

## Challenges of Teachers' Remuneration in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia: The View of Trade Unions as Social Partners

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**Abstract.** Uncompetitive remuneration for teachers has been a problem for many decades in Latvia. Government together with social partners – education trade unions, have tried to solve this problem by asking to allocate additional financial resources to public education budget, by developing teacher salary raise schedules and various educational reforms in all three Baltic countries. The aim of the study is to research general principles of teachers' remuneration and workload in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, for comparison and social dialogue argumentation on the part of education trade unions. Research approach is analysis of information on teachers' salary calculation and workload presented by education trade unions as semi-structured interviews. Reflection on the topic in relation to theoretical sources, including international organizations representing education and social dialogue issues, is enclosed. The results of the research show that there are differences in all three countries regarding general education teachers' remuneration. The main challenge is the implementation of effective and decision – making oriented social dialogue between trade unions and education policy makers regarding teachers' weekly contact hours and paid additional hours per full workload, minimal and average monthly salary rate for teachers. The conclusion of the paper indicates that, based on Lithuania and Estonia experience, immediate reforms in Latvia are necessary to increase public funding for education, to increase teachers' remuneration, harmonize and balance workload and ensure that teachers are paid for all duties performed.

**Keywords:** teachers' remuneration, workload, trade unions, social partners, social dialogue

### Introduction

Uncompetitive remuneration and heavy workload have resulted in teachers' "burnout syndrome", characterized as occupational burnout resulting from chronic work-related stress, with symptoms of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job (Understanding and Preventing..., 2006). It has resulted in reduced professional efficiency, shortage of vacancies in various teaching subjects in educational institutions, as well as decline of teacher's profession attraction to young people, including students of pedagogical programs in higher education institutions in Latvia. The study highlights the necessity to review and analyse workload and payment models of general education teachers. Because of the current system were "money follows a student", insufficient remuneration, increased workload, unpaid additional duties, and "burnout syndrome" are those challenges which are faced not only by individual teachers but by all education system in Latvia (Challenges of Teachers'..., 2021). The aim of the study is to research general principles of teachers' remuneration and workload in Latvia and two other EU countries – Lithuania and Estonia, for comparison and social dialogue argumentation on the part of education trade unions. In order to achieve the aim, the following tasks were set: 1. Research theoretical aspects of trade unions as government social partners in social dialogue; 2. Use empirical results concerning comparison of salary and workload components of general education teachers in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia from the research conducted by Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) in December 2000- January 2021; 3. Summarize theoretical and empirical findings, organize a discussion and come up with conclusions. The research subject - teachers' remuneration and workload aspects in the view of trade unions. The main research method used: semi-structured interviews with members of education trade unions in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

### Methodology

Semi - structured interviews were used to interview government social partners in education in Latvia – LIZDA, Lithuania – LESTU, and in Estonia – EEPU. The sample of the empirical research "Challenges of Teachers' Remuneration in EU Countries" conducted by LIZDA is broader – 9

education trade unions, representing EU countries, were interviewed: Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Germany. Because of limitation of the research subject, this study presents, summarizes and analyses data only from LIZDA (Latvia), LESTU (Lithuania) and EEPU (Estonia). Research presented more data which is not included in the study: teachers' qualification requirements, major support activities implemented to motivate young people to choose teaching profession, as well as issues concerning remote studies for students provided during the COVID-19. Theoretical information sources used: social dialogue literature sources – Sage publications and International Labour Organization's (ILO) concepts on social dialogue, Eurydice and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reviews on teachers' statutory salaries and allowances. Normative regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, Republic of Latvia, concerning teachers' remuneration and workload, are used.

The interview was structured with 10 questions to research teachers' remuneration and workload situation in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Results from five questions were used to reach the aim of the study:

1. What are the financial sources for general education teachers' remuneration?
2. Is the public funding allocated primarily based on the number of students (the model "money follows a student") per educational institution?
3. How many weekly working hours per full workload a teacher must work? What are the contact (teaching) hours from the total number of hours per week, and how many hours are allocated for other duties concerning preparation for lessons, assessment of students' assignments, consultations and other duties?
4. What is the minimal gross teacher salary rate in EUR per month per full workload?
5. What is the average gross salary in EUR per month per full workload for a public sector employee?

