



Teacher Standards and Professionalism: International Visions and Regional Realities

TE_REG Report 3 (WP2b1) Exploratory Report on Teacher Standards

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Overview

This report offers an exploratory mapping of how teacher standards are framed and discussed in different contexts. The report starts by presenting key international and European documents that set out broad frameworks, recommendations, and visions related to teaching professionalism and teacher education. These global and European texts provide important reference points for understanding ongoing developments in national and regional systems.

Following this international mapping, five regional studies are presented. These reports, developed within the TE_REG project, explore how teacher standards are defined and debated in five European regions/countries. Based on these regional findings, a brief comparative synthesis is offered to highlight emerging patterns, differences, and common issues that arise across the participating regions.

In the 'Teacher Standard: reflections and discussions' Report we build on the descriptions provided in this document

3.1 Framing international frameworks on teacher standards

3.1.1 UNESCO

Education holds a prominent place on the global agenda of the United Nations, and especially UNESCO, which for decades has provided guidance on education policy and normative frameworks. Across time, UNESCO and the UN have developed a shared architecture of principles to support teacher standards and teacher education, emphasizing human development, ethical responsibility, global citizenship, sustainability, equity, and educational transformation.

The Four Pillars of Education (1996)

UNESCO's 1996 report 'Learning: The Treasure Within' (aka the 'Delors Report') introduces four interconnected pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. These pillars present education as a process that fosters personal growth, practical competence, ethical responsibility, and social cohesion. Teachers are seen as key contributors in bringing these dimensions into the daily reality of education.

Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards (2019)

Developed by UNESCO and Education International, the 2019 Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards defines teaching as an ethically grounded, professionally owned, and globally relevant activity shaped by local contexts. Teaching draws on human rights, social justice, inclusion, and equity. Standards are not imposed control mechanisms but serve as collectively developed professional reference points. Teachers and their representative organizations are positioned as central actors in both the formulation and continuous refinement of these standards. The framework emphasizes teacher autonomy, professional judgment, and shared responsibility for both student development and broader democratic purposes.

The standards integrate professional knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and ethical commitment. They address both the classroom dimension – ensuring high-quality teaching and

learning – and the wider societal role of teachers as contributors to educational innovation, collaboration, leadership, and advocacy. Standards promote continuous professional learning as a dynamic process, enabling teachers to respond to evolving challenges in society, including diversity, digitalization, and sustainability. Crucially, the framework rejects technical, bureaucratic checklist approaches and insists on maintaining the holistic, complex nature of teaching as an evolving profession with collective agency at its core.

Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education (2021)

Reimagining Our Futures Together (2021) proposes a vision of education as a shared public good that contributes to just, peaceful, and sustainable societies. Confronting inequality, ecological degradation, democratic strain, and technological change, it proposes education grounded in human rights, equity, solidarity, and democratic engagement. Teachers are seen as partners in knowledge creation and ethical practice, contributing to educational renewal and wider social dialogue. The report advocates for education that goes beyond ‘knowledge transmission’ to foster critical thinking, empathy, intercultural dialogue, and collective responsibility. Digital technologies are considered useful where they support relational and ethical aspects of learning. The report suggests that education gains transformative power when teachers, learners, and communities engage collectively in shaping educational futures.

Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development (2021)

With the Berlin Declaration, education is placed at the centre of efforts to tackle climate change, biodiversity loss, inequality, poverty, and health crises. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is described as essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4.7. The declaration highlights the importance of equipping learners with knowledge, but also with cognitive, social, emotional, and action-oriented competencies that enable active engagement with global challenges.

It calls for transformation of educational institutions into participatory, inclusive, and sustainable learning environments that serve as ‘living laboratories’ for sustainable development. Teachers are recognized as key actors and leaders of this transformation, requiring substantial investment in their professional development and capacity building. Technologies are valued when aligned with human well-being and sustainability objectives.

Joint Invitation on Transforming Teacher Education (2022)

In the Joint Invitation, teacher education is portrayed as a distinct and vital part of the education landscape, offering unique opportunities for educational renewal. Teacher education is envisioned as preparing professionals who combine subject expertise with ethical awareness, reflection, social engagement, and global responsibility. Competencies related to social justice, global citizenship, sustainability, intercultural understanding, and well-being are central.

