



# Strengthening teaching in Europe

*New evidence from  
teachers compiled by  
Eurydice and CRELL, June  
2015*

## Introduction

Two new reports, by the Eurydice network<sup>1</sup> and by the European Commission's Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (JRC-CRELL)<sup>2</sup>, look at evidence from large-scale international surveys and the latest EU data to give an overview of **teachers' working conditions, professional development and classroom practice** across Europe.

This note summarises some of the key findings of the reports and their implications for education and training policies in Europe.

## Key findings from the reports

### ➤ Countries are taking measures to raise the quality of teaching by enhancing Initial Teacher Education programmes

The findings confirm a known trend across Europe towards **requiring higher levels of qualifications (MA/BA) for Initial Teacher Education**.

There is also a trend towards **increasing the amount of practical training, including school-based practice**, within programmes.

### ➤ The gender imbalance in teaching is striking and set to increase

In lower secondary education, teaching is a job largely exercised by women: at EU level, **less than a third of the teaching force (32.2%) are men**, while in some countries (BG, EE, LV, LT) as few as one in five teachers are men.

The Eurydice report found that on average, the gender imbalance in the profession is greatest among the youngest teachers (only 28.8% male teachers in the <30 age group), which suggests a **trend towards an overall more pronounced gender imbalance** in future<sup>3</sup>.

The Eurydice report also found that **certain aspects of professional development show significant differences between male and female teachers**. For instance, some of the perceived barriers to professional development, such as the 'costs of **Continuing Professional Development**' (CPD) and 'family responsibilities', are more often referred to by women than men. Also, in some countries (BE nl, CZ, DK, FR, NL, PL and SK) men are more likely to go abroad for professional purposes than women – and such mobility often has a positive influence on career development.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Teaching Profession in Europe. Practices, Perceptions and Policies' provides a comprehensive overview of the status of lower secondary teaching in Europe. The report analyses key components of teacher initial education and early career support, examines needs and provision of continuous professional development, provides an overview of teachers' transnational mobility, and analyses the link between job satisfaction, perception of value of the profession, and working conditions.

<sup>2</sup> 'Teaching Practices in Primary and Secondary Schools in Europe: Insights from Large-Scale Assessments in Education' builds on literature review and evidence from international education surveys such as TIMSS/PIRLS, PISA and TALIS to investigate the frequency of different teaching practices and their relationships with other characteristics of the school environment in European countries.

<sup>3</sup> The **Netherlands** is the only country with an almost perfect gender balance at secondary level. However, as there are significantly higher shares of male teachers in the older age groups, closer to retirement, this balance is expected to be lost in future.

## ➤ **Mobility for teacher professional development is not widespread**

The Eurydice report includes new data, gathered through the TALIS 2013 survey, on the transnational mobility of teachers for professional purposes. It found that at EU level, **only one in four teachers (27.4 %) say they have been abroad at least once for professional purposes**. This includes all types of visits including very short ones. Teachers most often referred to accompanying visiting students as well as learning languages and studying abroad as part of teacher education.

The report also found that **more than half of teachers of modern foreign languages have been abroad for professional purposes**. On average, professional mobility remains much lower among teachers of other subjects.

Overall, while some significant schemes exist at national or regional level, **EU-funded activities** make up a large share of this mobility in Europe.

## ➤ **Teachers say they need more professional development linked to tailoring, diversifying, and innovating teaching practices**

Analysis of TALIS data shows that more than **nine out ten teachers in Europe have completed Initial Teacher Education** (91.2 %). A large majority of these teachers (80%) say that their studies included the three essential elements of **content, pedagogy and practice**. Italy (53.3%), Spain (63.2%), France (74.8%) and Serbia (75.5%) are notable exceptions in this respect.

The same analysis shows that at EU level, teachers **feel better prepared** for the different aspects of their job **if they have completed an Initial Teacher Education** programme.<sup>4</sup> ITE appears to make a difference, in particular with respect to the teachers reporting that they feel “very well prepared” for their job. However, the overall **feeling of preparedness is higher in relation to the ‘content’** of teaching (subject knowledge) **than to its ‘pedagogy’** (understanding of teaching and learning) and **‘practice’** (classroom-based training).