The interview results were structured in the following thematic blocks to compare teachers' remuneration and workload situation in all three Baltic countries:

1. Financial sources of teachers' remuneration, minimal and average salary rates, comparison with the average salary rates in public sector.
2. Working hours per full workload, contact hours and hours for additional duties as stipulated by the law or other normative regulations.

The information assessed were used to analyse remuneration and workload application to general educational levels – primary, elementary, and secondary, and the differences among the described aspects in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Education trade unions as government social partners for improvement of teachers' remuneration system**

Social dialogue at the national level refers to cooperation between social partners, i.e., employees' and employers' organizations, with the government. It can address a wide range of issues from labour relations to wider social and economic challenges (National Tripartite Social..., 2013). Hence, the social dialogue concept includes broad aspects of social and economic challenges which include also payment and workload systems for employees in education. Highlights of the importance or organizational resources and capabilities for interactions and relationships among social partners in various industries are researched at a broad international scale (Bechter B. et al., 2021). To understand the education trade unions of all three countries as social partners, it is necessary to present short introduction into trade unions' organizational activities and goals. LIZDA is an independent organisation founded on May 19, 1990, and at the moment is the largest trade union in Latvia. LIZDA unites more than 22 000 employees working in education and science. LIZDA members actively pursue their interests of improving working and living conditions, furthering education and science

field development. LIZDA is an official social partner of the government (Latvian Trade Union...,2021). Approximately the same structure and goals are implemented by EEPU. It is also an independent, voluntary trade union organization. It brings together all education staff associations and unions working in education sector. The aim of the union is to represent and protect professional, economic and social rights and interests of its members in education sector. The union has about 10 500 members (About Estonian Education..., 2021). LESTU is the largest trade union organisation for education employees in Lithuania with about 9000 members. The union unites employees in all fields of education, ranging from pre-primary teachers to lecturers and researchers in universities. The union is actively engaged in promoting the overall professional and trade union interests of its members at all levels – national, regional and institutional. The union is politically independent and is committed to influence the education policy of the government and employers (Lithuanian Education and..., 2021).

Social dialogue carried out by official government social partners is defined as all types of negotiations, consultations or exchange of information among the government, employers and employees at different levels of economy. Social dialogue has faced major challenges over the last decades, these include growing global competition, technological and organisational changes as well as the emergence of new forms of work alongside with digitalisation. In most countries and across all geographical areas, social dialogue has suffered from declines in trade union membership, a more fragmented employer community and lower coverage of collective agreements (Social dialogue in..., 2020). While impacted by these developments, social dialogue remains a key instrument for achieving a broad range of societal goals. In several OECD countries tri - and bipartite social agreements have played an important role in softening some of the employment effects of the financial crisis (Education at a Glance, 2021). More effective social dialogue could help to reduce inequalities, enhance the inclusiveness and performance of labour markets, and help countries to achieve their commitments.

One of the platforms where government, employers and employees discuss issues concerning teachers' remuneration and workload in Latvia is the Latvia National Tripartite Cooperation Council (NTSP). Tripartite social dialogue has to play a role in the formulation, adoption and implementation of policy decisions, especially on labour market issues, labour law, social security and education. The council considers various social, economic and education issues in order to agree on the most appropriate decision for all parties involved (Nacionālā trīspusējās sadarbības...,2021). The council coordinates tripartite social dialogue between employers' organizations, state institutions and trade unions in order to harmonize the interests of organizations in social and economic issues.

Globally, ILO is respected and consulted by all education trade unions in the European Union. Labour organization defines social dialogue as a process including all types of negotiations and consultations among representatives of government, employees and employers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. It is a process of discussions and joint decision-making that results in the formulation and adoption of social, economic and labour policies, laws and regulations as well as social pacts, joint opinions and policy positions (Social Dialogue in..., 2020). Tripartite social dialogue, involving government and employers and employees' representatives, is the main form of social dialogue among organisations and the government. Conclusions concerning tripartite consultation at the national level on economic, education and social policy promote tripartite cooperation at the national or other appropriate levels. Its efforts in this domain should above all seek to ensure the fulfilment of the conditions necessary for the smooth functioning of tripartite cooperation. In this regard, special attention should be paid to gathering, evaluating and disseminating information, raising awareness, as well as offering assistance to strengthen the capacity of governments and employers' and employees' organizations to participate effectively in tripartite cooperation (The Effectiveness of..., 2020). Social dialogue is implemented through establishment of bilateral or tripartite councils, participation and decision making in employment and socio-economic agreements in Lithuania and Estonia.

