

CALL TO MINISTERS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

For the Tirana Ministerial Conference, 29-30 May, 2024

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) is a federation of 127 education trade unions in 51 countries, representing in total 11 million members all over Europe. It is the European Region of Education International. ETUCE is a consultative member of the Bologna Processes' Bologna Follow-Up Group.

SINDIKATA E BASHKUAR E ARSIMIT, E SHKENCËS DHE KULTURËS (SBASHK), KOSOVË (UNITED TRADE UNION OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE, KOSOVO) is a member of ETUCE and represent 18.782 teachers and staff in the higher education and research sectors.

The digital and green transitions, the health and cost-of-living crises, demographic changes, attacks on fundamental values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy, freedom and respect of knowledge and science, and Russia's war against Ukraine and the risk of its escalation are having a strong social, economic and political impact on the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and higher education and research personnel.

The European higher education and research sectors and their personnel have a key role in defending the fundamental values of higher education, human rights, democracy and equality, passing on these values from generation to generation and building bridges between nations. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are vital pillars of strong democracies and social development. Academic freedom is essential for any democracy to enable freedom of expression and open and critical discussions, build mutual trust, and create sustainable development. Higher education teaching and research that is free from political, economic and religious influence also helps to ensure a knowledge-based society wherein people make rational and reasonable decisions as citizens and in democratic processes.

In order to guarantee quality higher education and research and to develop “a more inclusive, innovative, interconnected and resilient European Higher Education Area (EHEA)”¹, it is crucial that staff are properly valued and supported.

¹EHEA Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 19 November 2020
http://www.ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique.pdf

It is vital to ensure that academic careers are attractive to talented teachers and researchers. However, increasing pressures on academics and higher education institutions including underfunding, privatisation, the casualisation of academic work and declining salaries are making academic careers unattractive. Improving the attractiveness of academic careers and the retention of staff in higher education and research are [priorities](#) for the Member Organisations of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) which represents staff in the higher education and research sector in 52 countries.

In the run up to the 2024 Tirana Ministerial Conference of the Bologna Process, we call on Ministers to commit to the following goals in the forthcoming Communiqué:

- Strengthen **academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and other fundamental values**, such as freedom of knowledge, science, and speech, and ensure that they are effectively monitored across the EHEA with the involvement of the staff in the process;
- Encourage **cooperation** instead of competition among institutions, staff and students within the Bologna Process;
- Guarantee sustainable and long-term **public investment and funding** in higher education and research to ensure high quality education and research and a supportive working and learning environment for staff and students;
- Ensure **research-based quality teaching and learning**, parity of esteem between teaching and research, a shift from quantitative towards qualitative assessment of teaching and research, and responsible, transparent and collegial evaluation of staff;
- Strengthen **collegial governance and effective social dialogue** with the trade unions of academic staff, in particular in relation to the digital and green transitions of higher education and research and their impact on the jobs and working conditions of the staff;
- Make the academic **career attractive** for highly skilled personnel by guaranteeing **attractive salaries, fair pensions, decent working conditions, job security with permanent contracts, reliable career paths, and equal opportunities** for staff in higher education and research;

- Ensure **the health and safety** of academics and researchers, and equip them with effective support to fight against fake news and protect them from hate speech and harassment;
- Recognise that innovations in teaching and learning such including **digitalisation** must be underpinned by pedagogical practices, and guarantee **work-life balance** for the staff, respect their **right to connect and disconnect and to telework**;
- Respect and protect **intellectual property** of higher education and research personnel when developing open science and education;
- Support access of **early career academics** to quality induction and preparation for the profession, permanent contractual status and fair career development pathways;
- Ensure equal access to **quality continuous professional development** for all staff to take place during normal working hours;
- Ensure **equal access** and the incorporation of the social dimension of higher education and research for both staff and students and **greater equality in the recruitment, retention, career development and evaluation of academic staff**.

OUR SPECIFIC NATIONAL DEMANDS ARE:

- Access to digital infrastructure and resources to facilitate online learning and research in the face of the digital transition.
- Implementation of sustainable practices and policies to support the green transition, considering the environmental impact of higher education activities.
- Adequate support for healthcare systems and measures to mitigate the health crisis, ensuring the well-being of students, faculty, and staff.
- Addressing the rising cost of living through financial aid programs and support mechanisms for students and academic professionals.
- Strategies to manage demographic changes and ensure inclusivity and diversity within higher education institutions.
- Protection of fundamental values such as human rights, the rule of law, and democracy, safeguarding academic freedom and intellectual autonomy.
- Promoting freedom of knowledge and science, resisting any attempts to undermine academic integrity or restrict access to information.