



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale



Building Union Power: Defending the Rights and Status of Education Support Personnel

Education International's 2nd World Education Support Personnel Conference
Aveiro, Portugal, 16-18 May, 2023

Overview

EI's 2nd World Education Support Personnel (ESP) Conference "**Building Union Power: Defending the Rights and Status of ESP**" brought together education union activists from around the world to exchange ideas, join together in solidarity, and build power across the globe to defend ESP's rights and status in accordance with the [Education International Declaration on the Rights and Status of Education Support Personnel](#).

Conference themes

Defending ESP rights and status

ESP must be valued and respected for their contribution to quality education. Their right to decent work and their right to organize must be fulfilled. Their status should be enhanced and their professionalism recognized, including through improved working conditions, access to quality professional development opportunities, and the ability to participate in decision making within their institutions. Conference participants identified common priorities in relation to the vision set out in the [EI Declaration on the Rights and Status of ESP](#) and discussed strategies to achieve these.

Go public: fund ESP

With education funding in crisis globally, EI's campaign [Go Public: Fund Education](#) calls on governments to urgently increase

investment in public education and the education workforce. Recent cuts to education budgets and privatisation trends have impacted ESP jobs, contracts and working conditions. Conference participants identified common challenges facing ESP across the world in relation to financing and had the opportunity to exchange successful strategies to enhance investment in ESP and improve ESP terms and conditions of employment.

Union renewal

Strong unions are at the core of defending ESP rights and status. The conference provided participants with the opportunity to discuss multiple ingredients that contribute to making a strong union, and share experiences on union strengthening in unprecedented times. The conference aimed to build collective power among EI member organisations to better support ESP across the world.

ESP for inclusion and sustainability

ESP are critical to ensure inclusive, quality education. These professionals play an important role in fostering positive, safe, learning environments and ensuring that all students can thrive in education institutions. The conference explored how education systems can support ESP to enable all students, regardless of gender identity and/or expression, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic background, or migrant status, to enjoy their right to quality



education and have their wellbeing prioritized.

The conference also explored ESP's role in ensuring quality education in the context of the climate and environmental crisis. ESP are important for greening education institutions and teaching for climate action. Yet ESP labour rights are at risk due to worsening climate impacts. The conference allowed member organisations to consider unions' role in promoting a just transition for all education workers.

Participants

The conference was attended by 75 participants from 22 countries.

The participants included 63 representatives from EI member organisations, 4 external guests, and 8 EI staff.

Region	Number of participants	Number of countries
Africa	4	4
Asia-Pacific	6	3
Europe	37	5
Latin America	14	8
North America and Caribbean	14	2
Total:	74	21

11 participants had registered to attend the conference but did not attend. At least 7 participants were unable to attend the conference due to being unable to obtain the Schengen visa.

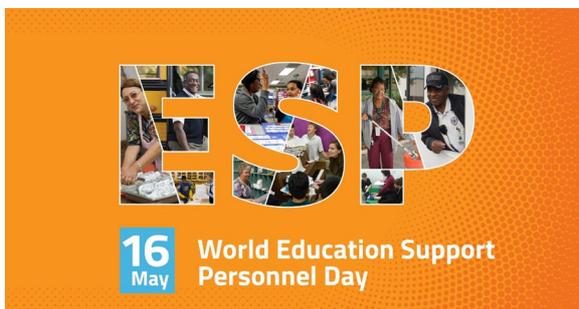
Of the 58 representatives from EI member organisations for whom we have gender-data, 20 participants identified as men, 38 as women.

A list of attending registered participants is in an annex to this report.

Conference sessions

World Education Support Personnel Day Celebration

FNE hosted a welcome reception for conference participants to celebrate World Education Support Personnel Day on 16 May.



Participants were welcomed by **Joao Dias da Silva, FNE**, and **Marjolaine Perrault, CSQ**, on behalf of the Education International Executive Board. Rebeca Logan, Education International, acted as moderator and interpreter.

Participants had the opportunity to meet each other, network and enjoy some traditional Portuguese Fado music, performed by local teachers.

Conference Day 1 | ESP Rights and Status: Where Are We Now?

The first day of the conference aimed to take stock of the current situation for ESP. It examined ESP's working conditions in the context of pandemic-recovery, funding shortfalls, and the climate crisis, as well as

the growing recognition of ESP's role for inclusive and quality education.

Plenary 1: Funding education – Defending ESP status and rights in the context of education budget cuts and privatisation

The session was moderated by **Antonia Wulff, Education International**.

Opening remarks: Joao Dias da Silva, FNE



FNE General Secretary **Joao Dias da Silva**, opened the conference by acknowledging the indispensable role of unions for enhancing ESP's working conditions. Referring to a study conducted by FNE, he argued that almost all ESP feel undervalued, which is why union efforts to improve their status and the conversations at this conference are so important.

Video: Susan Hopgood

Conference participants watched a video filmed by **EI president Susan Hopgood** to mark the occasion of World ESP Day. [You can view the video here.](#)

Keynote speaker: Maria Ron Balsera, Action Aid International

Maria Ron Balsera [emphasized](#) the vulnerability of Education Support Personnel (ESP), who face job precarity and lower salaries. She discussed the 4S financing approach, which focuses on size, share, scrutiny, and sensitivity of funding. She informed the conference that only a few countries are meeting the minimum spending thresholds as a percentage of GDP (4%) and share of the budget (15%), indicating a need to examine where the money was allocated.

The issue of tax evasion was highlighted, underscoring how it undermines public funding for education. Multinational corporations annually divert approximately \$4.83 billion to tax havens.

Ron Balsera pointed out a massive debt crisis in low- and middle-income countries, and calls for austerity by international financial institutions, which constrain public sector wage bills and have a negative impact on human rights. It is estimated that more than 85% of the world will live under austerity measures by the end of 2023, despite a consensus among economists against this approach. Similarly, privatisation in and of education continues despite the negative impact on segregation and inequality.

