

ETUCE Position on EU-level Guidance on Preparedness in Education

This position provides ETUCE critical views regarding the design and implementation of the **EU-level guidelines on Preparedness in Education**, and initiative launched by the European Commission in 2025 in the framework of the implementation of the [EU Preparedness Union Strategy](#), published in March 2025, which aims to strengthen the EU's ability to anticipate, prevent, and respond to crises through an integrated all-hazards approach, a whole-of-society approach, and a whole-of-government approach.

The Strategy sets out a series of actions across six pillars:

- foresight and anticipation, resilience of vital societal functions,
- population preparedness,
- public-private cooperation,
- civil-military cooperation,
- and crisis response coordination,
- and resilience through external partnerships.

Within the pillar on population preparedness, **Action 29** seeks to develop guidelines for embedding preparedness concepts into early childhood and primary education curricula and to equip educators with the skills and tools needed to teach preparedness effectively. The Action is co-led by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) and the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), with implementation supported by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and the Justice and Consumers Directorate-General Official Use Only (DG JUST).

The **2025 UNESCO Santiago Consensus** stresses social dialogue with the teaching profession as a fundamental mechanism of education and teacher policies: "Establish permanent, inclusive and transparent mechanisms for social dialogue between governments and democratically elected representatives of teachers, including trade unions, in order to promote a genuine participatory and constructive decision-making process at all stages of policy making and implementation that have an impact on the teaching profession and the achievement of SDG4." ⁱ

This is fundamental to the attractiveness of the teaching profession and the success of the **EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda**. A profession has its own democratic organizations—teacher unions and

associations—representative structures, and its own policies and points of view, which are developed through careful consideration and processes. A profession by definition also has a fair amount of professional autonomy at all levels, and a fundamental say in setting and implementing its own standards, classroom practices (pedagogy, curricula), teacher education, induction, research, and professional development. These principles apply to the European level and the involvement of ETUCE as well.

ETUCE acknowledges the importance of embedding preparedness concepts into curricula and equipping teachers and other education personnel with the necessary skills to anticipate, prevent, and respond to crises. However, we stress that preparedness in education must go beyond technical measures and address systemic, social, and professional dimensions. ETUCE calls for Preparedness Strategy in Education that provides a **clear definition of what constitutes an ‘emergency’** in the framework of the Strategy and **respects professional autonomy, ensures social dialogue, and promotes systemic investment in education**, and for the EU-level guidelines that are comprehensive, inclusive, and adaptable, addressing **both technical preparedness and the social dimension of education**, and provide mechanisms for the **robust democratic governance and monitoring**, enabling continuous improvement and democratic accountability. Furthermore, it is critical to **avoid that "preparedness" leads to the militarisation of education** or the loss of democratic sovereignty.

Systemic investment in public education

Recent crises exposed fundamental flaws in public service management, notably chronic underinvestment in education. Emphasising that education is a fundamental right, ETUCE notes the risks of over-reliance on public-private partnerships and instead calls for sustainable public funding, including ring-fenced allocations for preparedness and emergency response in education. It is also crucial to ensure public investment for teacher digital training and secure, quality digital infrastructure in all education institutions. We remind the Commission and member states of **Recommendation 7 of the United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession recommendations** which states that: “Funding for public education should be guaranteed as at least **6 percent of GDP** and **20 percent of total government expenditure**, as set out in the Education 2030 Framework for Action, and should allow for increasing investment per capita.”ⁱⁱ

Stakeholder participation and social dialogue

ETUCE insists on the implementation of the Santiago Consensus, which means **systematic inclusion of education trade unions** in design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the preparedness strategy at European, national, regional and school level. The current process at the European and national level insufficiently reflects social partner engagement. The proposed EU Guidelines must **commit explicitly** to social dialogue and collective bargaining in all matters affecting teachers and education staff during preparedness and emergency situations, as effective social dialogue and collective

bargaining are essential to ensure that preparedness measures respect teachers' rights and professional autonomy.

Clear definition of preparedness competences

The current approach lacks clarity on what constitutes preparedness competences while covering broad range of “key risks” (anticipating, preventing, responding). Preparedness for natural disasters, cyberattacks, or health crises requires distinct skills and knowledge. For example, natural disasters of geopolitical crisis would require survival and practical life skills: students should acquire foundational survival skills applicable in limited resource situations (e.g., living in nature, building shelter, rationing food, extinguishing fires, basic first aid). While cyber preparedness emphasises critical thinking and risk assessment for digital threats, including cyber hygiene and response protocols.

Therefore, ETUCE calls for including both **risk-specific competences** (e.g., natural disasters vs. cyberattacks) and **cross-cutting competences** (critical thinking, risk assessment, problem-solving, citizenship education, environmental sustainability), building on existing frameworks such as [EU GreenComp](#) and the [Paris Declaration on Citizenship Education](#).