There is **a mismatch in terms of topics between teachers’ stated needs<sup>5</sup> and the content of the professional development** they participate in. For instance, while over 60% of teachers say that their professional development activities covered ‘Knowledge and understanding of my subject’, less than 30% expressed a moderate or high need in this area. Furthermore, the report found that in countries where CPD is predominantly defined by a top –level educational authority the teachers’ stated need for CPD remains high. This does not necessarily mean that a bottom-up approach will lower teachers’ needs, but may mean that top-level intervention needs to be fine-tuned to teacher’s needs.

According to the Eurydice report, there are several areas for which teachers say they have moderate or high levels of needs for **Continuing Professional Development** (CPD) **that are often not matched by participation**, including:

- Teaching cross-curricular skills
- Teaching in multilingual and multicultural settings
- Student career guidance and counselling
- Teaching students with special educational needs

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<sup>4</sup> In France, Finland and Iceland the proportion of teachers feeling very well or well prepared for their job, despite having completed an Initial Teacher Education programme, is lower than in other countries.

<sup>5</sup> This may be due to a lack of opportunities as much as a positive attitude to career-long learning

- New technology in the workplace
- Approaches to individualised learning

For example in relation to 'student career guidance and counselling' the report found there is a positive correlation between the share of teachers expressing a need for professional development in this field and the percentage of early school leavers in a country.

### ➤ **Teacher collaboration to share and diversify teaching practices is varied**

Based on the TIMSS/PIRLS performance assessment of primary schools children, the CRELL report finds that collaboration between **teachers varies widely** across the 17 EU countries covered. While discussions on teaching generic and content-specific activities may be more frequent, common planning and preparation of instructional material, as well as visiting other classrooms to learn more about teaching are less widespread practices.

Wide variations have also been found in the degree of **teachers' peer-review of lesson-plans, assessment instruments and lessons** in secondary schools. According to the CRELL report, whilst there is a consensus amongst school leaders that most teachers are willing to try new methods and adapt to student needs, there is a **wide variation across EU countries in the extent to which students are exposed to different teaching strategies** to foster learning.

### ➤ **Collaboration between teachers increases job satisfaction**

The presence of **collaborative practice in schools is also positively linked with teachers' levels of satisfaction** - both their satisfaction with the profession and with their work environment (Eurydice). Among the different aspects of collaboration, job satisfaction is found to be most strongly linked to a **collaborative school culture which is characterised by mutual support** with other teachers and with the school leader, followed by the **opportunity for staff to actively participate in school decisions**. In addition, in 12 EU countries students learn in schools where the presence of peer review practices is associated to the likelihood that teachers 'try new methods'.

Collaborative practice at school is positively linked with teachers' **perception of how their profession is valued in society**. In this respect, teachers appreciate a decentralised system where staff, parents and students have a role to play and a voice regarding the running of the school, and where teachers and leaders can cooperate to mutually support each other.

### ➤ **A diversity of forms of professional development activities is emerging**

Looking at different formats of teachers' professional development, the Eurydice report found that **formal and traditional forms of in-service training, such as courses, workshops, and conferences prevail in almost all education systems**. However, there is a diversity of forms of **professional development activities emerging**. This could be an opportunity for countries to learn from each other to promote less traditional forms of CPD such as networks of teachers, mentoring or peer learning.

## Main policy implications

Many Member States are taking actions to improve the quality and status of teaching, for instance by upgrading qualifications required for Initial Teacher Education. These policies recognise the **highly complex and challenging tasks teachers face** and the need for each of them to develop high-level expertise in teaching and learning and an understanding of what it takes for young people to succeed in their education.

The evidence presented in the reports points to a number of avenues which could be considered for further policy action by governments and stakeholders.