Ron Balsera introduced the 4Rs of tax justice—revenue, redistribution, repricing, and representation—as a means to secure financing for the future. She closed by highlighting the importance of budget allocation in either solidifying or exacerbating existing educational inequalities (in both high-income and low-income countries) and encouraged efforts to change budgetary policies to promote equity in education.

Panel 1: What is the education financing landscape in your national context and how are your members impacted?



In response to the keynote address, representatives of four different member organisations shared their perspective on the financing landscape in their countries.

Gueda Cristina de Olivera Andrade, CNTE, Brazil

In Brazil, Bolsonaro's divestment from education and the subsequent privatisation of the sector has impacted both ESP and teachers. Therefore, teachers and ESP are working together to collectively strengthen their rights. Funding cuts have had a significant impact on ESP training. With Lula's government, CNTE has more hope for securing quality training for ESP and raising the status of the profession.

Valerie Fontaine, CSQ, Quebec

In Canada, public services have been weakened by austerity measures and privatisation has increased. ESP have been greatly impacted: precarity has increased, and there are severe shortages in certain ESP roles. Fontaine argued that it is necessary to show how student needs are not fully met when ESP roles are

outsourced. As unions, we must fight for adequate funding across all levels of education.

Isabell Matebula, SADTU, South Africa

In South Africa, whilst the country does currently allocate 6% of GDP to education, the sector is still suffering from years of underfunding and a lack of quality infrastructure. Lack of investment in ESP means that they often have precarious (1 year) contracts, insufficient training opportunities (including training on using digital technologies) and are the first staff members to be laid off when school budgets are cut.

Joao Ramalho, FNE, Portugal

In Portugal, insufficient funding for education has meant that the quality of public schools has deteriorated and parents are choosing private schools. More funding is needed to better train ESP for inclusive education (currently the union is filling the gap and training ESP instead of the government).

Panel 2: How do funding cuts impact ESP work and lives?



The panel about experiences at the national level was followed by one about the impact of funding constraints on individual ESP and their work – and the quality of education for students.

Debra Ward Mitchell, NEA, United States of America

Ward Mitchell, a para-professional working with teen mothers reported that ESP in the US like herself were leaving the profession in droves because the income was not high enough.

Carlos Varandas, FNE, Portugal

Varandas explained that in Portugal ESP's working conditions had deteriorated as their employment relationships changed (ESP now work under the local government rather than the ministry of education). The cost of living crisis and ESP's low wages are hitting ESP hard.

Break-out sessions | Sectoral roundtables

Participants were then invited to join break-out sessions focused on the rights and status of ESP at the different levels of education: early childhood education; primary and secondary education; and higher education.

ESP in primary and secondary education

Participants discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ESP in primary and secondary education. Many participants noted that – though ESP had gone above and beyond, risking their health on the frontlines to support student learning and wellbeing during the pandemic – it had not meant that they finally got the recognition they deserved. ESP are still having to fight for recognition and decent working conditions.

Key long-term priorities for unions representing ESP in this sector included: ensuring that there is a fully and centrally funded teacher aide in every classroom; guaranteeing high quality professional development opportunities for all ESP; ESP respected by school leadership; good benefit for ESP; ensuring quality working conditions in the context of climate crisis; an end to job precarity for ESP.

ESP in Early Childhood Education

Participants discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ECE sector. Participants noted that many ECE educators had left the profession, causing a severe shortage of labour in ECE; despite gaining public sentiment, the working conditions of ECE educators had not improved; resources allocated to ECE recovery were timebound. However, they also noted some new positive new funding mechanisms emerging due to the pandemic, such as an increase in teleworking provisions and the hiring of new IT staff.

Regarding non-state actors in ECE, FLC-CGIL noted differences in the systems between the north and the south of Italy, as well as the difficulty of organizing ESP in Catholic ECE institutions. CSQ reported regulated and subsidized ECE services, with higher quality in public institutions.

Key priorities identified for the sector included: being valued and respected (ECE is education not childcare), decent salaries, receiving relevant training, funding to keep staff working, working conditions, recruitment and retention of ESP in the sector and in the union.

ESP in Higher Education

Participants noted that there is a “double invisibility” challenge for ESP in Higher Education when unions mostly represent teachers in basic education. Whilst some HE staff could work remotely during the COVID-

19 pandemic, many ESP had to work in person, risking their health.

Key union priorities included: ESP shortages; organizing ESP and ensuring they are able to participate in the union; salaries; and privatization of certain ESP roles (such as food services); and workload.

Successful strategies to improve ESP working conditions included: cross-sectoral organizing; showing that ESP are valued within the union through initiatives like “ESP of the year” or “support staff week”; ensuring ESP representation within the union; and alliance building.

Break-out sessions | ESP for inclusion and sustainability

The next break-out sessions focused on ESP's role in fostering inclusive and sustainable classrooms. Participants chose to attend one of the following three sessions.

ESP's role in fostering inclusive classrooms

This session was led by FNE, Portugal.

José Cardoso, FNE, Portugal observed that virtually all children, even those with difficulties, can benefit from inclusive classes. Staff training is crucial to adapt to the differences between pupils.



Alexandra Bojanic, SNUipp-FSU, France,

also felt that training was fundamental. Inclusion goes far beyond simply grouping pupils together in the same class. Training must take place during working hours, and all staff must benefit from it, so as to facilitate teamwork. This is made difficult by the fact that not all education staff have the same employer or the same status.

Rita Nogueira, FNE, Portugal,

a psychologist, insisted on the need for in-depth adaptation of school methods. Educational staff need to be able to understand students better, so that they can adapt their attitude and expectations to each individual's character and aptitudes. A shy pupil, for example, should not be penalized with a poor oral mark. Education staff need to adopt a positive approach and value students.

All this requires total commitment from education staff. They live in an environment of constant stress and change. They need to be able to think about themselves first, and then help others. Preserving the psychological well-being of educational staff is a priority.