Teachers' knowledge and skills, their commitment to the job are all essential factors in achieving high quality education outcomes. Countries must consider that adequate and competitive remuneration is closely linked to teachers' commitment and quality education outcomes (The structure of..., 2020). Thus, teachers' salary increase and workload negotiations are the major challenges of social partners in dialogue with the governments in all three Baltic countries.

## 2. Funding sources and remuneration for general education teachers in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia

General education teacher is defined as a primary, elementary and secondary education level teacher. General education teachers' workload in Latvia – paid hours per week (30 working hours) corresponds with the monthly salary rate of EUR 790 from 01.09.2020. in Latvia (Pedagogu darba samaksas..., 2018). The number of working hours per week includes not only contact hours, but also preparation for lessons, assessment of students' written works, individual and group work, consultations, methodological and project work and other duties. Teaching subject, number of students in a class as well as other factors stipulated by the municipality - founder of the educational institution, are taken into consideration when calculating teachers' remuneration. The salary rate is determined by the principal of the school from the current year September 1 till the next year's August 31. In accordance with the criteria approved at the school and agreed by the municipality, the teacher salary rate per workload can be determined higher than the state minimal teacher salary per month. The principal of the school may consider various factors (including work experience, professional qualification, etc.) for teacher's salary raise. The teacher salary is the total sum of calculation of multiplying teacher's workload with the monthly salary rate. The teacher salary every year is fixed by the principal of the school by making tariffication. Astronomical hours (including breaks between teaching classes) are taken into consideration when calculating teachers' remuneration (Kā veidojās skolotāja..., 2019). To summarize the teacher salary calculation system, it is influenced by three factors: workload hours per week, monthly salary rate and salary supplements.

Education International (EI) and Education Trade Union Committee in Education (ETUCE) have researched teachers' wages at 27 EU member states on a regular basis, and teachers' wages are considered to be an important factor in attracting new entrants to the teaching profession, as well as in retaining existing teachers. Comparative surveys provide education trade unions with more arguments in their struggle for better wages and working conditions for teachers at both the national and European level through giving a better and broader international perspective. The remuneration of working teachers varies greatly between the different countries of the broader European region, and also within each country. Wages are largely determined by three main factors: the institutional status of schools, the type of labour contract agreed upon, and the stage a teacher has reached in his or her career (Comparative study of...,2008).

In order to understand various aspects of teachers' remuneration, it is necessary to clarify funding sources in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The following research data shows what is the distribution of funding sources for teachers' remuneration in all three Baltic countries (Table 1).

Table 1

### Public, municipal and private financial sources (%) for general education teachers' remuneration in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia (Challenges of Teachers'..., 2021)

Education level	Latvia		Lithuania		Estonia		
	Public	Municipal	Public	Municipal	Public	Municipal	Private
Primary	80	20	80	20	93	2	5
Elementary	80	20	80	20	93	2	5
Secondary	80	20	80	20	93	2	5

The assessed data shows that there are no significant differences regarding financial sources for teachers' remuneration in Latvia and Lithuania – most of the funding or subsidy (80%) is coming from the public source, some funding (20%) is allocated by the municipal budget. In Estonia, the situation with financial sources allocated for general education teachers' salaries is different: firstly, there is private funding (5%) indicated, which is not the source in Latvian and Lithuanian public schools, secondly, public allocation is much higher (93%) than in Latvia and Lithuania, thus, the municipal subsidy for teachers' salaries is limited - 2% (Table 1).

Demands on the part of education trade unions exist that the public budget for teachers' remuneration has to be increased. That would ensure more stability and equality of teachers' remuneration. Local governments have different funding situations which influence how much financial allocation municipalities spend on general education. Positive EU level tendencies also indicate that general education teachers' remuneration has to be mainly covered by the state budget. The data indicate that there is no difference of application of funding sources regarding education levels (primary, elementary, secondary) in all three countries.