Protecting education personnel and working conditions

Current plans overwhelmingly target students, leaving education personnel vulnerable. Preparedness must include **protection of employment rights, health and safety at work, psychological support for staff**, and measures addressing **workload, wellbeing, and work-life balance** during and after emergencies. Furthermore, **fair compensation** and recognition for **extra workload** undertaken to maintain equality and inclusion under emergency conditions must be guaranteed.

Another key issue related to the education personnel is professional autonomy: proposed policies should **respect teachers' professional autonomy** in preparing, teaching, and adapting preparedness content to context and student needs.

Curriculum design, materials, and local adaptation

Before producing repositories of materials, EU guidelines must **first define competences and skills coherently and transparently**. Materials, curricula, and assessment approaches must be **adapted to local contexts, risk profiles, and community needs**; ETUCE recommends avoiding a one size fits all EU repository without clear pedagogical guidelines. Furthermore, preparedness, sustainability, and critical thinking should be **applied across subjects**, embedded in everyday teaching and school culture—not siloed or optional. It is also important to establish requirements for **regular drills** and **behavioural protocols** in emergencies (evacuation, fire suppression basics, first aid) with appropriate training and resources.

Teacher initial and continuous professional development

Teacher training on preparedness competences and skills must be **comprehensive and systemic** (including both initial and continuous professional development) and **provided during the working time**. ETUCE cautions that **optional micro-credentials are insufficient** to ensure consistent, cross-subject capacity. This training should also build **capacity for inclusive education during remote or hybrid teaching**, address **mental health support** for learners and staff, and **ensure pedagogical continuity**. Finally, teachers and other education personnel must be actively involved in designing pedagogical approaches and organisational models for preparedness.

Infrastructure standards and digital readiness

EU guidance must set **minimum standards for school infrastructure** (e.g. safety features, emergency exits, accessibility, energy and water resilience), including **digital infrastructure** for emergency remote learning (e.g. devices, secure connectivity, platforms, data protection, cybersecurity). However, acknowledging that the **social dimension of education is irreplaceable**, it must clearly state that switching to online learning is strictly emergency and temporary, with clear limits and safeguards.

Equity and inclusion

The proposed Guidelines must tackle inequities in access to quality education arising from socio-economic status, geography (including rural and remote areas), and other barriers. It is crucial to provide **targeted national-level support for vulnerable learners** (e.g., students with disabilities, migrants, refugees, those in poverty), including tailored interventions, resources, and contingency planning.

Pedagogical and organisational alternatives for emergencies

The Preparedness in Education Guidelines must include **beneficial alternatives to emergency education**, such as an adapted curricula, smaller class sizes, and recruitment of additional teachers and support personnel to maintain quality, equity, and inclusion during disruptions. Furthermore, it should note the importance of the school role and **social security alignment**: the social security support systems should be better aligned so schools can concentrate on delivering education and are **not used as substitutes for social support institutions**.

To summarise the position, ETUCE calls on the European Commission and Member States to ensure that EU-level guidance on preparedness in education:

- Does **not lead to the militarisation of education or the loss of democratic sovereignty**.
- **Defines preparedness competences clearly**, aligned with risk types and cross-cutting skills, and builds on [EU GreenComp](#) and the [Paris Declaration](#) on Citizenship Education.
- **Commits to sustainable public funding** with dedicated budgets for preparedness and resilient **digital infrastructure**.

- **Guarantees meaningful participation** of education trade unions and social partners in education; embeds **social dialogue and collective bargaining**.
- **Protects staff rights and wellbeing**, including health and safety, workload, psychological support, and **professional autonomy of education personnel**.
- **Sets minimum infrastructure standards** and recognises online learning only as a **temporary emergency measure**.
- **Prioritises competenced curriculum design**, with **local adaptation** and cross subject integration.
- **Delivers systemic teacher initial and continuous professional development**, beyond micro-credentials, covering inclusion, mental health, and remote teaching.
- **Centers equity and targeted support** for vulnerable groups and addresses socio-economic and geographic disparities.
- **Provides pedagogical and organisational alternatives** (adapted curricula, smaller classes, additional staff) and **aligns social security systems** so schools are not overburdened.
- **Implements robust governance and monitoring**, enabling continuous improvement and accountability.

ⁱ UNESCO. *Santiago Consensus. World Summit on Teachers - Adopted 29 August 2025*. UNESCO, 2025.
<https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/08/world-summit-teachers-final-santiago-consensus-en.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ *United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession Recommendations and Summary of Deliberations. Transforming the Teaching Profession*. ILO/UNESCO, 2024.