The moderator noted that the need for inclusion at school is part of a wider context. At a societal level, families are increasingly diverse. Including the children of migrants, for example, requires a culturally sensitive approach. Inclusion at school is part of the construction of citizenship, which calls for institutional commitment and a holistic approach.

Participants discussed the challenges related to legal frameworks and their implementation: while one participant appreciated their country's particularly ambitious law in favor of inclusion, they observed, however, that laws are not enough, and that the means to implement them are just as important. Similarly, another participant pointed out that in his country, the means are insufficient to apply the positive provisions of the law.

Colleagues also observed that schools evolve in an environment. It is possible to make schools more fraternal, more democratic. The notion of democracy requires giving more to those who need it, to achieve a balance. You can't treat everyone the same. Otherwise, we risk deepening inequality within the school.

The need for specific skills to include students does not only concern teachers, but all staff working inside and outside the classroom.

We cannot forget those students who cannot be included, and for whom special skills are needed.

ESP and the just transition

Jennifer Ulrick, Education International, [provided an overview](#) of EI's [Teach for the Planet](#) campaign and [EI's research on the just transition in the education sector](#). She highlighted ESP's important role in ensuring quality climate change education and climate-proof education institutions, as well as in engaging in climate activism. She



emphasized that a just transition in the education sector requires the defence of decent working conditions for ESP in the context of worsening climate impacts.

Arta Dedaj-Salad, NEU, UK, [underscored](#) the contributions of ESP for greening schools despite the challenges they face, and explained how the NEU supported members to become climate activists. This includes a climate change network, green representatives, health and safety representatives, environmental officers as well as opportunities to engage in national and international climate advocacy.

Isabell Tebula, SADTU, UK [reported](#) that the South African curricula includes climate change education and the union encourages its members to volunteer as ambassadors for climate justice. The government provides ESP with training to up-skill them in the context of the digital transition.

Jane Porter, NZEI, New Zealand [shared](#) how for the NZEI, union action on the just transition is inextricable from ongoing efforts to decolonize the union. The union's work is guided by their Founding Treaty – a set of Maori principles. “Kaitiakitanga”, for example, refers to the connection between humankind and the natural world, which is a role of guardianship, thereby spurring climate activism. The union engages in efforts to future-proof employment agreements for ESP, takes part in wider just transition processes, holds a climate conference, engages in community

organizing and member training, and ensures a whole-of-union commitment to climate justice and decolonization.

The discussion revealed diversity in the extent to which unions prioritized climate issues within their unions as well as government policy on education and climate change. Despite the perception of being far from union “bread and butter” issues, participants pointed out that union action on the just transition is union work. It can be a tool for organizing youth (for which climate justice is a key concern) and is important when ESP working conditions risk deterioration in the face of climate crisis (due to e.g. unsafe workplaces and higher workloads).

[Click here](#) for useful online resources from NZEI on a just transition.

ESP's role in ensuring LGBTI+ rights and inclusion

IGLYO, The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, & Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organisation, led this session.

Joao Lopes, IGLYO, [shared the results](#) of their inclusive education survey, which pointed to high levels of harassment of LGBTQI youth in schools and under-reporting of these incidents. [They highlighted](#) the crucial need for a comprehensive, whole-school inclusive



approach to ensure safe, supportive schools for LGBTQI learners.

Participants discussed policies and actions that can be taken by staff to foster inclusive schools.

These can include:

1. Developing and enforcing non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, which explicitly mention sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics, and takes a proactive approach versus a reactive approach
2. Monitoring school climate and conducting research on the experiences of LGBTQI learners
3. Ensuring that all school staff are trained and equipped with strategies to address school-bullying, to use inclusive language, and to understand LGBTQI students experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination
4. Ensuring students receive positive representations of LGBTI people in school curricula and teaching materials
5. Collaborating with civil society organisations who can facilitate and support student activities, training, and advocacy efforts

Participants also reflected on the challenges of the current sociopolitical context in many countries, with an organised right-wing

backlash threatening ESP, teacher, and student wellbeing. With unions in different countries dealing with vastly different policy contexts, it was suggested that unions could build alliances with others in similar systems. The role of the union activities at the national level was also stressed as important in contexts where there are state or regional variations within a country.

Deliberating the conference statement

The Aveiro statement aims to provide a summary of key concepts discussed at the conference and an advocacy tool for unions as they call for increased recognition of and investment in ESP. It was drafted in the months leading up to the Conference by the EI Secretariat with the support of a reference group, which had been open to all EI member organisations.

Participants discussed the draft statement in language groups, highlighting priority issues that resonated with their national contexts and suggesting amendments to the text. The input was collected and collated and led to a revised final version of the statement.



Plenary 2: Closing session

The session was moderated by EI Executive Board member, **Manuela Mendonça, FENPROF**.

Video message: participants watched a video message from **Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO** to mark World ESP day. He thanked ESP for their contribution during the pandemic. [You can view the message here.](#)

Panel



In this final session of the day, 4 panelists who were attending the ESP conference for the first time reflected on the day's proceedings and shared their key takeaways from the conference so far.

Jaqueline Cristina da Silva Neves, CNTE, Brazil

Da Neves showed appreciation for the opportunity to share experiences with others as the struggles are similar across many countries. She pointed out that all ESP in Brazil self-identify as “educators” as they all contribute to quality education.

Catharina Niwhede, STU, Sweden

Niwhede said that for her the conference was an excellent opportunity to get to know union activists from other parts of the world. She noted that we can work together to respond to budget cuts, which impact ESP and ultimately students.

Mamadou Kone Halimatou, SYNAFEN, Niger

Halimatou said that she has found it touching to be at this conference. She shared her story – she has been an ESP for many years, focusing on providing inclusive education for students with disabilities. In Niger ESP are working in very difficult circumstances with little support. They need more training as well as better salaries and more staff to be able to do their jobs well.

