom disruptions, repeated conflict, or aggressive behaviour from students or families. In this regard, the initiative ensures teachers' voices inform national reports, awareness campaigns and policy demands for safer, healthier schools. ▪ Results: The service has proved to be a vital, widely used resource for teachers who need urgent support to cope with violence, excessive workloads and growing psychosocial demands. In the 2022/2023 academic year alone, the service handled 1,947 cases nationwide, showing sustained high demand and highlighting teachers' exposure to complex stressors like physical or verbal aggression, heavy bureaucratic burdens, and burnout (ANPE, 2023). A report by ANPE indicates that 74 % of teachers who contacted the service in the 2022/2023 academic year did so seeking psychological support, reflecting the strong emotional impact of the current educational context. Among the cases treated, 77 % presented symptoms related to anxiety, and there is an increase in teachers with depression, reaching roughly 13 %. The literature suggests that by providing immediate counselling and legal support, the service helps to reduce feelings of isolation, protects mental health and prevents the escalation of stress-related symptoms that can lead to sick leave or longer-term health issues. Nonetheless, there is no data on the extent to which the service helps to reduce mental health symptoms.		

Source: <https://eldefensordelprofesor.es/categoria/3/El-defensor-del-profesor>

Box 7: Intervention #7 — Guidelines to prevent and combat PSRs in education

Joint Practical Guidelines on How to Promote Joint Social Partner Initiatives at European, National, Regional and Local Levels to Prevent and Combat Psychosocial Hazards in Education		
Organisations implementing the initiative: European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) and European Trade Union Committee for Education (CSEE-ETUCE)	Educational establishments where it has been implemented: EU-wide	Country/Region: EU
▪ Objective: The guidelines were developed by the European social partners in education to tackle rising work-related stress and psychosocial hazards in the sector. Born out of evidence that stress, poor work organisation and a lack of supportive environments harm teachers' mental and physical health, the initiative aims to create healthy, safe and supportive workplaces for all education staff. By providing practical guidance for employers, trade unions and education authorities, the project encourages joint action to prevent and combat stressors such as excessive workload, poor work design and insufficient social support. The guidelines promote sustained change by supporting healthy working conditions and fostering a positive school climate, contributing to the EU's wider goals of quality education and decent, healthy workplaces. ▪ Content and actions: The guidelines outline clear actions to prevent and manage PSRs in schools through dialogue and joint responsibility. The initiative was implemented collaboratively by education employers and trade unions at European level, ensuring that workers' voices were included through social dialogue structures. The guidelines encourage schools and institutions to set up local frameworks for identifying stress factors and developing tailored prevention measures. Practical actions include regular risk assessments, awareness-raising campaigns, and training for managers and staff on recognising the early signs of work-related stress. While the guidelines apply to all staff who work in education – e.g. teachers, trainers, school leaders and support personnel – specific attention is given to vulnerable groups such as newly qualified teachers and older staff, who may face higher risks. ▪ Results: While the guidelines do not provide quantitative results, they highlight expected positive outcomes such as reduced exposure to PSR factors and improved mental and physical well-being among education staff. This approach helps schools to address stressors like excessive workload, poor work organisation and a lack of social support. In the long term, the guidelines are expected to contribute to healthier working conditions, lower levels of work-related stress, and better job satisfaction, ultimately supporting teachers' resilience and sustaining quality education across Europe.		

Source: https://www.csee-etuce.org/images/attachments/Joint-practical-guidelines-SPs-Decent-Workplaces_-EN.pdf

Box 8: Intervention #8 — Online risk assessment tools

Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tools for teachers and other education sector professionals		
Organisations implementing the initiative: different partners (e.g. EU-OSHA; Generalitat de Catalunya; Croatian Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy; Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; EFEE and CSEE-ETUCE; Hellenic Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; State Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Lithuania; State Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Latvia; Cypriot Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance; Bulgarian General Labour Inspectorate)	Educational establishments where it has been implemented: EU and nationwide	Country/Region: EU and different countries/regions (e.g. Catalonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus, Bulgaria)
▪ Objective: The OiRA tools were created by EU-OSHA to make risk assessment practical and accessible, especially for micro and small enterprises, which often lack the resources or expertise to carry out thorough workplace safety evaluations. In the education sector, OiRA tools specifically target teachers and educational staff who work in primary and secondary schools, vocational training, and universities, recognising that they face particular PSRs such as high workload, third-party violence, and bullying, as well as ergonomic hazards linked to standing or sitting work and vocal strain. The OiRA education tools have been developed through extensive collaboration among multiple stakeholders at European and national levels. The European sectoral social partners – the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE) – have worked in close partnership with EU-OSHA to develop three EU-level tools that cover different education sectors. The tools were launched to help schools systematically to identify these hazards, assess the levels of risk and choose suitable preventive measures, ultimately improving working conditions and supporting teachers' well-being. In this sense, OiRA empowers educators to manage risks proactively, reducing stress, burnout and health problems linked to the demanding nature of the profession. ▪ Content and actions: The tools provide a practical, user-friendly online platform that enables national authorities, sectoral organisations and social partners to develop customised risk assessments. For teachers and educational staff, the tools guide users through a clear, step-by-step process: identifying workplace hazards, evaluating associated risks, and selecting appropriate measures to eliminate or mitigate them. The tools cover a wide range of risks, from PSR factors like violence and bullying to ergonomic issues such as prolonged standing or vocal strain. Importantly, the development and use of OiRA tools actively involve workers and their representatives, ensuring that their expertise and on-the-ground experience shape the measures proposed. This participatory approach helps to tailor the tools to the real needs of teachers and ensures their participation. Currently, 19 OiRA tools cover the education sector across the EU, representing one of the most extensively covered sectors in the OiRA platform.		

