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Council of Europe Standing Conference of
Ministers of Education
“Empowering Educators for a Democratic Europe in
the Digital Age”
27th Session
Podgorica, Montenegro, 3-4 December 2026

Pre-Ministerial high-level exchange with education
stakeholders: Empowering educators

Podgorica, Montenegro, 3 December 2026 (morning)

Draft concept note and programme

PRE-MINISTERIAL HIGH-LEVEL EXCHANGE WITH EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Empowering Educators

I. Background and Strategic Context

The 27th Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education takes place at a critical moment for democracy in Europe. Across the continent, democratic institutions face mounting pressures, including polarisation, disinformation, erosion of trust in public authorities, geopolitical instability and rapid technological change. The [New Democratic Pact for Europe](#) aims to respond to these challenges by strengthening democratic resilience, reinforcing institutional integrity and restoring citizens' confidence in democratic governance.

Education is central to this endeavour. Democratic culture is not sustained by institutions alone; it is cultivated in classrooms, learning environments and communities. Teachers and education professionals are therefore indispensable actors to promote education for democracy. They shape critical thinking, nurture pluralism, support inclusion and prepare younger generations for active and responsible citizenship. They foster democratic decision making and social dialogue in schools and education systems as fundamental to our democracies. The collective voice of teachers plays a fundamental role in this, as highlighted in the [UNESCO Santiago Consensus](#).

This Pre-Ministerial High-Level Exchange with a focus on teachers' organisations is conceived as a strategic contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe. It provides a **structured space for dialogue between ministers of education, the Council of Europe, teachers' organisations** (notably [Education International](#) and the [European Trade Union Committee for Education \(ETUCE\)](#)), **and representatives of the wider school community** including those involved in teacher education, school leadership, parents and students. It ensures that the lived experience of educators directly informs ministerial deliberations and the future work of the Organisation.

The Exchange will also contribute directly to the Ministerial Conference starting in the afternoon, with key messages from the Exchange to be included in the Ministerial Resolution. In addition, the Exchange will inform the Council of Europe's future work concerning the teaching profession together with the forthcoming White Paper on the Future of the Teaching Profession in the Digital Age, which serves as a flagship deliverable of the Council of Europe for 2026. By grounding policy reflections in professional realities, the event strengthens the coherence between democratic ambition and educational practice.

II. Purpose and Objectives

The High-Level Exchange pursues three interrelated objectives:

1. To position educators as key actors of democratic security

In line with the New Democratic Pact pillar "Learning and Practising Democracy", the Exchange will examine how competences for democratic culture can be systematically integrated into the daily practice of teaching and school life. Teachers operate on the frontline of democratic culture. The Exchange will highlight their role in protecting pluralism, fostering dialogue, and strengthening trust in democratic institutions and the rule of law.

2. To address democratic resilience in times of crisis

War, forced displacement, and political instability place education systems under extraordinary pressure. The event will explore how teachers uphold democratic values and ensure continuity of learning in fragile contexts.

3. To protect and empower the teaching profession in the digital age

Rapid technological change and the expansion of artificial intelligence raise new ethical, pedagogical and governance challenges. The event will explore how to safeguard professional autonomy and ensure that digital innovation strengthens rather than undermines the profession and the democratic values.

Through these objectives, the High-Level Exchange will directly contribute to the New Democratic Pact's overarching aim: restoring trust in democracy and demonstrating its tangible benefits in citizens' daily lives.

III. Expected Outcomes

The High-Level Exchange will produce:

- Key messages to be included in the draft Resolution of the Ministerial conference;
- Policy orientations on the future of teachers and the teaching profession to inform the Council of Europe's education programme 2028-2031;
- Reinforced co-operation between the Council of Europe and education stakeholders, including teachers' organisations;

By linking professional realities to democratic security, the Exchange will demonstrate that democracy is built and renewed every day through education.

IV. Participants

Participants will include the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (tbc), ministers of Education, members of the [Steering Committee for Education \(CDEDU\)](#), representative of teachers' unions, teacher associations, school leadership, higher education and research, student and learner organisations, parents, civil society, teachers from the host country and experts.

Interactive methods to ensure full participation are foreseen.

In total, 80 people are expected for this high-level exchange.

Provisional programme: 3 December 2026 – 9:00 am to 12:45 pm

Moderator for event: Ms Hajar Yagkoubi

08h00-9h00

Registration

09h00 - 09h20

Welcome & Opening Remarks

- Welcome by the Minister of Education, Science and Innovation of Montenegro, **Anđela Jakšić-Stojanović**, and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (tbc)
- Introduction to the purpose of the High-Level Exchange and interactive format.

09h20 - 09h45

Setting the Scene: Educators at the Heart of Democratic Security

- Short framing presentation (10 min) by the lead author of the *White Paper on the Future of the Teaching Profession*
- The White Paper from the perspective of the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) (5 min)
- The White Paper from the perspective of a Minister of Education (5 min)

9h45 - 10h30

Interactive Roundtables: Challenges and Opportunities for Educators

- Participants already seated at mixed roundtables (8 people/table), each with a facilitator.
- Each table discusses:
 1. How can educators and the wider school community best strengthen a democratic culture?
 2. What is needed most to support educators increasingly under pressure?
 3. What is one concrete idea to empower the profession?
- Facilitators capture 2-3 key points per table.

10h30 - 11h00

Coffee Break

11h00 - 11h50

Plenary: Sharing insights, participation interaction and key messages

- Each table shares one headline takeaway (2 min/table), feeding into the plenary.
- Open mic: short interventions by participants (max 1 min each).
- Rapporteurs summarise key shared messages to inform the Ministerial Conference Resolution and the White Paper.

11h50 - 12h15

Interactive Poll & Prioritisation

- Live poll: All participants vote on top three priorities or ideas to empower educators for democracy and digital change.
- Discussion of poll results: Which ideas unite us? What needs further work?

12h15 - 12h45*Concluding Reflections and Next Steps*

- Closing remarks by ETUCE and the State Secretary of Education of Montenegro
- Brief outline of how today's messages will feed directly into the Ministerial Conference Resolution and White Paper.