

THE CRISIS AND ITS DRAWN-OUT EFFECTS ON EDUCATION SINCE 2008

The views of the teachers in Europe

Six years of economic and financial crisis, in conjunction with the sovereign-debt crisis, have undeniably caused considerable strain on European countries' public budgets. Governments across Europe undertook paths of reforms often justified by major cuts in public spending.

ETUCE, representing 132 teacher trade unions in 45 countries, has started to monitor the effects of the crisis on education in 2008, carrying out three questionnaire surveys¹ covering the period 2008 – 2011 and 2011 – 2013. The surveys embraced almost all EU Member States, allowing ETUCE to collect responses from 45 trade unions in 27 European countries.

According to the ETUCE member organisations, governments across Europe even partly triggered by the economic crisis **cut educational spending** and embarked in reforms headed towards some kind of **privatisation of education**, mining the pillar of a democratic European society based on the access to public education free of charge for all.

CUTS IN EDUCATION BUDGETS

When the crisis first broke out in 2008, it caused **immediate cuts in educational budget in 19 out of 26 EU countries**², reaching peaks of 55% of educational budget cuts³, with harsh consequences for all those employed in the education sector and for the communities affected by an inevitable decrease in the quality of education.

EDUCATION REFORMS AS A RESULT OF THE CRISIS

80% of EU countries⁴ underwent education reforms from 2008. Although we cannot state that an empirical direct correlation exists between cuts and education reforms, almost all the 20 countries who reported government's reforms in the education sector were affected by cuts⁵.

INCREASE IN PRIVATISATION

The on-going **process of privatisation**⁶ has been reported by organisations in half of the EU countries⁷. Alarming, all those⁸ who went through some kind of privatisation reform suffered from education budget reductions due to the crisis.

Is privatisation or an increase in public-private partnership the response of governments to the crisis? *Governments have the responsibility to ensure adequate resources for universally accessible education provided equitably on a not-for-profit basis*, according to one of the ETUCE 10 key messages.

Yet some countries⁹ did not make their first steps towards privatisation reforms in education, although the economic crisis had serious impacts both on schools and on teachers' working conditions.

IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Schools' closure occurred in more than a half of EU countries¹⁰ in the period 2008-2011, with appalling reported figures¹¹. Eventually, this last-resort decision was not carried out until 2013 by all of these countries¹².

Equally alarming, **merger of schools happened in two out of three EU countries¹³** in the first crisis period¹⁴.

Almost **half of the EU countries¹⁵ went through dismissals** of teachers when the crisis first broke out in 2008, with peaks of more than one hundred thousand dismissed teachers in one country.¹⁶

Many **teachers have left their position** due to deteriorating working conditions since 2008¹⁷.

WORKING CONDITIONS

The **working conditions of teachers have deteriorated in 70% of EU countries¹⁸**, in terms of salary cuts and freezing from 2008 to 2013.

Freezing of salaries has occurred in half of the 27 EU countries surveyed¹⁹ in the period 2008 – 2011. Four countries that initially did not foresee freezing took this measure in the second period surveyed, 2011-2013: Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia and Austria.

Cuts in teachers' salaries were reported in 13 out of 27 EU countries²⁰. The peak on salary cuts has been reached by Greek teachers²¹. All the listed countries perpetuated with cuts in salaries for the period 2011-2013²². Few countries, who suffered from educational budget cuts, even though in different periods, did not cut teachers' salaries²³.

¹ For reference: ETUCE, 05/2013 – [The continued impact of the crisis on teachers in Europe](#); ETUCE, 09/2012 [Mini- survey on the impact of the economic crisis on teacher education](#); ETUCE, 2012, [Mini-survey in the Action and Campaign framework on the economic crisis](#).

² Period 2008-2013: amongst these 19 countries, Italy and Denmark ceased to report cuts in educational budget from 2011. Slovenia started to report cuts from 2011.

³ 55% cuts in Latvia, 50% in Romania, from 15 to 30% cuts in Hungary, Greece and Cyprus. UK, Czech Republic, Ireland, Spain, Lithuania, France, Italy and Belgium followed.

⁴ The 80% is referring to 20 countries out of 26 surveyed from 2008: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and UK.

⁵ With the exception of Austria, Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia. Denmark didn't undergo reforms despite educational budget cuts. Almost all the countries reporting education reforms in 2008 confirmed the trend for the period 2011-2013. Austria and Slovakia limited their reforms to the first period, and Romania and Slovenia started reforms only from 2011.

⁶ When referring to privatisation, surveyed ETUCE member organisations meant to report an on-going process of reforms in differing and various branches of education – e.g. pre-primary and primary in Poland, higher education in Romania and Spain, pre-university in Cyprus, teacher education and early childhood education in Ireland, LLL programs in the Netherlands, indirect public-private participation in France and educational service sector in Spain and UK, boosted up by the economic crisis.

⁷ From 2008: 11 countries out of 26 surveyed, namely: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Spain, Finland, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal and UK. From 2011, 2 countries more started privatisation processes: Ireland and Romania.

⁸ With the exception of Germany, Malta and Poland.

⁹ Namely: Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Slovenia and Slovakia.

¹⁰ 16 countries out of 26 reported closures in the period 2008-2011: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and UK.

¹¹ Spain- 1.500 schools closed down, Greece- 1.053, Poland- 500 and Italy- 450.

¹² Except for Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Greece.

¹³ 18 countries out of 26 for the period 2008-2011, namely: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and UK.

¹⁴ The number of merged school per country since 2008, as reported by teacher trade unions, ranges from 1.933 in Greece to 1.200 in Hungary, 750 in Italy, 403 in the Netherlands and to less than 50 in Belgium. While Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Lithuania carried on mergers through 2011 and 2012; others, such as Austria, went through mergers only from 2011.

¹⁵ 12 countries out of 26 for the period 2008-2011: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain and UK.

¹⁶ The record belongs to Romania, with 120.000 dismissed teachers followed by Spain and Hungary, 15.000 and 14.500, Netherlands, 10.500. Hungary and Denmark did not report other dismissals in 2011; Bulgaria (6.000 teachers dismissed from 2011), Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Spain continued to report after 2011, joined by Greece and Slovakia from 2011.

¹⁷ 24.000 in Greece, 10.000 in UK, 2.000 in Ireland and 200 in Romania.

¹⁸ Teachers in 18 countries out of 26 surveyed went through salaries cuts and/or freezing, details in following footnotes.

¹⁹ Freezing of salaries for different periods from 2008 to 2011 in: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and UK. Only after 2011: Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia and Austria.

²⁰ Cuts in salaries 2008-2013: Bulgaria (from 2011), Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania (from 2011), Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia (from 2011) and Spain.

²¹ Greece - 30% salary reduction, Romania - 25%, Ireland - 18%, Cyprus - 13%, Portugal, Spain and Croatia - under 10%.

²² Except Slovakia.

²³ Denmark, Hungary and Italy. Accompanied by Austria and Malta, who didn't suffer from educational budget cuts.