Francia Briceno, SEC, Costa Rica

Briceno appreciated the discussions at the conference about financing and privatisation. In Costa Rica, they are fighting against privatisation but also to ensure that education budgets are used wisely. Capacity building for ESP, for example, is crucial for inclusive education. She noted that most ESP are women and therefore fighting for dignity for ESP is also about gender equality.

Conference Day 2: What is our vision and how do we get there?

In the second and final day of the conference, participants identified a common vision for improving the rights and status of ESP and discussed concrete strategies to make the vision a reality.

Women's Caucus

Participants identifying as women were welcomed to come together in a safe space to discuss priority issues for women unionists defending the rights and status of ESP, noting that women make up the majority of the workers in many ESP roles. Key issues discussed included:

- Violence and harassment against women (and its exacerbation during COVID), as well as action by unions to defend the rights of their women members and support their wellbeing;
- The impact of the pandemic on women's trade union participation (an increase seen due to new opportunities for online engagement);
- Women's engagement within unions - fostering women's leadership and preventing women from bearing the administrative burden within union work;

- Workload and the challenge of ESP women's multiple work and caring responsibilities.
- Precarious employment conditions of women ESP.

It was noted that this was an important space for discussion and in future conferences increased participation in a women's caucus could be enabled by including it within the main programme.

Plenary 3: ESP Rights and Status: Sharing successful strategies to make our vision a reality

This plenary aimed to provide ideas and inspiration for unions on how to meet the challenges discussed in the first day of the conference.

The session was moderated by **Antonia Wulff, Education International**.

Video message: Participants watched a video from **Stefania Giannini, UNESCO**, who celebrated ESP's contribution to quality education and called on the global community to invest in decent working conditions for all members of the education workforce. [You can watch the video here.](#)



Panel

The panel discussed effective union strategies to enhance working conditions.

Anaclara Liberatori, Asociación de Trabajadores de Enseñanza Secundaria, ATES, Uruguay

ATES successfully works in collaboration with other unions across all levels of education as well as teacher representatives. Together, they have a platform to push back against privatization in education, which includes outsourcing and firing of ESP.

Ally Kamplen, NZEI, national executive, NZ

Having started with teacher aides, the NZEI has now won gender pay equity claims for ESP across a range of roles. The claims resulted in 20-70% pay corrections for ESP. The 70% pay corrections were received by support staff who were experts in the Maori language, meaning that they were finally remunerated in accordance with their skills and qualifications. This was life changing, as these workers were previously severely underpaid and undervalued. The pay corrections meant that they could finally stop working additional jobs.

The gender pay equity claim wins were a result of a long union campaign and rigorous process. First, they interviewed ESP and their managers all over the country to develop accurate job descriptions. Then they compared the work with similar male

dominated jobs. In the case of teacher aides, their work was compared with correction officers and this showed the inequity of pay between these similar jobs. The success of the campaign was thanks to ESP telling their stories and not being afraid to build power together.

[Click here](#) for useful online resources from NZEI on pay equity.

Kaba Sory, Fédération des Organisations de Syndicats du secteur Education/Formation de la FESACI

Kaba Sory shared two recent pieces of positive news about ESP in Côte d'Ivoire.

In Côte d'Ivoire, certain staff are responsible for school security, cleaning the school, and accompanying pupils to the toilet or across the road. This category of ESP has mobilized and formed a union. As a result, they were able to negotiate a pay rise with the government. They now earn the minimum wage, equivalent to 120€.

In pre-school and elementary school, some ESP are tasked with helping the teacher manage the classroom. The problem is that these staff work without any training. Following a dialogue with the government, the union was able to obtain training for these staff.



Go Public: Fund Education



Rebeca Logan, Education International, [presented](#) EI's campaign, [Go Public: Fund Education](#). The campaign aims to mobilise more funding for public education. It is driven by education unions organizing as the voice of education workers.

Go Public: Fund Education responds to the current context of austerity, budget cuts, privatization and deteriorating working conditions.

The campaign contends that there is sufficient funding for sustainable investment in education and educators to achieve quality education for all. However, too much public funding is used instead on other areas such as debt servicing, tax abuse, fossil fuel subsidies and military expenditure. The campaign calls for governments to allocate funds to the education sector and thereby invest in a just future.

The campaign builds a strong narrative:

- We education support personnel are the heart, the builders, the creators of school, of education communities. We deserve the respect, authority, the dignity and pay our professions merit. We have

the knowledge, the experience, and authority to guide our students, to create a more just and inclusive future.

- We are part of a movement. We believe in the public, we believe education is a human right and a public good. We resist privatization, corporate greed, and the profiteers who want to pillage our common resources and use our children to make money for their private interests.
- We believe that fully funding public education systems, and the education personnel, is the key to a sustainable future for all. Education Support Personnel are an essential part of the education community. It takes the entire education workforce to educate the whole student.

Logan highlighted how EI member organizations around the world were taking part in the campaign and encouraged conference participants to engage.

For more information about the campaign, [visit the campaign website here](#).

David Edwards, Education International reported that he has been launching the campaign in every region of the world. He believes that this campaign is urgent, necessary and with huge potential, because unions have real power to change the education funding landscape. Through the

campaign, he said, we can ensure that the global community understands the narrative of our movement. EI is ready to support every union's campaign actions by providing research, materials and speakers. We will grow union power through the campaign.

Break-out sessions | Tools to win! Campaigning for better terms and conditions

Participants were then invited to join workshops where they discussed strategies to undertake and win concrete campaigns on financing, ESP wellbeing and multiple other specific issues related to ESP working conditions.

Go Public: Fund Education – Campaigning 101

[Participants discussed](#) what key objectives for the *Go Public: Fund Education* campaign were in their countries. These included: students who love learning and prepared and supported educators who love their jobs; investment in safe education infrastructure; equitable education financing; adequate staffing levels; stopping privatisation.