The tools are implemented across multiple education levels:

- Higher Education and Research (2024)²⁹
- Early-Childhood Education (2019)³⁰
- Secondary Education (2019)³¹

According to EU-OSHA, there are 19 OiRA tools covering the education sector in total, making education one of the most extensively covered sectors in the OiRA platform. This includes the 3 EU-level tools developed by the European social partners (ETUCE and EFEE) plus 16 national/regional tools across the 11 countries (France, Croatia, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Slovenia, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus, Bulgaria).³²

- **Results:** The OSH4Edu project (2020-2021) provided evidence for continued development, involving over 60 educational social partners from EFEE and ETUCE networks across two interactive workshops. Recent qualitative studies across France, Cyprus, Slovenia and Lithuania have provided evidence of OiRA's effectiveness in different settings, including education (EU-OSHA, 2025). While detailed quantitative results are not available for the education setting, the tools help to reduce exposure to PSRs and promote healthier practices and preventive measures. The comparative report by EU-OSHA (2025) points out that the tool is easy to use and increases awareness in meeting legal obligations, and it ultimately contributes to better mental and physical health outcomes for workers. The report on the Lithuanian experience³³ highlights that the OiRA tool is suitable for educational institutions, which often operate within tight budgets and cannot afford expensive external assessments. Although specific figures are not provided, the widespread adoption of OiRA demonstrates its practical value in fostering safer, healthier school environments.

Source: <https://oira.osha.europa.eu/en/oira-tools?f%5B0%5D=sector%3A1186&page=%2C0>

²⁹ <https://osha.europa.eu/en/highlights/tailored-risk-assessment-higher-education-sector-new-eu-oira-tool-released>

³⁰ <https://www.etuce.org/en/projects/oira/3370-project-introduction>

³¹ <https://oira.osha.europa.eu/es/Partners/european-federation-education-employers>

³² https://oira.osha.europa.eu/en/oira-tools?aggregated_field=f%5B0%5D=sector%3A1186&facets_query=&page=%2C1

³³ https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/OiRA-Lithuania_EN.pdf

Box 9: Intervention #9 — Right to disconnect for school teachers

Right to disconnect in the National Collective Labour Agreement for Education and Research		
Organisation implementing the initiative:	Educational establishments where it has been implemented:	Country/Region:
ARAN (Agency for the Negotiation Representation of Public Administrations) and main national trade unions	Nationwide	Italy

- **Objective:** The right to disconnect for teachers was introduced in the National Collective Labour Agreement (CCNL) for Education and Research to tackle increasing work–life imbalances caused by constant digital connectivity and blurred boundaries between work and personal time. First included in the CCNL for 2016–2018, the right set out general criteria to limit the use of work technologies outside working hours through supplementary agreements at school level. The new CCNL for 2019–2021, signed in January 2024, reaffirmed this protection, requiring schools to define clear limits and actions if this right is violated. This initiative responds to the growing strain on teachers from excessive digital communications, late-night messages and administrative overload, which fuel stress, burnout and the disruption of personal life. The right to disconnect aims to safeguard teachers' mental health and restore a healthier balance between their professional duties and private lives.
- **Content and actions:** The right to disconnect in schools is implemented through supplementary bargaining at individual institutions, requiring trade union members to define precise criteria for when and how teachers can disconnect. This includes setting clear contact slots and protected non-working periods, as specified in the latest CCNL for 2019–2021 that was signed in January 2024. Schools are obliged to ensure that communication channels like WhatsApp or private phones are not misused for official messages beyond agreed hours. Teachers have actively highlighted issues through unions and consultations, pushing for stronger boundaries. Although all school staff are covered, the measures are especially relevant for teachers, who often face excessive after-hours digital communication from principals, parents and colleagues.
- **Results:** The National Observatory on the Safety of School Staff at the Ministry of Education and Merit is responsible for monitoring and analysing reports of violence or threats to school staff, promoting studies and formulating proposals to improve current legislation, as well as raising awareness and informing the school community. While specific data on the outcomes is limited, the right to disconnect clauses in both the 2016–2018 and 2019–2021 CCNLs have sparked greater awareness among teachers and unions about the impact of constant connectivity on work–life balance. In this regard, the agreements have encouraged schools to reconsider excessive digital demands on staff. However, challenges remain and many teachers still report receiving messages and circulars late at night, on weekends and during holidays. This shows that while the framework exists, stronger enforcement and clearer guidance are needed to protect teachers fully from the encroachment of work on private life, which continues to pose risks for stress, burnout and family-life disruption.

Source: <https://www.flpscuolaroma.it/diritto-alla-disconnessione/>, <https://cobasscuolapalermo.com/ccnl-2024-art-14-articolazione-della-prestazione-in-modalita-agile-e-diritto-alla-disconnessione/>

Box 10: Intervention #10 — Law and awareness day on education and prevention of violence against school staff**Law No. 25 of 4 March 2024 for the safety of school personnel and the National Day of Education and Prevention against Violence against School Staff****Organisation implementing the initiative:**

Italian Ministry of Education

Educational establishments where it has been implemented:

Nationwide

Country/Region:

Italy

- **Objective:** Law No. 25 of 4 March 2024 was introduced to address the alarming rise in physical and non-physical violence by students and parents against school staff in Italy. This legislative measure aims to strengthen the protection of principals, teachers and all school personnel through both preventive and punitive actions. The law establishes the National Observatory on School Personnel Safety within the Ministry of Education and Merit to monitor and analyse incidents, promote studies and guidelines, and encourage training to handle conflicts and improve workplace safety. In addition, it mandates the launch of targeted information and awareness campaigns to foster respect for school staff. As part of these efforts, the 'National Day of Education and Prevention Against Violence Against School Staff' will be held every 15 December, promoting a culture of non-violence in schools and reinforcing the commitment to safeguarding teachers from psychosocial risks linked to aggression and intimidation.
- **Content and actions:** Law No. 25 of 4 March 2024 not only strengthens criminal penalties for acts of violence and threats against school staff but also lays out concrete actions to protect them through systematic monitoring and prevention. Under the law, the National Observatory on School Personnel Safety was established within the Ministry of Education and Merit to collect data, analyse trends, develop best practices and ensure the proper implementation of protective measures in schools. The Observatory is tasked with coordinating training courses to help staff to manage conflicts and strengthen communication with students and families. To complement this, in the context of the annual 'National Day of Education and Prevention Against Violence Against School Staff', schools across Italy are encouraged to organise awareness campaigns, educational workshops and community discussions to promote mutual respect and prevent violence in the school environment.
- **Results:** Although it is too early to measure concrete outcomes, the introduction of Law No. 25 and the 'National Day of Education and Prevention Against Violence Against School Staff' are expected to raise awareness and strengthen prevention efforts. The collected data point to an increase in reported cases of violence in the period 2022-2024, but it is noted that the number of reported cases is potentially lower than the number of actual cases. According to the above data, 36 cases of aggression against educational personnel were reported in 2022, while in the 2023/2024 school year, the number of reported cases increased to 68. Of course, if we are dealing only with reported cases, it is clear that the real number of cases is likely much greater.³⁴ These measures are expected to reduce physical and non-physical violence in schools and foster a safer and more respectful working environment for school staff in the coming years. The Observatory prepares an annual report to be submitted to the Ministry and Parliament by 31 January of each year, documenting cases of violence, reporting on the effectiveness of the adopted measures, and proposing improvements. It also oversees the implementation of safety measures in school workplaces and promotes training courses for school personnel on conflict management.

³⁴ <https://www.scuola7.it/2024/411/violenza-contro-il-personale-scolastico/>

Source: <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/provvedimento/disposizioni-per-la-tutela-della-sicurezza-del-personale-scolastico.html>,
<https://www.mim.gov.it/~seguir-la-diretta-dalle-ore-11-00-presentazione-della-giornata-nazionale-di-educazione-e-prevenzione-contro-la-violenza-nei-confronti-del-personale-sco>

The implementation of the identified good practices may still be hindered by a number of barriers that would limit their overall impact. The potential barriers include, among others:

- **Lack of awareness.** The degree of awareness and understanding of psychosocial risks and their effects on workers' health and safety has an important impact on the prioritisation of these issues in practice. Similarly, in light of cultural norms and beliefs, professionals in the education sector might be reluctant to talk openly about mental health.
- **Time constraints.** Demanding schedules and workloads leave little room to implement comprehensive mental health strategies.
- **Insufficient economic resources.** Some forms of psychological support, such as internal psychological services, might be unavailable because of a lack of consistent and substantial funding throughout the school year (EU-OSHA, 2022a).
- **Complexity of legal obligations.** While legal obligations are essential to ensure worker protection, their intricate and fragmented nature often creates compliance burdens that limit practical impact.
- **Lack of specialised expertise.** The lack of specialist support and insufficient training on psychosocial risk management prevent teachers from identifying and addressing these issues properly themselves. The lack of a broader external perspective to consider principals' and teachers' concerns and seek comprehensive solutions is a barrier to effective risk management (Wischlitzki et al., 2020).

Although several sector-specific barriers exist for the implementation of good practices, the evidence shows that such practices can still be implemented efficiently. Notably, well-implemented and resource-oriented organisational development efforts can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of processes and at the same time have a positive effect on the health-related working conditions and well-being of teachers (Wischlitzki et al., 2020).

6 Conclusions

The main aim of the study was to provide a comprehensive overview of psychosocial risks in the workplace and, more broadly, of mental health and well-being in the education sector and how to manage these issues, particularly by focusing on sector-specific PSRs.

6.1 Discussion of results

Overall, the findings from the scoping review and the interviews highlight that teachers face PSRs that are unique to their sector. This includes constant pressure to balance teaching with non-teaching duties while adapting to curriculum changes and digitalisation including the increasing use of AI-based digital technologies, often with insufficient digital skills (especially among older teachers). Teachers also face emotionally demanding situations that require extensive emotional labour, yet have limited autonomy, poor recognition and few opportunities for professional development or career progression compared to other professions. Low salaries, job insecurity, and low collegial and supervisory support also characterise their working conditions. Moreover, teachers face a high risk of experiencing violence, bullying and cyberbullying, all of which further undermine their well-being. These risks are further exacerbated by societal trends such as an increasingly older teaching workforce and lower fertility rates, educational expansion (especially in higher education), and digitalisation. The study also showed that the COVID-19 pandemic put further strain on the mental health of teachers. The impacts of the identified PSRs are not distributed equally across the teaching workforce. For instance, primary school teachers might be more exposed to violent behaviour by students, while university teachers are more likely to experience work–life imbalances. Younger teachers face insecure contracts, low pay and limited mentoring, whereas female teachers are particularly affected by work–family conflicts.

While the reviewed literature primarily identifies psychosocial risk factors that contribute to adverse mental health outcomes, certain protective factors can buffer the negative effects. Professional autonomy represents a particularly important protective factor; data from TALIS 2018 demonstrate that teachers report high levels of control over key professional decisions. Across the OECD, an average of 96 % of teachers report having control over selecting teaching methods, 94 % over assessing students' learning, 92 % over disciplining students, 91 % over determining the amount of homework to be assigned, and 84 % over determining course content (OECD, 2020). Beyond individual autonomy, the collaborative nature of the teaching profession itself can also function as a protective mechanism, fostering peer support networks and job satisfaction that further buffer against psychosocial strain. Other factors can include positive relationships with students' parents, supportive leadership, professional development opportunities, and school characteristics such as smaller class sizes and single-grade teaching.