Teacher education institutions are invited to operate in multiple roles: as initiators and educators of teachers, as investigators advancing research, as innovators and example setters modelling inclusive and ethical education, and as intermediaries building connections between educational communities, policymakers, and society. Instead of rigid standards or fragmented competencies, the invitation encourages flexible, integrated frameworks that protect teacher agency. Co-construction, involving teachers, learners, communities, and policymakers, is presented as central to shaping teacher education for an uncertain future.

Global Monitoring: SDG 4 Midterm Review (2023)

The Global Education Monitoring Report charts both the progress made and the gaps that remain in achieving inclusive and quality education for all. Despite developments in certain areas, significant gaps remain in access, quality, equity, and teacher preparation. The report identifies teacher shortages, limited training opportunities, growing inequalities, and persistent learning deficits. Strengthening the teaching profession is presented as an essential step toward achieving inclusive and quality education for all under SDG 4.

UNESCO Revised Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights, Global Citizenship and Sustainable Development (2024)

Adopted in 2024, the Revised Recommendation frames education as a lifelong endeavour that supports peaceful, just, inclusive, and sustainable societies. It presents education as both a right and a shared responsibility, enabling learners to engage thoughtfully with global issues, from conflict and inequality to climate challenges and technological shifts. The Recommendation identifies a blend of cognitive, emotional, ethical, and action-oriented competencies, including critical thinking, intercultural understanding, respect for diversity, global citizenship, ecological responsibility, and democratic participation.

The Recommendation highlights inclusive governance involving not only governments but also civil society, learners, educators, and communities. Teachers and teacher educators are recognized for their role in nurturing these competencies, supported by ongoing professional development and academic freedom. The document specifically acknowledges UNESCO's Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) as a global platform where these principles are actively explored and tested. ASPnet offers examples of inclusive, democratic educational practice that can inform broader systemic development.

Report of the Joint ILO–UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (2025)

The 2025 CEART Final Report revisits existing global norms on the status of teachers while noting evolving challenges. Teaching is presented as a profession grounded in dignity, ethical responsibility, and public service. The report calls attention to teacher agency, working conditions, and leadership roles, emphasizing the need for professional autonomy and meaningful participation in education systems. It notes emerging risks linked to technocratic control, digital automation, and political pressures that may weaken teacher voice and fragment professional standards. Teachers are seen as contributors to inclusive, resilient education systems. The report suggests updating global instruments to reflect societal shifts, while preserving core principles of collective agency, ethical responsibility, and teacher involvement in policy decisions.

UNESCO ASPnet Strategic Framework for Action 2025–2029 (2025)

The UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) Strategic Framework for Action 2025–2029 sets out a vision for building peaceful and sustainable futures through transformative education. ASPnet positions schools, including teacher education institutions, as active agents in promoting global citizenship, education for sustainable development, and intercultural understanding. The framework emphasizes the whole-school approach, encouraging alignment of curriculum, pedagogy, school policies, and community partnerships to create genuinely transformative learning environments. Teachers are seen as co-creators of knowledge, working

collaboratively with students, families, and communities to address contemporary challenges such as inequality, climate change, disinformation, and digitalization. Rather than offering prescriptive teacher standards, the framework focuses on building capacity, encouraging peer learning, and supporting innovative practices through networks and partnerships that inspire change and inform policy development.

3.1.2 OECD

OECD Learning Compass 2030 (2019)

With the Learning Compass 2030, the OECD sets out a vision of learning aimed at preparing students to help build sustainable, inclusive, and equitable societies. Learning is not simply about acquiring knowledge but about developing the competencies to navigate complexity, create value, and contribute to individual and collective well-being. This vision emphasizes the importance of student agency – learners taking ownership of their learning, engaging with global challenges, and participating in building better futures.

Crucially, the Compass proposes to redefine the relationship between teachers and students. Students are no longer passive recipients of instruction but active participants who share responsibility for shaping the learning environment. This dynamic form of co-agency links student agency directly with teacher agency, highlighting the teacher’s role not just as a facilitator but as a co-navigator of learning alongside students. Teacher education is therefore invited to prepare future teachers who combine subject knowledge and pedagogy with ethical reflection, adaptive expertise, collaboration, and a readiness to engage in joint meaning-making with their students. In this view, teaching becomes a professional practice rooted in partnership, shared responsibility, and continuous mutual learning.