They also discussed what strategies could be used to affect the change we want. This included regular campaign actions (e.g. Wearing black every Thursday in South Africa), humanizing the impact of cuts, and working with the local community.

ESP's health & well-being: the I-BEST survey

This session focused on the results of the I-Best survey (a survey investigating the health and wellbeing of educators) carried out by the **Education and Solidarity Network**. The first I-Best survey was conducted in 2015, with 5 countries taking part. The second edition includes ESP and was conducted in Argentina, Quebec, Cameroon, Spain, France, Morocco, Belgium, Switzerland and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

EI member organizations on the panel discussed their participation in the survey, how to activate members to participate in research, and the importance of using research in advocacy efforts when meeting with stakeholders.

Marie-Josée Dallaire, CSQ, Quebec: 8000 members responded to the survey, giving a good overview of members' perspectives. The data has been used for the union's media campaigns and to show the government what workers' experiences are – they feel overburdened.

Cuqui Vera Belmonte, FECCOO, Spain: 3000 members responded to the survey. The high response rate was thanks to the union's dissemination efforts including flyers, press conferences and videos on social media. The union considers wellbeing and mental health to be a priority area for union action and the survey a good way to gather data on the issue.



Boris Faure, UNSA, France: Faure explained that UNSA have a specific barometer on ESP. They see the research as a way to draw attention to the issue, both with the ministry and the general public.

Participants agreed that union action on mental health and wellbeing of ESP is crucial, due to multiple challenges such as lack of recognition, unmanageable workloads, violence and harassment, and stress. They also noted the importance of making sure that being involved in union activism does not negatively impact ESP wellbeing and mental health.

Building Union Power through Running an Issue Campaign

This session was led by Carl Williams and Lauren Samet, AFT.

AFT [shared some of the issue campaigns](#) that their union had carried out:

- **Living wage campaign**
- **Respect campaign**
- **Safeguarding our workplaces**

You can access the [campaign toolkits here](#).

Participants discussed other issue campaigns that could be carried out, based on the belief that ESP deserve: a living wage, fulltime work and benefits, continuous professional development, adequate staffing levels, safe working conditions and not to be outsourced.

For example:

- **Work hours campaign:** many ESP are not paid for extra hours worked (for example maintenance staff who must work later if other people are in the building). To deal with this, working to rule (only working the exact number of contracted hours) is a possible tool, but for many ESP is seen as a last resort as they do not want students to suffer. A successful campaign might involve sharing the stories of extra hours worked and their importance for student safety and wellbeing, and garnering the support of parents.
- **Anti-outsourcing campaign:** Such a campaign could be won by showing parents the dangers of outsourcing ESP roles; contract staff on short-term contracts are not part of the school community and do not know the students in the way that full time staff do.
- **ESP shortage campaign:** Such a campaign would call for minimum staffing levels to be met and publicise how ESP, teacher and student wellbeing are impacted when this is not the case. It could also call for improving the attractiveness of an ESP career by improving the salaries, benefits and working conditions.



Suggested tools to support issue campaigns included:

- Surveys, data
- Template contract language
- Researchers and experts
- Job descriptions
- A thematic database of ESP stories including videos to be used on social media.

Break-out sessions | Building union power

Defending ESP rights and status requires strong unions. The next session therefore focused on why and how to build union power.

Strengthening our capacity for union renewal



The conference split into two groups to discuss union renewal. The interactive workshops focused on considering two questions: 1. What is union renewal? and 2. What are the obstacles to union renewal and how do we overcome them?

This workshop formed part of the “Building Union Power” thematic strand of the conference. Indeed, to improve the status of their members - in terms of training, working conditions, pay and respect - and to meet the challenges facing education systems, ESP unions need to strengthen and renew themselves.

In terms of format, the session was designed to be highly interactive. Participants were divided into language groups, one English-speaking, the other multi-lingual. Deliberately, there was no background information on the work of EI and its affiliates on the issue of union renewal provided to delegates before the session. The aim was to enable spontaneous comments and proposals from participants.

What are the obstacles to union renewal, and how can they be overcome? Participants brainstormed individually, then compared their analyses and proposals.

The outcomes of these workshops show that there is a common understanding of the reasons why union renewal is necessary, and agreement on the main priorities for work.

Obstacles to this strengthening are both internal (traditions) and external (privatization, for example). Here are just a few of the avenues mentioned by participants for overcoming obstacles and engaging unions in processes of union renewal:

- be closer to the grassroots, listen more to members and talk less;
- facilitate the expression of diverse opinions and involve members in decision-making (internal democracy);
- be more inclusive (particularly with women and young people);
- reexamine certain practices (such as industrial action);
- provide more training for activists;
- create alliances;
- develop unionization and organization strategies based on the above principles.

Break-out sessions: taking action on the issues we care about

In the final round of break-out sessions, participants explored ESP's role for supporting students with special educational needs, the role of research to support union action, and steps that can be taken to make our unions more powerful, relevant, and equitable.

Teaming up to support students with special educational needs

This session was led by CSQ.

CSQ [provided a detailed overview](#) on the provision of special educational services in Quebec in the public and private sectors, as well as in higher education. A new challenge outlined in detail relates to the way funding is distributed based on the number of students with special educational needs, who need a specific diagnosis. The financing model is based on a basic allocation to school organizations, with additional allocations based on the number of students with special needs. As a result, funding methods influence the diversity and accessibility of complementary professional and support services offered to students.

Nevertheless, a number of studies show that the needs and diagnoses of students with special needs are on the rise in Quebec.

These factors also influence the ability of ESP and teachers to effectively meet the needs of all students.

In the private sector, the FPEP-CSQ, explained how the particular financing model raises similar challenges for the private sector. Some schools lack the resources and teachers and ESP lack the training to properly meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

In higher education, students with special educational needs often struggle with the transition from secondary to higher education.