▪ Demands at work

Qualitative demands at work, which involve balancing teaching-related workload with non-teaching responsibilities, as well as extended working hours, are not disproportionately prevalent in any specific teacher group. In higher education, the teaching role is often combined with research responsibilities, which increases workload and performance expectations compared to other groups (Nicholls et al., 2022; Kis et al., 2022). Balancing teaching and administrative workloads leads to chronic job stress and emotional exhaustion (Jentsch et al., 2023; Sanchis-Giménez et al., 2024). Long working hours are also linked to emotional exhaustion (Kreuzfeld et al., 2022).

As for cognitive demands, older teachers are more adversely affected by digitalisation and the challenges of integrating new technologies into their work (Ferreira-Santos, 2022). Also the impact of the use of AI-based digital technologies add to the cognitive demands and uncertainties on transparency, bias etc. (EU-OSHA, 2024). In the case of updated curricula, no significant differences were observed across teacher groups.

In terms of emotional demands, teachers working in socio-economically disadvantaged schools may experience higher pressure (Sinkkonen and Kytälä, 2014). Female teachers, particularly in elementary and middle schools, (ISCED levels 1–2) are more vulnerable to emotional demands (Noor and Zainuddin, 2011). However, other research points to secondary school teachers, who work with adolescents, facing more challenging emotional labour (Kidger et al., 2016). Additionally, emotional demands that stem from relationships with parents are more pronounced at lower educational grades (ISCED levels 1–3) (Peterson et al., 2011; Baxter and Kilderry, 2024). Additionally, younger and less experienced teachers, especially in elementary education, are particularly sensitive to pupil relations, which affect their well-

being (Collie, 2021). Emotional labour is linked to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Arens and Morin, 2016; Kollerová et al., 2023; Tuxford and Bradley, 2015).

▪ **Work organisation and job content**

Primary and secondary school teachers (ISCED levels 1–3) are more likely to be affected by issues of autonomy, as they face greater exposure to external control factors such as strict curricula, standardised testing requirements, and accountability measures that constrain their professional discretion (Salokangas et al., 2020). Reduced autonomy limits their ability to tailor instruction and manage classrooms in line with their professional judgement, often resulting in emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009, 2010).

In contrast, teachers in higher education (ISCED level 4–8) typically encounter challenges related to larger class sizes, which have been increasing as a consequence of expanding educational access (Gil-Flores, 2017). Larger class sizes are associated with increased workload, reduced individual interaction with students, and higher levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, depression and burnout (Hindman and Bustamante, 2019; Pietarinen et al., 2013; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021).

Multi-grade teaching occurs more frequently in rural schools and poses additional stress for primary school teachers (Darmody and Smyth, 2011; Burns and Machin, 2013). Managing classrooms with students from different grades requires handling diverse learning needs simultaneously, increasing cognitive and emotional demands as well as stress. Conversely, urban and city schools tend to have larger class sizes and serve student populations with greater socio-cultural diversity and higher educational needs, increasing the complexity of teachers' work environments and PSRs (See et al., 2023).

Regarding career development, no significant differences have been identified across teachers at different education levels. Professional development participation is generally high in the teaching profession (OECD, 2020), yet opportunities for career progression remain limited, especially at the school level (Palma-Vasquez et al., 2022). However, higher education teachers may have more career opportunities beyond teaching, including research publication and institutional leadership, although such opportunities come with additional job demands and stressors.

▪ **Interpersonal relationships and leadership**

Social support and collaboration among colleagues may be limited because the bulk of teachers' work is performed by the teacher working alone with pupils (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Regarding cooperation among teachers, those in higher education may be more vulnerable because of an environment characterised by increased competition for resources and reputation. The competitive atmosphere has contributed to a weakening of collegial bonds and fostered a more strategic, individualistic orientation among academics, as highlighted by Kosmützky and Krücken (2023). Furthermore, the process of digitalisation has weakened professional relationships across all school levels, affecting the quality of teacher cooperation and support (Pavlovaite and Hallissy, 2021). Poor professional relationships might increase the risk for stress (Kelchtermans, 2017) and emotional exhaustion (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

Bullying by colleagues is a serious concern that disproportionately affects teachers from racialised groups at all education levels, highlighting an intersection of psychosocial risks related to both professional dynamics and systemic discrimination (Lander and Santoro, 2017; Arneback et al., 2023). According to Kollerová et al. (2023) and Dangleben (2019), victimisation through workplace bullying is associated with increased risk of emotional exhaustion, burnout and depression among teachers.

Public attitudes toward the teaching profession are generally positive regarding work recognition; however, they vary significantly by country. Across the EU, teachers' perception of the value and importance of their profession among the public remains low, with only 15.8 % feeling that their work is valued (OECD, 2020). The lowest levels of perceived recognition among teachers were recorded in Belgium (5.3 %), France (6.6 %), Slovenia (5.6 %) and Slovakia (4.5 %).

Teachers in higher education often hold higher educational degrees, which formally acknowledge credentials and confer a degree of protective prestige that is not commonly available to other teaching sectors (Fuller et al., 2013). However, professional identity is complicated within academia by balancing research and teaching activities, with teaching frequently viewed as secondary to research. This results in teachers receiving less recognition and lower status in academic settings (Benavides Martínez, 2020).