The public funding allocated for general education teachers' remuneration is primarily based on the number of students per education institution (school) in Latvia and Estonia. This model is generally called as the "money follows the student" principle. In Lithuania the situation is different – starting from 01.09.2018 the funding model for general education was changed. It shifted from the "money follows a student" model to a "class basket" principle. The new model is based on coherence between the basic education costs basket and the implementation of curricula. Public funding is allocated not to each student in the class but according to the size of a class. This major part of public funding is allocated as a targeted subsidy for schools in Lithuania. LIZDA as social partner negotiates with the government that the funding model for teachers' remuneration – "money follows the student" must be changed also in Latvia.

The next data (Table 2) shows the gross teacher salary rates per month per full workload in 2019 in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. In general, it has to be stated that teachers' remuneration – both minimal and average, differ significantly among EU countries. There are enormous differences between European countries in the statutory salaries for teachers. Gross statutory salaries can go from around 5000 EUR to more than 80 000 EUR per year, depending on the country (Teachers' statutory salaries, 2019). Also, it has been indicated by OECD that the total spending on educational institutions represents 4.1% of GDP in Latvia, although that does not mean that most of the percentage goes for teachers' salaries. Teachers' salaries are relatively low compared to other countries. As indicated by international organizations' reports, lower minimum starting salaries of OECD group countries are only in Hungary, Costa Rica and Brazil. (Teachers' and School, 2020; Education at a Glance, 2021).

Table 2

**The gross teacher salary rate (EUR) per month per full workload in September 2019  
(Challenges of Teachers'..., 2021)**

	<b>Latvia</b>	<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>Estonia</b>
Minimal monthly salary rate	750	1142	1250
Average monthly salary rate	900	1213	1500

In each of the Baltic countries the minimal monthly salary rate is stipulated by the state normative acts. Education trade unions and the government have agreed that the minimal rate is increased every year. The increase which is regulated by teachers' salary raise schedule in Latvia is extremely low – approximately EUR 40 is added to the minimal salary rate every year (Par pedagogu darba..., 2018). Analysing annual Eurydice research provided by the European Commission on education issues, it has been stated that in 2018/2019 teachers' statutory salaries have increased in most education systems, but salary increases were generally modest or index-related to inflation (The structure of..., 2020).

The minimal monthly salary rate for a full workload for a general education teacher in Latvia is EUR 790 starting from 01.09.2020 (Par pedagogu darba..., 2018). On 01.09.2019 the minimal monthly salary rate was only EUR 750, and the average monthly salary rate for a teacher – EUR 900 (Table 2). Teacher's salary rate is not competitive with other public sector professions, considering that the average monthly salary rate in public sector was EUR 1076 in 2019 as indicated by the Central Statistics Bureau of Latvia (Vidējā alga publiskajā..., 2019). The situation regarding minimal and average salary rates in Lithuania and Estonia is much better. In Estonia both minimal and average

teacher salary is much higher – EUR 1250 and EUR 1500, but in Lithuania – EUR 1142 as minimal salary rate, and EUR 1213 as average (Table 2).

Updated minimal salary rates in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are shown in Table 3. It has to be noted that there is a difference between weekly working hours (including contact hours and preparation hours) for teachers in three Baltic countries. If assimilating minimal salary rate (EUR) to 40 hour per week in all three countries, difference in teachers' salary rate in Latvia, comparing with Estonia and Lithuania, still exists.

Table 3

**Monthly minimal salary rate (EUR) for teachers in the Baltic countries in 2020/2021 (Challenges of Teachers'..., 2021)**

Countries, stipulated working hours (h) per week	Minimal monthly salary rate (EUR)	Minimal monthly salary rate (EUR) equated to 40 h per week
Latvia, 30 h	830	1106
Lithuania, 36 h	1216	1351
Estonia, 35 h	1315	1503

It has to be noted that EEPU has asked to the education policy makers for EUR 1500 (for 35 weekly working hours) starting from 01.09.2021 as a minimal monthly salary rate for teachers. At the same time in Lithuania the teachers' remuneration system is positively influenced by the financial support to young teachers and by financial support to teachers in accordance with their experience (number of years worked): EUR 300 stipend is provided to young teachers, and EUR 400 is provided to experienced teachers as addition to their monthly salary rate.