OECD Teaching Compass (2025)

The Teaching Compass builds directly on the Learning Compass, translating its vision of student agency, ethical engagement, and future-readiness into a professional framework for teaching. If learners are to become active agents in shaping sustainable and inclusive societies, teachers are called to guide, support, and co-navigate that process. Teaching is presented as a relational and ethically grounded profession, requiring not only subject expertise but also sensitivity to learners' identities, emotions, and social contexts.

The Teaching Compass introduces a professional framework organized around four domains of professional practice: pedagogical expertise, relational practice, professional responsibility, and professional learning. These domains offer orientation for teaching practice without translating (and reducing) it to fixed competencies. This choice reflects the view that teaching demands flexible professional judgment and cannot be fully captured in discrete behavioral checklists. Teachers are seen as professionals who develop evolving repertoires of practice, informed by evidence, collaboration, and reflective inquiry. Schools are positioned as learning communities where teachers engage in shared knowledge-building and continuous growth.

Teacher education is invited to prepare future professionals who combine strong disciplinary knowledge with ethical discernment, adaptive expertise, cultural responsiveness, and collaborative capacity. Professional standards, in this perspective, function as evolving frameworks that sustain collective trust and ethical commitment, rather than as prescriptive lists of skills to be mastered.

OECD Reimagining Teachers (2025)

In *Reimagining Teachers*, teaching is presented as a relational, value-based, and knowledge-rich profession that contributes to learning, care, and social responsibility.. Teachers are seen as members of professional communities who share knowledge and uphold education as a public good. Public trust in teachers depends not only on individual competence but on the collective credibility of the profession, which contributes to trust in public institutions and democratic processes. Teaching requires complex judgment that integrates pedagogical expertise, ethical reasoning, and sensitivity to diversity, while also supporting the cohesion and resilience of democratic societies. Teaching is not only about instruction but about contributing to the cohesion, stability, and resilience of democratic societies. Teacher education is invited to foster strong content knowledge, reflective practice, collaborative capacity, and adaptive expertise. Professional standards are framed as shared ethical commitments that orient practice, sustain professional learning, and maintain confidence in the profession's societal role.

OECD Trends Shaping Education 2025

The 2025 OECD Trends Shaping Education report examines how global developments are reshaping education and what this means for the role of teachers. Two central developments are highlighted: rising polarisation, which threatens social cohesion and public trust; and new forms of progress, offering technological and scientific advances that raise complex ethical questions. In this context, education is seen as a crucial space for preparing learners not only with knowledge, but with resilience, adaptability, civic responsibility, and ethical discernment.

Teachers are positioned as key actors in navigating these tensions, fostering inclusive learning environments and supporting student agency within increasingly complex societies. While the report addresses system-level frameworks, it emphasizes that such frameworks should articulate shared values and provide orientation, while preserving space for professional judgment and adaptation. For teachers, this reinforces the need for evolving professional standards that guide practice without prescribing uniform solutions, sustaining both educational quality and social trust.

3.1.3 EU

Eurydice: Teachers in Europe – Careers, Development and Well-being (2021)

This Eurydice Report highlights persistent challenges in sustaining a strong teaching profession across Europe. It identifies limited career progression, unequal access to professional development, high workload, and growing stress levels as risks for teacher well-being and retention. While teachers are recognized as central to student learning and educational quality, the profession struggles to remain attractive. The report stresses the importance of sustained

professional learning, collaborative cultures, and support for teacher agency in adapting to diverse learner needs. For teacher education, this points to the need for preparing resilient, reflective professionals who see professional learning as a continuous, collaborative process beyond initial qualification.

The Teaching Profession (Commission Staff Working Document) (2023)

The document frames teaching as a complex, relational, and knowledge-rich profession that plays a key role in addressing equity, inclusion, digital transformation, and democratic resilience. Teachers are positioned as designers of learning environments, facilitators of student agency, and contributors to wider societal development. Professionalism is defined through strong pedagogical knowledge, ethical responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and the capacity to manage complexity.