▪ **Work–individual imbalances**

Younger teachers tend to receive lower salaries and are more likely to be employed on temporary contracts, with precarious employment disproportionately affecting younger professionals in the education sector (European Parliament, 2020). This is especially concerning given the declining proportion of teachers under 30 in the EU, where only 8 % of primary and secondary teachers are under 30 as of 2022 (Cedefop, 2023b). These employment conditions negatively impact younger teachers' health and well-being and significantly increase their risk of early-career attrition (Giunchi et al., 2020), exacerbating teacher shortages across many EU countries. A study shows that fixed-term contract teachers report lower well-being and maintain greater emotional distance from students, which may further affect job satisfaction and retention (Capone and Petrillo, 2020). Moreover, there are significant differences in teachers' salaries between countries. In Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden, the salaries of teachers working at all or most education levels fall below per capita GDP (Eurydice, 2023). In addition, early-childhood teachers tend to earn less, while upper secondary teachers generally earn more as a consequence of differences in their minimum qualification requirements (Eurydice, 2023).

Regarding work–life balance, female teachers are particularly vulnerable to the 'double presence' phenomenon: the simultaneous demands of professional responsibilities and disproportionate family caregiving duties, including childcare and eldercare (García et al., 2016). The dual burden often results in increased stress and work–family conflict for women in teaching roles, especially in primary education, where women make up a larger share of the workforce. Academics and higher education teachers face blurred lines between multiple demanding roles, such as teaching, research, mentoring, pastoral care, consultancy and public engagement, which substantially elevate inter-role conflicts and burnout risk (Kinman, 2014; Slišković and Maslač Seršić, 2011). The digitalisation of education has further intensified these challenges by increasing so-called borderlessness in work schedules, blurring the boundaries between professional and personal life, and heightening work–life conflicts and feelings of isolation (Eurofound et al., 2020). This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when rapid shifts to online teaching imposed additional workloads and stress without adequate resources or preparation time. Evidence reviewed during the study indicates that inter-role conflict, particularly between work and personal life, increases the risk of stress (Kinman, 2014).

▪ **Conflict and offensive behaviours**

Several studies have shown that working with primary and secondary school classes increases the risk of experiencing violence in the educational workplace. Primary teachers report the highest levels of physical attacks by students and harassment from students' parents (Berlanda et al., 2019; De Cordova et al., 2019; Gerberich et al., 2011). Such violence includes physical assaults – being hit, being pushed or having objects thrown – and non-physical violence such as intimidation, verbal abuse, threats and bullying. Special education teachers are particularly vulnerable to aggressive behaviours that can arise from their students' complex needs and behavioural challenges (Jasik-Ślęzak and Kasian, 2019). Teachers from racialised groups also face a heightened risk of harassment and discrimination in the workplace, which can lead to feelings of isolation and additional psychosocial risk (Arar et al., 2024).

In contrast, tertiary education settings tend to experience much lower rates of violence, threats and bullying, indicating that academics are generally less exposed to difficult pupils (EU-OSHA, 2022a; DANES, 2018). Nonetheless, non-physical violence is present across primary, secondary and higher education levels (Nyberg et al., 2021). Primary and lower secondary teachers, who often have more direct contact with parents, are more exposed to violence and harassment from parents. Research suggests that tensions between parents and teachers are on the rise and can sometimes escalate into verbal or physical conflicts. Evidence reviewed shows that challenging parental relationships are associated with heightened stress levels among teachers (Otero-López et al., 2009; Rodríguez-Mantilla and Fernández-Díaz, 2017).

The shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated risks associated with offensive online behaviours. Teachers have faced increased exposure to cyberbullying, harassment and negative comments, particularly through social media and digital platforms (EU-OSHA, 2022a). Exposure to violence, bullying and cyberbullying heightens the risk of stress, anxiety and sleep disturbances (Berlanda et al., 2019; Rudkjoebing et al., 2020; EU-OSHA, 2022a).

According to ESENER (2019), the most prominent musculoskeletal risk factors among teachers include prolonged sitting (59 %) and repetitive hand or arm movements (51 %). Additionally, one in four teachers (26 %) reported experiencing high disruptive noise levels in their classrooms (OECD, 2019). Exposure to ergonomic strain, inadequate workspace within schools, or elevated noise levels can exacerbate the impact of psychosocial risks.

6.2 Limitations of the study

The current body of research on PSR among teachers in the EU lacks studies using rigorous experimental designs, such as randomised controlled trials. Most existing research analysed in this study relies heavily on self-reported survey data, small-scale observational studies, and qualitative interviews. The main results presented in the report draw primarily on self-reported data, whose sources range from large-scale surveys (such as the TALIS 2018 dataset, which includes responses from over 260,000 teachers across Europe) to smaller qualitative studies based on as few as 10 interviews. Consequently, when interpreting the findings, the limitations inherent to self-reported data were carefully considered. Nonetheless, quantitative and qualitative evidence triangulation provides valuable complementary insights.

The qualitative component of the present study consisted of 10 targeted interviews conducted to obtain in-depth insights from key stakeholders. Although the number of interviews was limited, they addressed knowledge gaps in underexplored areas and validated findings from the existing literature by reflecting real-life experiences. Moreover, there are EU Member States for which no relevant studies were identified, namely Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta and Poland. Therefore, there is a great need for further research that encompasses worker samples from other EU Member States. EU-level comparative studies across countries are also required. Finally, there remains a lack of data on the experiences of minority groups, which represents another important gap to be addressed in future research.