### 3. Workload stipulations for general education teachers in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia

As described above, general education teachers' workload in Latvia is 30 working hours what corresponds with the monthly salary rate of EUR 790 starting from 01.09.2020 (Pedagogu darba samaksas..., 2018). Out of the total 30 hours workload, 21 hours are teaching or contact hours, and 9 hours are those allocated for other duties (Table 4). Comparing the number of contact hours among all three countries, in Lithuania and Estonia contacts hours are different in comparison with Latvia – there are 24 contact hours per week for a teacher in Lithuania and Estonia.

Table 4

**Weekly working hours (h) per full workload a teacher must work as stipulated by the law or other normative regulations (Challenges of Teachers'..., 2021)**

	Latvia	Lithuania	Estonia
Total number of hours per week	30	36	35
Contact (teaching) hours from the total number of hours	21	24	24
Hours for other duties from the total number of hours	9	12	11

The data shows that total number of hours per week per full workload is stipulated by the state normative regulations in each country, but workload allocation – how many hours must be spent on teaching (contact hours), and how many on other duties (preparation for lessons, assessments of students' assignments, consultations, etc.) is not regulated by the state normative acts, it is stipulated by each municipality in cooperation with education institution.

In 2015 the Good Intention Agreement was signed between EEPU and the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. According to the agreement, a full-time teacher can have up to 24 contact hours per week within 35 hour working time for the minimal teacher salary rate. Situation with time allocation for other duties in Estonia is much better.

It has been stated in the interviews that practical teacher workload per week is usually 45-55 hours. General education teachers are stipulated to work 30 to 36 hours per week (Table 4) out of which 21 to 24 hours are contact hours. In practice, preparation for lessons and assessment of students' assignments take more time than planned – in Latvia, the time for preparation hours and other duties (9 hours) is the smallest among all three countries. Hours for planning educational process, preparation for classes and assessments of students' assignments are set according to teaching subject and the number of students in a class.

In order to summarize research results and discussion on education trade unions as government social partners for improvement of teachers' remuneration system, comparison of funding sources and remuneration for general education teachers, and workload stipulations for general education teachers, the authors have come up with the conclusions.

## Conclusions

1. There are no significant differences regarding allocation of financial sources for teachers' remuneration in Latvia and Lithuania. The major financing is provided by the public subsidy (80%), and there is a limited financial allocation from the municipal government (20%). In Estonia the public allocation is higher (93%) than in Latvia and Lithuania, thus, the municipal subsidy is only 2%. Education trade unions as government social partners' demand is to increase state funding to reduce inequalities in teachers' salaries which is caused by different financial opportunities of local municipalities in Latvia.
2. Eurydice and OECD research indicate that teachers' remuneration rates differ significantly among EU countries, depending on countries' economic situation and government priorities. Minimal and average monthly salary rates for teachers are significantly lower in Latvia than in Lithuania, and especially, in Estonia in 2019 and in 2020. That relates to the fact that in recent years the state budget for education and for teachers' remuneration has been increase more in Estonia and Lithuania than in Latvia.
3. The public funding allocated for general education teachers' remuneration is primarily based on the number of students per school in Latvia and Estonia. This model is generally called as the "money follows a student" principle. In Lithuania, the situation is different – the funding model "money follows a student" has been shifted to a "class basket" principle which is based on coherence between the basic education costs basket and the implementation of curricula. It has been negotiated by LIZDA - the funding model in Latvia has to be changed by adopting Lithuanian experience to ensure competitive and equal remuneration for teachers.
4. Workload stipulations for general education teachers in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are similar – teachers are appointed to 21 to 24 contact hours per week per full workload. The situation differs with paid hours for other duties – in Latvia only 9 hours per week are calculated and paid as additional duties which include preparation of lessons, assessment of students' work, consultations and other duties. In Lithuania and Estonia, the number of paid additional hours is higher – 12 hours in Lithuania and 11 hours in Estonia. The social partners in Latvia insist on paying for all extra duties performed by teachers.
5. Although total working hours per week per full workload for the general education varies from 30 hours to 35 hours, teachers' workload in practice in all three Baltic countries exceed 40 to 45 hours per week. That relates to extended timing for preparation of lessons and students' work assessment and leads to teachers' professional "burnout syndrome".
6. Immediate reforms in Latvia are necessary to increase public funding for education in general. That will allow to ensure adequate and competitive teachers' remuneration, harmonize and balance teachers' workload and ensure that teachers are paid for all duties performed.

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