To this aim, the CSQ argues that the system can be improved by:

- a. Defining together the roles and responsibilities of each ESP;
- b. Strengthening collaboration between teachers and ESP to put the conditions in place for students to succeed;
- c. Improving access to professional development resources for ESP and materials for students;
- d. Developing models of intervention specific to the reality of the student
- e. Improving and conducting research;
- f. Valuing ESP through [campaigns](#) to raise the status of the profession.

In the discussion, some participants highlighted the challenge of ensuring inclusive education across all levels of education. One participant pointed out that in higher education in their country, the government cannot provide much guidance on administering special educational services, as the universities are autonomous. Another explained that in their country teachers receive a specific budget depending on the special educational needs of their students, yet this financing does not extend to secondary education nor higher education, which then limits the abilities of students to complete their full education cycle. It was argued that clearer monitoring and regulation of public spending towards special education services is necessary.

Other participants pointed to the availability of quality training, resources and enabling working conditions (including decent salaries, manageable class sizes and supportive families) for educators as a key challenge to provide quality education for students with special needs.

Leveraging What We Know About ESPs to Help Organize, Engage, and Support ESP Members

This session was led by Janie White and Amber Parker, NEA.

The [NEA shared some of the findings](#) of their recent survey of ESP members. They demonstrated how survey data could be used strategically to organize, engage and support ESP members. For example, data on the demographics of the survey respondents (such as on race, gender, education level) were compared with national level ESP data to show where the union could increase membership. Data on ESP's use of public assistance initiatives and those in debt provided a strong empirical case for improving ESP salaries. Data when compared longitudinally across time had the potential to show policy trends.

Participants discussed how they could use research and surveys in their national setting, but also talked about the importance of reading "between the lines" when faced with data. For example, some respondents may be ashamed of using public assistance initiatives, leading to



underreporting when asked about this in a survey; or some identity groups may be less likely to respond to the survey (due to various factors, for example workload or care responsibilities), leading to underrepresentation in the results.

Union renewal: next steps

Following the first workshop on union renewal, this workshop took a deeper dive into the various aspects of union renewal, using the EI union renewal toolkit.

The [EI union renewal toolkit can be downloaded here.](#)

Plenary 4

The conference came together for the final session moderated by **Antonia Wulff, Education International**. The conference participants unanimously agreed to adopt the Aveiro Statement – *Go Public: Fund ESP*.

Closing Remarks: Joaquim Santos, FNE

Santos highlighted the significance of the establishment of World Education Support Personnel Day in 2018 and said that it had been a pleasure to celebrate it this year in Aveiro.

He underscored that this conference aimed to value and celebrate education support staff, promoting understanding and diversity. He emphasized the need for self-recognition and societal acknowledgment

for education support personnel's vital role in education. He discussed challenges such as diversity, digital transition, and gender equality. He also stressed the importance of investment, job stability, and decent conditions for all education support personnel.

Santos expressed confidence in the Aveiro Declaration's impact and called for global recognition and visibility of education support personnel. Finally, he thanked the participants and wished them well, hoping for future collaborations in the fight for quality education and dignified status for education support personnel worldwide.

Closing remarks: David Edwards



EI General Secretary David Edwards

expressed his happiness at having been together in person for this conference after a long separation due to the pandemic, and reflected on the productive discussions held during the conference.

He noted the specific challenges faced by ESP, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, budget cuts, privatization, inequalities, and the climate crisis. He emphasized that by working together in solidarity as a global union movement, we

have the power to respond to these challenges.

Funding was highlighted as a crucial prerequisite for defending the vision outlined in the *Education International Declaration on the Rights and Status of ESP*. Edwards stressed that adequate public funding was necessary to ensure decent work for ESP, improve working conditions, offer professional development opportunities, foster inclusive learning environments, and support the transition to greener education institutions.

He pointed to Education International's *Go Public! Fund Education Campaign* as an initiative that had been launched to pressure governments for full funding of public education and fair compensation for education workers. He expressed gratitude to the conference participants, acknowledging their contributions and the obstacles some had faced in attending. He also thanked partner organizations, the conference hosts, staff, interpreters, technicians, and hotel staff for their support.

Edwards concluded by emphasizing the need for continued collaboration, coordination, and solidarity to defend ESP rights and status. He reiterated Education International's commitment to maintaining the ESP network and ensuring the inclusion of ESP issues in future programs and Congresses.

Conference outcome

[The Aveiro Statement](#), "Go Public: Fund Education Support Personnel" is a summary of the conference discussions and a tool for advocacy at the national level. The statement includes a list of demands for governments globally to act upon to improve the working conditions of ESP. Please do share it widely and use it to advance the rights and status of ESP in your country or jurisdiction.

Final remarks

Education International would like to thank all the participants of the 2nd World ESP conference for their active engagement in the conference and their commitment to share, learn and strategise together. We look forward to the 3rd World ESP conference.

Please see Annex 3 for an analysis of the responses to the conference evaluation form, which was sent to all participants.

If you would like to get in touch with Education International concerning the 2023 ESP conference, please email espconference@ei-ie.org.

If you would like to get in touch with Education International concerning EI's ongoing work in relation to ESP, please email jennifer.ulrick@ei-ie.org.