Overall, such policy actions could respond to the need to **break the isolation of the classroom** and the "one teacher one classroom" doctrine. Building on the necessity to establish a culture of collaboration, these actions can result in improving the quality of education. This is based on new insights into how and where learning takes place, and the recognition that effective teaching requires the **involvement of teams of professionals** rather than that of individual teachers.

Most importantly, the actions presented below can at the same time assist in **making the teaching profession more attractive** to a wider pool of candidates, an important challenge in most EU Member States that is often combined with **shortages of qualified teaching staff**. Transforming the teaching profession into one based on **professionalism, aspiration, teamwork and a diversity of career opportunities** (e.g. to become a leader, mentor or researcher) can help attracting more candidates, both female and male. Therefore, breaking the silos of the classrooms and introducing a new dynamic with broader opportunities for professional and career development can **increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession** and **mitigate the gender imbalance**.

In this context, educational stakeholders and policy-makers can take into account the following **suggested policy actions**, grouped into four inter-connected areas:

### Gender imbalances

- **Improve teachers' working conditions and career opportunities** in order to raise the attractiveness of teaching to a wider pool of candidates, and to **achieve better gender balance**;
- Consider **flexible pathways** into teaching with a view to addressing teacher shortages and the need for diversification of the teaching force.

### Mobility

- Provide **more opportunities for mobility** and remove existing barriers, both for student teachers and serving teachers, with a view to **supporting effective professional development** and **increasing motivation** for taking up teaching;
- Increase **mobility for the professional development of all teachers**, not just teachers of modern foreign languages.

### Professional development

- Improve programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) through **regular reviews** to identify **potential deficits** (e.g. teachers feeling less well prepared for particular aspects of teaching, such as pedagogical expertise or teaching practice). Balance ITE programmes with a mix of subject **knowledge, pedagogical education** and teaching **practice** and integrate partnerships

between the ITE providers and schools. Support a culture of collaboration and team-work in ITE programmes and offer the same to all beginning teachers;

- Increase the **efficiency of investments** in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by **addressing mismatches** between the specific needs of schools and teachers and the CPD teachers really follow, and by introducing a **diversity of formats** (including school-based, collaborative CPD or digital courses). In particular, focus CPD on the needs as identified in **evaluation and feedback processes** in order to improve pedagogical practices and competences that better address the needs of pupils and help tackling such issues as early school leaving. Involve teachers more actively in the definition and planning of CPD activities through for example school development plans;
- Ensure **flexible programmes to enter the profession** provide for sufficient components focusing on **practice and pedagogical skills**;
- Critically **examine governance processes** for teacher education with a view to establishing a continuous development process where each stage builds on the previous ones. Moreover, look at teacher education in conjunction with broader policies on the organisation of schools to **strengthen the roles of teachers as experts in learning and teaching**, allowing them to operate in new roles (e.g. mentor, coach, researcher, liaison officer). This could make the profession more dynamic and attractive. Involve **relevant stakeholders and partnerships**, which can support such complex processes.

## Collaboration

- Increase teacher collaboration by supporting **networks**, providing **physical and virtual spaces**, and developing a **collaborative school culture** between teachers, students and the wider community;
- Include **leadership** training and **collaborative-based** approaches in teachers' professional development and learning, additionally reducing gender-specific barriers;
- Against the backdrop of school consolidations and teacher shortages, improve **resource efficiency** in school management and governance by increasing collaboration between schools which would allow for a pooling and sharing of resources. Help schools engage with local organisations and businesses in **community development, prevention of radicalisation and for promoting diversity**.

The evidence from the two reports will also guide and support EU-level co-operation to modernise education systems through **peer exchanges between countries on education policies** and the **Erasmus+ programme**. The **eTwinning** community for schools in Europe<sup>6</sup> and the newly launched **School Education Gateway**<sup>7</sup>, which provide support and tools to teachers and schools, can be further developed in light of these new findings.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.etwinning.net>

<sup>7</sup> [www.schooleducationgateway.eu](http://www.schooleducationgateway.eu)