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ETUCE Activity Report on Higher education and research

To BFUG Plenary meeting on 24-25 February 2025, under the Polish Presidency

The following report is a summary of ETUCE¹ activities on higher education and research between February 2024 and February 2025.

Global efforts of protect democracy and academic freedom in higher education and research

10th World Congress of Education International met in Buenos Aires, Argentina between 27 July and 2 August under the theme *Growing our unions, elevating our professions, defending democracy*. Over 1200 representatives of the education trade unions, including higher education and research staff, from over 150 countries participated. The specific meeting of the trade unions of higher education and research discussed the role of higher education to protect democracy and academic freedom:

[Joining forces to protect Higher Education: A stand for democracy and rights](#)

The congress adopted many resolutions including some on protecting academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and trade union rights:

- [Protecting higher education and research staff from attacks on academic freedom](#)
- [Research and innovation: supporting basic research for resilient societies](#)
- [Organising against the political and ideological attacks on academic freedom and institutional autonomy](#)

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

- [Technology, artificial intelligence and the future of the teaching profession](#)

EI and CAUT (Canadian Union of Teachers) hosted a Conference on Academic Freedom in Calgary, Canada, 7-8 Febr. 2025 for member organisations. More information: [Defending academic freedom: Higher education unions mobilise against escalating attacks](#)

Fighting for the Future of Public Education in a Social Europe

Education trade unions of the European region of Education International, ETUCE met in November, in Budva, Montenegro in the framework of a quadrennial statutory conference to discuss about Future of Public Education in a Social Europe. The Conference discussed about the role of education trade unions to protect democracy. It adopted resolutions which demanded public investment to higher education and research to ensure attractive salary and working conditions to staff:

- [Defending higher education and research in an age of crises \(2024\)](#)
- [Research and innovation: supporting fundamental research for resilient societies \(2024\)](#)

Higher education and research staff are concerned about the increase of far-right movements

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

The Standing Committee met twice in 2024 to discuss, among others, the following issues:

- The impact of increasing far-right movements on higher education, research, and academics;
- Attractiveness of academic professions in higher education and research in light with precarious contracts, lack of support for young academics, and declining salaries. [ETUCE's Campaign on the attractiveness of the teaching profession](#) and events planned for the [European Week of Teachers](#) aimed to address these issues were presented.
- The members discussed and adopted an [ETUCE Position on European Degree and Academic Careers](#) and their views on the [Future of the Bologna Process](#);

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

The joint ETUCE and ETUI (European Trade Union Institute) expert conference on AI at work, took place on 28-29 February 2024 in Brussels, to address the impact of AI on higher education and research and aims to develop trade unions' strategy on this topic.

The detailed report can be found here: [ETUI-ETUCE Expert Conference Explores Impact of AI on Higher Education and Research Sector - European Trade Union Committee for Education](#)

European Social dialogue in the Higher Education Sector

In order to cope with challenges of the future, strong social dialogue in higher education institutes is key. In relation to the new [Social Dialogue Work Programme 2024-2026](#) the partners of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue in Education met for the Working Group on Higher Education and Research, on 24 September 2024 to discuss crucial developments in the field. Two significant topics took centre stage: the development of the OiRA ([Online Interactive Risk Assessment](#)) tool for Higher Education, jointly developed by ETUCE and EFEF with the European Commission's agency EU-OSHA, and the importance of enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession.

More information:

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