Annex 1

List of conference participants¹

Full Name	Company Name	Title	Work City	Work Country
Harrington, Trish	Australian Education Union	School Business Manager, Australia	Abbotsford	Australia
Peace, Meredith	Australian Education Union	Deputy Federal President	Southbank	Australia
Borges, Juçara de Fátima	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação	Dirigente	Brasilia	Brazil
Bueno do Prado, José Carlos - Zezinho	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação	Secretário de Funcionários	Brasilia	Brazil
da Silva Neves, Jaqueline Cristina	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação			Brazil
De Moraes, José Valdivino	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação	Secretário Executivo	Brasilia	Brazil
de Oliveira Andrade, Guelda Cristina	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação	Secretária de Assuntos Educacionais	Brasilia	Brazil
Lima, João Marcos	Confederação Nacional dos	Dirigente	Brasilia	Brazil

Trabalhadores em
Educação

Allaire, Luc	Centrale des syndicats du Québec	Relations internationales	Montreal	Canada
Dallaire, Marie- Josée	Centrale des syndicats du Québec	Vice-présidente de la Fédération du personnel de l'enseignement privé	Montreal	Canada
Fontaine, Valérie	Centrale des syndicats du Québec	présidente FPSES	Saint- Hyacinthe	Canada
Massé, Sophie	Centrale des syndicats du Québec	Vice-présidente de la Fédération des professionnelles et professionnels de l'éducation du Québec	Montreal	Canada
Perreault, Marjolaine	Centrale des syndicats du Québec	Directrice générale	Montreal	Canada
Briceño, Francia	Sindicato de trabajadoras y trabajadores de la educación costarricense	Secretaría de la Mujer	San pedro	Costa Rica
Chacon, Mora	Sindicato de trabajadores de la educación	Jefa departamento jurídico	San José	Costa Rica
KABA, SORY	organisation des Syndicats du Section Education/formation de la FESACI		Abidjan	Cote d'Ivoire
Bojanic, Alexandra	Syndicat national unitaire des instituteurs, professeurs des écoles et PEGC	Secteur droits et libertés,et international	Paris	France



Faure, Boris	Syndicat Administration et intendance	Secrétaire national à l'international	Paris	France
Richard, Morgane	Réseau Education et Solidarité / Education and Solidarity Network	Project Manager	Paris	France
Colindres Rodriguez, Selvin Noel	Colegio de Pedagogos de Honduras	Fiscal	Tegucigalpa	Honduras
Flores Alvarez, Celso	Colegio de Pedagogos de Honduras	Presidente	Tegucigalpa	Honduras
Hamilton, Miriam	Irish Federation of University Teachers	Deputy General Secretary	Dublin	Ireland
Chiodi, Stefania	Federazione Lavoratori della Conoscenza	Head of International Affairs	Rome	Italy
Franchi, Claudio	Federazione Lavoratori della Conoscenza CGIL	Head, International Affairs	Rome	Italy
Pistorino, GraziaMaria	Federazione Lavoratori della Conoscenza CGIL	national secretary	Rome	Italy
Ntsibolane, Letsatsi	Lesotho Association of Teachers	Secretary General	Maseru	Lesotho
Awang, Aminuddin	National Union of the Teaching Profession Malaysia	President of NUTP	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia
Singon, Fouzi	National Union of the Teaching Profession Malaysia	General Secretary	Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia

Kemplen, Ally	NZEI Te Riu Roa	National Executive	Wellington	New Zealand
Porter, Jane	New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa	Strategic Lead – Schools	Wellington	New Zealand
Halimatou, Mamadou Kone	SYNDICAT NATIONAL DES AGENTS DE LA FORMATION ET DE L'EDUCATION DU NIGER	SECRETAIRE CHARGE DE QUESTIONS GENRE ET PERSONNEL DE SOUTIEN	NIAMEY	Niger
Barros Rebelo, Maria do Rosário	Confederação Sindical da Educação dos Países de Língua Portuguesa	Coordenadora do Gabinete de Estudos e Projetos	Amarante	Portugal
Cardoso, José	Confederação Sindical da Educação dos Países de Língua Portuguesa	Secretário-Geral	Amarante	Portugal
Dias da Silva, João	Federação Nacional da Educação	Secretary General	Porto	Portugal
Ferreira, Cristina	Federação Nacional da Educação	President of STAAE Sul e RA (ESP Union of the south of Portugal, Madeira and Azores)	Lisbon	Portugal
Mendonça, Manuela	Federação Nacional dos Professores	Président of the National Board	Lisboa	Portugal
Ramalho, João	Federação Nacional da Educação	President of STAAE-ZC (ESP Union of the center of Portugal)	Coimbra	Portugal
SANTOS, JOAQUIM	Federação Nacional da Educação	Executive Commission	Porto	Portugal
Soares, Tiago	Federação Nacional da Educação	Communication Department	Porto	Portugal



Lopes, Joao	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth & Student Org	IGLYO Executive Board		Portugal
Matebula, Isabell	South African Democratic Teachers Union	Senior Secretary: ECD Directorate	Pretoria	South Africa
García Mancera, José Luis	Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)	Secretario del Personal Educativo (PAE) FECCOO España	Madrid	Spain
Muñoz, Alfonso	Enseñanza	Secretario Pas	Leganés	Spain
Vera Belmonte, Cuqui	Federacion de Enseñanza de CCOO	responsable politica internacional	madrid	Spain
López Sanchis, Alejandro	Confederación de Sindicatos de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de la Enseñanza - Intersindical			Spain
Eriksson, Ina	Swedish Teachers' Union	International Secretary	Stockholm	Sweden
Niwheide, Catharina	Swedish Teachers' Union	Education and Career Advicor	Limhamn	Sweden
Holbourne, Zita	Public Services International	PCS BEIS Group Vice President & Personal Case Officer	London	UK
Ron Balsera, Maria	Action Aid	Tax-Ed Alliance coordinator	London	UK
Dedaj-Salad, Arta	National Education Union	Policy Adviser	London	United Kingdom



Liberatori, Anaclara	Asociación de Trabajadores de Enseñanza Secundaria	Secretaria internacional	Montevideo	Uruguay
Bilal-Threats, Daaiyah	National Education Association	Senior Director, Education Policy and International Relations	Washington	USA
Li, Helen	National Education Association	Sr. Analyst	Washington	USA
Parker, Amber	National Education Association	Director, Education Support Professional Quality	Arlington	USA
Samet, Lauren	American Federation of Teachers	Director, AFT PSRP	Washington	USA
Vaandering, Hanna	National Education Association	Executive Committee Member	Hillsboro	USA
Ward-Mitchell, Debra	National Education Association	Paraprofessional	Harvey	USA
White, Janie	Washington Education Association	WA state Vice President	Federal Way	USA
Williams, Carl	American Federation of Teachers	Senior Custodian	Los Angeles	USA
Yukna, Lois	National Education Association	National Council for Education Support Professionals	North Brunswick	USA