6.3 Considerations and policy pointers

Despite these pressing issues, PSRs in the education sector remain underestimated and inadequately addressed compared to physical hazards (Wischlitzki et al., 2020). While some institutions have implemented effective risk management strategies, significant gaps persist. Based on a systematic review by Moore et al. (2022), who looked at 10 articles from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and the US, it was identified that sustained delivery of well-being interventions in schools depended mainly on school leadership, staff engagement, intervention characteristics, available resources and external support. Identified **barriers** included **competing priorities**, **a lack of leadership prioritisation**, **insufficient resources**, **high staff turnover**, and **limited time for training**, while **facilitators** were found to be a **strong leadership commitment**, the **integration of interventions into school policy and culture**, **designated programme leads**, **well-designed interventions**, **staff buy-in** and **access to ongoing support**. Most barriers and facilitators centre on the school level, and the factors often interact (e.g. leadership support influences resource allocation and staff morale). Long-term sustainability is most likely when facilitators work together and address systemic barriers.

Based on the good practices identified, regular workplace risk assessments, targeted interventions, and job-crafting strategies could help to mitigate the risks. However, a systemic approach is necessary to integrate mental health support, training and well-being initiatives into daily practice taking into consideration the **OSH hierarchy of controls**.

The list below sets out a broad selection of considerations for stakeholders, researchers and social partners, as well as policy pointers for policy-makers. There are also suggestions for further research.

6.3.1 Considerations for employers

- Conduct **systematic psychosocial risk assessments** tailored to education settings using practical tools like the EU-OSHA OiRA tool. This approach supports compliance with legal obligations under the OSH Framework Directive and guides the development of targeted action plans to prevent identified risks.
- Adopt **comprehensive policies** that address long working hours, work–life balance, and protections against physical and non-physical violence, paying special attention to the vulnerabilities of teachers from racialised groups.

- Promote **stable employment** by reducing reliance on temporary contracts and ensuring fair salaries, particularly for younger and early-career teachers.
- Improve leadership practices to **foster a healthy balance between job demands and resources, as well as supportive, collaborative work environments** that promote positive interpersonal relationships among staff.
- Provide ongoing **OSH training** for teachers and education professionals to raise awareness about psychosocial risks and their mental health impacts.
- Establish clear **protocols for mental health screening**, support and treatment for educators who experience psychological distress.
- Encourage **job-crafting initiatives** that allow teachers to redesign aspects of their work, improving job fit and autonomy, which have been shown to mitigate psychosocial risks.

6.3.2 Considerations for social partners

Considerations relevant for teachers' and employers' associations (including trade unions):

- Advocate for **stable contracts** and **fair pay**, focusing primarily on younger educators who face job precarity.
- Encourage **mentoring** and introduction programmes to help new teachers integrate successfully, drawing on models like Finland's *Osaava Verme* (skilled worker) network as good practice examples.
- Launch initiatives to restore **teachers' professional recognition** and address misconceptions that link teacher quality alone to student performance; engage media and educational programmes in the effort.
- Support **campaigns** such as Austria's 'Teachers' Health Campaign' to increase understanding of PSRs in education.
- Promote **strategies to reduce bullying**, discrimination and harassment, prioritising the protection of racialised groups and special education teachers.
- Advocate for **continuous training**, particularly in digital skills and **AI integration**, to support teachers' adaptation to technological changes.
- Promote transparent, **accessible channels for reporting abuse** or PSRs in schools, following examples like Spain's 'Teacher's Ombudsman' service.

6.3.3 Considerations for researchers

- Conduct and evaluate **evidence-based interventions** to lower workload, administrative burdens, and emotional labour while bolstering job resources such as autonomy and supportive leadership.
- Investigate the effects of proactive work behaviours (such as job crafting, strengths use, and playful work design) that help teachers to optimise their own demands and resources.
- **Translate findings** from international studies to inform regionally appropriate approaches in the EU and at national level.
- Carry out new research into **at-risk groups** (younger/older teachers, women, racialised groups and special education professionals) to tailor prevention and management strategies.
- Study the role of **physical environment features**, such as noise, lighting and spatial design, on teacher and student well-being and propose architecture that supports mental health.

6.3.4 Policy pointers for policy-makers

- Promote **legal frameworks** that address identified psychosocial risks, such as precarious contracts, salary inequalities for younger teachers or poor work–life balance. Invest in **policies that foster smaller classes** and controlled student–teacher ratios to ease cognitive and emotional burdens on teachers.
- Integrate measures to address **digital border lessness** and social isolation into educational policies, supporting healthy boundaries in remote and hybrid teaching. Promote guidance on use of AI-based digital technologies also to promote health, safety and well being for teachers.

- Allocate resources to **redesign and improve school spaces**, including quiet rooms and soundproofing, to reduce ergonomic and environmental stressors, following successful examples like Denmark's quiet rooms for teachers.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Scoping review protocol

A scoping review was conducted following a systematic approach. The review of the literature included articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals that were identified using a predefined number of databases: ISI Web of Science, Scopus and PUBMED. To complement the resources identified in the academic databases, the study team also conducted searches in Google Scholar.

The initial search string that was used to identify relevant literature appears in Intervention 10. We then used a combination of certain key words to yield more tailored results.

Box A 1: List of terms in search string

Education OR teach* OR school OR educators OR university OR 'vocational education and training' OR VET OR professor OR lecturer OR 'school principal' OR headmaster OR kindergarten OR "school counsellor" OR "academic mentor"

AND

Psychosocial OR PSRs OR risk OR well-being OR 'mental health' OR 'occupational safety and health' OR OSH OR psychosocial OR 'working conditions' OR health OR safety OR 'physical environment' OR ergonomic OR musculoskeletal OR MSD OR 'job quality' OR 'job content' OR 'job satisfaction' OR workload OR 'emotional demand' OR 'violence' OR 'bullying' OR 'harassment' OR 'poor communication' OR 'poor organisation' OR 'job insecurity'

Source: Authors' own elaboration

In terms of restriction criteria, the study team retrieved sources published between 2014 and 2025 to consider the latest evidence on PSRs in education. Also, the study team wanted to include a considerable number of resources both prior to and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which is widely recognised to have had a major impact on the profession. No restriction on settings or language of information sources was applied. As expected, most of the identified literature was published in English. The geographical scope was set to EU-27 Member States as well as EFTA countries when relevant. Other literature focusing on non-EU countries was included if deemed relevant, while no other literature for the European context was available.