The report calls for teacher education to move beyond procedural training towards fostering adaptive expertise, critical reflection, and collaborative professional identities. Partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools are emphasized as central to bridging theory and practice. Professional standards are described as evolving frameworks that support continuous development across the career span, anchored in shared values while allowing flexibility for contextual adaptation.

Education and Training Monitor – Comparative Report (European Commission) (2024)

The authors highlight the urgent need to strengthen teacher competences and capacity to advance sustainability education. Teachers are positioned as key actors in equipping learners not only with knowledge but also with values, ethical reasoning, systems thinking, and political agency to engage critically with global challenges. Teacher education is called to prepare professionals who can design inclusive, research-informed learning environments, integrate sustainability across subjects, and foster collaborative professional cultures. Ongoing professional learning and strong school partnerships are seen as essential to support teachers in this complex, evolving mission.

Teachers in the European Union – Status, Challenges and Opportunities (2024)

This recent European Parliamentary Research Service Briefing (EPRSB) outlines persistent challenges for the teaching profession across the European Union. It highlights teacher shortages, recruitment difficulties, uneven working conditions, and high workloads, which threaten the long-term attractiveness of the profession. While reaffirming teachers' crucial role in securing educational quality and equity, the report points to the need for coherent career structures, supportive working environments, and sustained professional learning. For teacher education, this reinforces the importance of preparing resilient, adaptive professionals equipped for diverse, demanding school contexts, with continuous development essential to maintain professional quality and public trust.

3.2. Five EU regional/country reports

Following the international and European mapping, this section turns to the five regional reports produced within the TE_REG project. These reports explore how teacher standards are defined, implemented, and discussed in five European contexts: Finland, Flanders (Belgium), Hessen

(Germany), Montenegro, and Portugal. Each report offers a detailed exploration of local policy, institutional structures, and professional cultures as they relate to teacher standards and teacher education.

To support the reader's orientation, we first present a short abstract for each regional report, summarizing the key features and approaches in each case. These abstracts allow the reader to gain a first impression of the main developments and points of interest in each country or region. Readers are invited to consult the full reports, which are included at the end of this section, for more detailed descriptions and analyses.

Finland (University of Helsinki)

Finland's teacher education rests on professional trust, academic autonomy, and research-based development rather than prescriptive teacher standards. While various national policy documents define aims for teaching and learning, universities and teachers retain broad autonomy in interpreting these. No formal national teacher standards are defined at state level; instead, broad competence frameworks are developed and used by teacher education institutions. These frameworks describe expectations for teacher development and guide curriculum design, but they do not function as binding national standards. The system emphasizes high entry requirements, a strong research component, lifelong learning, and reflective practice. Competence frameworks deliberately avoid rigid checklists in order to preserve holistic professional identity, ethical responsibility, and adaptability in rapidly changing contexts, including AI.

Flanders, Belgium (KU Leuven & UCLL)

Flanders introduced competency-based teacher standards in 1998 to unify fragmented teacher education and assure quality. The framework defines knowledge, skills, and attitudes across 3 domains and 10 functional areas, complemented by 8 transversal attitudes. Standards are legally binding for ITE and serve as both curriculum design tools and assessment instruments. While systematically applied, the standards remain deliberately general to avoid narrow proceduralism and preserve a holistic conception of teacher professionalism. The framework is periodically updated to respond to societal changes.

Hessen, Germany (Studienseminar Marburg)

Germany's dual-phase teacher education combines university-based academic study with intensive post-graduate school-based practical training. National KMK standards define eleven broad teacher competencies, addressing pedagogy, ethics, diversity, and professional development. In Hessen, the Marburg Studienseminar supplements these with participatory tools (Matrix, Marburg Curriculum) that structure mentoring, reflection, and evaluation while allowing situational flexibility. Standards provide a shared language but avoid rigid operationalization, promoting reflective and adaptive professional agency.

Montenegro (University of Montenegro)

Montenegro adopted national competency standards for teachers in 2016, covering practice, knowledge, and attitudes across eight areas. Though initially not binding for universities, accreditation reforms in 2022 began aligning ITE programs more closely with these standards. The framework aspires to integrate content knowledge, pedagogy, and ethical practice

throughout initial and in-service teacher education. Challenges remain in bridging systemic fragmentation and ensuring coherent implementation across diverse educational providers.