To complement the search on academic databases, the study team looked for additional sources through desk research. The desk research included works and publications from 'grey' sources, customised Google search engines, institutional websites, and snowballing from identified relevant literature. Through snowballing, several relevant additional sources of information were identified from the bibliography of relevant publications.

Appendix B – Semi-structured interview protocol

The study team worked with EU-OSHA to agree on the interview guidelines for the semi-structured interviews of relevant EU and national stakeholders. Based on the preliminary findings of the literature review, the study team refined the interview guidelines. The refined version of the interview questions appears in the box below.

Box B 1: Refined interview questions

Introduction

1. Could you provide a brief overview of your organisation and the work you do?

Overview of PSRs

2. In your experience, what are the most significant work-related psychosocial risks in the education sector? Which of these risks pose the greatest threat to teachers' and researchers' mental health, and why? Are you aware of specific data on that?
3. In your experience, which psychosocial risks in the education sector have become more prevalent in recent years? Which ones do you expect to increase in the coming years?
4. Are there any psychosocial risks in the education sector that you believe are often underestimated or overlooked?
5. What are the key consequences of psychosocial risks on teachers' and researchers' mental health and physical health (e.g. musculoskeletal disorders)? Beyond individual impacts, how do these risks affect the education sector and society as a whole? Are you aware of any studies, surveys or data sources that provide insights on this topic?
6. In your opinion, are certain groups – such as women, senior teachers, early-career educators, or professionals with a migrant background – more vulnerable to these risks? If so, what factors contribute to their increased vulnerability, and how do these risks impact their mental health?
7. What factors positively influence the mental health of teachers and researchers?

Risk management and good practice examples

8. Based on your expertise, how could such risks be efficiently and effectively prevented and managed? What are the main challenges when addressing psychosocial risks?
9. Are psychosocial risks and mental health sufficiently addressed in your sector? Are there any recommendations/guidelines?
10. Are you aware of any specific interventions or actions implemented to tackle such risks either at the education establishment level or by intermediaries at regional or national level? What are the success factors and barriers to implement them?
11. Are there any research findings, evaluations or key success indicators that demonstrate their impact? Could you direct us to any specific organisations, webpages or resources where we can find more information on effective good practices?
12. Do you have any additional recommendations for addressing PSRs and mental health in your sector?

Conclusion

13. Do you have any other remarks, and could you share any relevant documentation?

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The study team then contacted the list of identified relevant stakeholders to set up interviews. The table below contains the list of interviews that were conducted.

Table B 1: List of interviewees

Organisation	Geography	Status
European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE)	EU	Conducted
European School Heads Association (ESHA)	EU	Conducted
EUROCADRES	EU	Conducted
European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE)	EU	Conducted
Education Professionals Association (Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö – OAJ)	Finland	Conducted
National Association of Public Administrators and High School Professionals (Associazione nazionale dirigenti pubblici e alte professionalità della scuola – ANP)	Italy	Conducted
Croatian Teachers' Union (Sindikat hrvatskih učitelja – SHU)	Croatia	Did not reply → replaced
Swedish Teachers' Union	Sweden	Conducted
Ireland National Teacher's Organisation (INTO)	Ireland	Conducted
General Education Union (Algemene Onderwijsbond)	The Netherlands	Refused to participate → replaced
Asociación Nacional de Profesores Españoles (ANPE)	Spain	Conducted
Teachers' Platform (Učitelská platforma)	Czech Republic	Conducted

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Appendix C – Overview of good practices excluded

Table C 1: Longlist of excluded good practice examples at the workplace

Initiative	Type of initiative	Level of implementation	Type of educational establishment	Geographical coverage	Targeted subgroup	Type of PSR addressed	Level of maturity	Short description	References / source
Competence development strategy in digital education	Secondary intervention	Individual educational establishment	Secondary education	DK	Classroom teachers	Digital cognitive demands	Medium	Promoting teachers' professional and pedagogical training in digital education. Competence development must follow pre-established guidelines and should be reviewed regularly.	Link
SEN Toolkit for teachers (Managing graduated approach and including balanced curriculum for special educational needs students)	Secondary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary and secondary education	GR, IE, IT, RO	Special education teachers	Quantitative demands, cognitive demands, emotional demands	Medium	Allowing the acquisition of specific skills by teachers to intervene with innovative approaches and tools in reference to different special education needs.	Link
APRES COVID	Tertiary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary and secondary education	SI	Classroom teachers	Work organisation changes due to COVID-19	Medium	The project aims to actively promote an equitable and sustainable education-led recovery following the long-term impact of the COVID crisis on PSRs in the teaching profession.	Link
Healthy Campus Bonn	Primary intervention	Individual educational establishment	Tertiary education	DE	Academic staff	Emotional demands, environmental factors	Medium	It aims to produce conditions for healthy researching, teaching and working practices (i.e. mental health, physical health and social health).	Link

Initiative	Type of initiative	Level of implementation	Type of educational establishment	Geographical coverage	Targeted subgroup	Type of PSR addressed	Level of maturity	Short description	References / source
KILO occupational well-being programme	Tertiary intervention	Individual educational establishment	Primary education	FI	Classroom teachers	Workload and organisation, job conditions and environment, emotional and social demands	Medium	Promoting teachers' well-being with the support of well-being coaches, development teachers, and colleagues and principals.	Link
Supporting the Well-being of the School Community: Returning to School after Covid-19 School Closure. Well-being Toolkit for Primary Schools	Tertiary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary education	IE	Classroom teachers	Workload and organisation, emotional and social demands	Medium	One-hour webinar, accompanied by a toolkit on well-being and self-care to prepare teachers to return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic	Link
Enhancing Teacher Resilience in Europe (ENTREE)	Secondary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary and secondary education	CZ, DK, IE, MT, PT	Classroom teachers	Workload and organisation, emotional and social demands	Medium	The project aims to enable young European teachers to improve their resilience in the face of increasing demands of rapidly changing school contexts. The modules of the training include: 1. Resilience, 2. Building Relationships, 3. Emotional Well-being, 4. Coping with Stress, 5. Effective Teaching, 6. Classroom Management.	Link
Acceleration plan: Educational innovation with ICT	Secondary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Tertiary education	NL	Academic staff	Cognitive demands	Medium	The plan supports educational institutions in the Netherlands to adopt digital technology in ways that enhance teaching quality and flexibility. By investing in professional development and embedding support for lecturers throughout institutions, it improves working conditions and well-	Link

Initiative	Type of initiative	Level of implementation	Type of educational establishment	Geographical coverage	Targeted subgroup	Type of PSR addressed	Level of maturity	Short description	References / source
								being while empowering staff to innovate in their roles.	
Different Families, Same Love competition	Secondary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary education	IE	LGBT+ teachers	Poor relationship with colleagues, lack of support from supervisors, non-physical violence	High	To mark International Family Equality Day and International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, teachers take action in their classrooms to celebrate the diversity of people and families and to address and prevent homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools.	Link
Studios, lofts and quiet rooms for teachers at Skapa School (Huddinge)	Primary intervention	Individual educational establishment	Primary education	SE	Classroom teachers	Emotional demands, ergonomic factors, unsafe noise levels	High	Providing safe and quiet spaces within schools allows teachers to recharge, reflect and manage stress more effectively. This contributes to improved overall well-being, helping teachers to stay focused, energised and better equipped to support their students.	Link
Mindfulness sessions for teachers	Secondary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary and secondary education	NL	Classroom teachers	Emotional demands	Medium	The sessions aim to teach teachers how mindfulness can help them to deal with difficulties at school. Teachers who practice mindfulness report lower levels of burnout and greater resilience.	Link
Creative well-being online programme	Secondary intervention	Educational establishments at national level	Primary and secondary education	IE	Classroom teachers	Emotional demands	Medium	Specialist programme for teachers that aims to support their emotional and mental health through yoga, movement, dance, expressive tasks, meditation, breath work and self-care practices for everyday life.	Link

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table C 2: Longlist of proposed good practice examples by national/regional intermediaries

Initiative	Type of initiative	Level of implementation	Type of educational establishment	Geographical coverage	Targeted subgroup	Type of PSR addressed	Level of maturity	Short description	References / source
Law No. 25/2024 – Amendments to Articles 61, 336 and 341-bis of the Penal Code and other provisions for the protection of the safety of school personnel	Tertiary intervention	National	Primary, secondary and tertiary education	IT	Classroom teachers, academic staff, teacher aides and assistants	Physical and non-physical violence	Low	The recent legal measures aim to strengthen the protection of teachers and school staff from all forms of violence – both physical and non-physical – committed by students or their families through monitoring, awareness campaigns and harsher penalties for offenses against school personnel.	Link
Nationaal Programma Rotterdam Zuid (NPRZ)	Primary intervention	Regional	Primary and secondary education	NL	Classroom teachers	Quantitative demands, emotional demands, poor perceived societal recognition, physical and non-physical violence	Medium	While the NPRZ is broad in scope, aiming to improve education, employment and living conditions, it also seeks to enhance schooling in disadvantaged areas. These efforts – e.g. those targeting school quality, leadership support and staff shortages – can improve teachers' working conditions and overall well-being.	Link
The 'Teacher's Ombudsman' service	Tertiary intervention	National	Primary and secondary education	ES	Classroom teachers	Physical and non-physical violence	High	The service helps and assists teachers who face conflict and offensive behaviour in schools. It aims to resolve the conflict situation by advising and implementing the necessary mechanisms to solve the problem.	Link

Initiative	Type of initiative	Level of implementation	Type of educational establishment	Geographical coverage	Targeted subgroup	Type of PSR addressed	Level of maturity	Short description	References / source
Right to disconnect in the National Collective and Labour Agreement for the Education and Research sectors	Primary intervention	National	Primary, secondary and tertiary education	IT	Classroom teachers, academic staff, teacher aides and assistants	Work-life imbalances	High	Italy was one of the first European countries to introduce specific legislation on the right to disconnect, and included this principle in the National Collective Labour Agreement to protect teachers' well-being. By limiting after-hours digital communications, it aims to reduce stress, prevent burnout and support a healthier work-life balance.	Link
Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)	Secondary intervention / Tertiary intervention	National	Primary and secondary education	IE	Classroom teachers	Quantitative demands, cognitive demands, emotional demands, lack of support from supervisors, physical and non-physical violence	High	PDST was established in 2010 as a generic, integrated and cross-sectoral support service for schools by the Irish Department for Education and Skills. It is now the country's largest single support service that offers professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders in a range of pedagogical, curricular and educational areas. Key priorities include supporting school leadership, ICT for teaching and learning, inclusion, health and well-being.	Link

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) contributes to making Europe a safer, healthier and more productive place to work. The Agency researches, develops and distributes reliable, balanced and impartial safety and health information, and organises pan-European awareness raising campaigns. Set up by the European Union in 1994 and based in Bilbao, Spain, the Agency brings together representatives from the European Commission, Member State governments, employers' and workers' organisations, and leading experts in each of the EU Member States and beyond.

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