Portugal (Centro de Formação Dr. Rui Grácio)

Portugal's teacher education is tightly regulated through legal performance profiles that define professional, pedagogical, ethical, and developmental competencies across five dimensions. The Bologna structure (Bachelor + Master) integrates subject knowledge, pedagogy, didactics, and practicum experiences. Continuous professional development is organized through state-accredited training centers and national quality assurance mechanisms. While digital competencies are embedded, AI remains largely absent from formal standards, posing a challenge for future-oriented teacher education.

3.2.1 Finland

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https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/17e963e7-85e9-400d-ad2f-046d79adabb1/University-of-Helsinki-Finland-Teacher-Standards-Reflections_WP2b1.pdf

3.2.2 Flanders (Belgium)

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https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/00ca7252-5d3c-4856-ad8a-dd08ef4bc0b2/WP2b1-Flanders-Teacher-Standards-Report-20250504_1.pdf

3.2.3 Hessen (Germany)

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https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/edc20e3a-f165-4b69-89da-67223e9caedc/WP2b1-Germany-Hesse-Teacher-Standards-Report-20250528_1.pdf

3.2.4 Montenegro

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https://te-reg.eu/wp-content/uploads/go-x/u/7bbe6a13-e439-4d40-9866-e298e3a85d28/TE_REG-Report-WP2b1-Montenegro.pdf

3.2.5. Portugal

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3.3. Conclusion

3.3.1 International frameworks on teacher standards

Across the international frameworks, broad commonalities can be identified. Teachers are portrayed as professionals who combine subject knowledge, pedagogical expertise, ethical responsibility, and a commitment to wider social purposes such as inclusion, sustainability, and peace. Teacher standards or frameworks are generally positioned as guides to support professional growth, collaboration, and innovation, rather than as rigid checklists or control mechanisms.

Each framework highlights different aspects. UNESCO's Global Framework and the ASPnet Strategic Framework both emphasize ethics, collective agency, and transformative education, encouraging whole-school approaches and co-creation with communities. The OECD frameworks stress professional judgment, collaboration within professional communities, and the ability to navigate complexity. EU documents focus on system-level priorities such as capacity-building, partnerships, and alignment with educational quality goals. ASPnet, in particular, brings attention to networking, shared learning, and schools as hubs of innovation rather than prescribing teacher competences.

From the documents, it can be established that teacher frameworks take different forms and fulfil different roles. In some cases, they act as orientation points (providing shared reference for professional practice) or tools for capacity building (supporting the development of skills and knowledge); in others, they are connected to system alignment (the coherence between different parts of the education system) or to strengthening professional solidarity (fostering shared identity and collaboration within the profession). The documents show that teacher education frameworks link global priorities with practice in different ways. This is reflected, for example, in the varying emphasis they place on themes such as sustainability, digitalization, and intercultural understanding.

3.3.2 Five regional reports

The regional reports reflect a wide range of approaches to teacher standards. Finland relies on competence frameworks within a context of professional autonomy and trust. Flanders and Portugal apply formal, legally defined standards that integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes and guide curriculum design and assessment. Hessen (Germany) combines national competency frameworks with flexible, participatory tools that support reflective practice. Montenegro uses national teacher standards that are becoming more integrated into teacher education through recent reforms.

Despite these differences, shared patterns can be identified: all regions recognise teacher professionalism as multi-dimensional, incorporating knowledge, pedagogy, ethics, and professional development, though the degree of formalisation varies. The reports also show that some systems place greater emphasis on national regulation and alignment, while others give more space to local interpretation and institutional autonomy in shaping teacher professionalism.

3.3.3 Regional reports & international frameworks

When regional reports are compared with international frameworks, both alignments and differences can be observed. There is common ground in seeing teachers as professionals who

combine knowledge, skills, ethics, and a social mission. Teacher standards are generally presented as supportive frameworks rather than prescriptive rules. Collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools, and the role of schools as sites of innovation, appear in both international frameworks and regional approaches.

At the same time, international frameworks often place stronger emphasis on global challenges such as sustainability, digitalization, and intercultural understanding, while these themes appear with varying prominence across the regional reports. The focus on teacher agency, collective professionalism, and co-creation with communities found in some international frameworks is less pronounced in certain regional approaches where regulatory standards play a stronger role.