Annex 2

Conference programme**EI'S 2nd Education Support Personnel Conference 16-18 May**

ESP DAY 16 May
Arrivals
ESP Day Reception and cultural event hosted by FNE 19.00 -20.00

DAY 1 Conference 17 May:		
ESP Rights and Status: Where are we now?		
Plenary 9.30-11.00 FundED – Defending ESP status and rights in the context of education budget cuts and privatisation (EN/FR/ES/PT)		
BREAK 11:00-11:30		
Parallel Sessions: ESP Across sectors 11:30-12:30		
ESP in primary and secondary education (EN/FR/ES/PT) <i>San Antonio</i>	ESP in Early Childhood Education (EN) <i>San Pedro I</i>	ESP in Higher Education (EN) <i>San Pedro III</i>
LUNCH 12.30-14.00		
ESP for inclusion and sustainability: Parallel Sessions 14.00-15.00		
ESP's role in fostering inclusive classrooms (EN/FR/ES/PT)	ESP and the just transition (EN) <i>San Pedro I</i>	ESP's role in ensuring LGBTI rights and inclusion (EN) <i>San Pedro III</i>



BREAK 15.00-15.30		
ESP Conference Statement 15.30-16.30		
Deliberating the conference statement (ES/PT)	Deliberating the conference statement (EN) <i>San Pedro I</i>	Deliberating the conference statement (FR) <i>San Pedro III</i>
Closing remarks/day wrap up 16.30-17.00 (EN/FR/ES/PT)		

Day 2 Conference 18 May		
Where do we want to get to and what will it take?		
Women's Caucus- 08.30-09.15 (EN/FR/ES/PT)		
Plenary 9.30-10.30		
ESP Rights and Status: Sharing successful strategies to make our vision a reality (EN/FR/ES/PT)		
BREAK 10.30-11.00		
Tools to win!_Campaigning for better terms and conditions_		
Parallel Sessions 11.00-12.00		
ESP's health and well-being: the I-BEST survey (EN/FR/ES/PT)	Go Public: Fund Education - Campaigning 101: (EN)	Building Union Power through Running an Issue Campaign (EN)



	<i>San Pedro I</i>	<i>San Pedro III</i>
Building union power: Parallel sessions 12.10-13.00		
Strengthening our capacity for union renewal (EN/FR/ES/PT)	Strengthening our capacity for union renewal (EN) <i>San Pedro I</i>	Strengthening our capacity for union renewal (EN) <i>San Pedro III</i>
LUNCH 13.00-14.30		
Edvoices 14.00-14.20 (Trade Union activism at the International Level: Structuring ESP in the Educational and Cultural Networks of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs) (FR) <i>San Pedro I</i>		
Taking action on the issues we care about: Parallel sessions 14.30-15.30		
Teaming up to support students with special Educational needs. (FR/ES/PT/EN)	Leveraging What We Know About ESPs to Help Organize, Engage, and Support ESP Members (EN) <i>San Pedro I</i>	Union renewal: next steps (EN) <i>San Pedro III</i>
BREAK 15.30-16.00		
Closing plenary 16.00-17.00		
Adoption of conference statement (EN/FR/ES/PT)		
Closing remarks		



Annex 3

Evaluation of the conference

Following the conference, all conference participants were sent an evaluation form. 19 people filled out the evaluation form (28% response rate). All responses were anonymous. The form included 18 questions.

Logistics

1. 1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied were you with the event overall? [1= not satisfied at all, 10= very satisfied, the event met my expectations]. **Average: 9.7**
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the Conference Venue? [1= poor, 10= excellent]. **Average: 9.6**
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the interpretation? [1= poor, 10= excellent]. **Average: 9.6**
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the conference website? [1= poor, 10= excellent]. **Average: 9.6**
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the support available? [1= poor, 10= excellent]. **Average: 9.7**
6. Participants were asked whether they had any issues accessing the website or documents for the event. Nobody had.
7. Participants were given the opportunity to make any open comments about the event logistics. One respondent suggested giving further attention to the reception of participants including at the moment of arrival, and in relation to transportation. Another respondent felt that, given the smaller size of the conference, it would have been preferable to avoid splitting into break-out groups as there were only a few people in some workshops. All other comments were very positive. One respondent said: *"The organization of EI was excellent, both beforehand via email to clarify doubts and throughout the event. Amazing people in the organization. Congratulations"*



Content

8. Did the topics covered align with your professional interests and needs? [1 = the sessions didn't seem relevant to me, 10 = the events were relevant and useful].
Average: 9.6
9. Were the sessions engaging? [1 = the sessions were pretty dull, 10 = very engaging, the sessions held my interest]. **Average: 9.5**
10. Did the conference offer meaningful opportunities for networking? [1 = not at all, 10 = yes, I was pleased to connect with many people]. **Average: 9.2**
11. Did the conference have a good format and structure? [1= the format was inappropriate, 10 = the format had the ideal mix of plenary and break-out sessions].
Average: 9.2
12. Participants were given the opportunity to make any open comments about the event content. There were many positive remarks, including *"very informative"; "comprehensive and inclusive"* and *"very interesting and articulate"*. One respondent commented *"The conference gave us an opportunity to compare the situation of ESP in different parts of the world. This helps us to continue working to improve the working conditions of ESP and to be able to achieve recognition from the education community and the public."* Some respondents provided some suggestions on how the content could have been improved. One participant suggested that it could have been nice to identify the different categories of support staff represented, for example by using colours. Another noted that not all workshops were accessible to all due to a lack of interpretation. One participant felt that it could have been beneficial to create some sessions for ESP members and for staff that work on ESP issues for unions to meet separately as they can have slightly different perspectives and interests. Providing additional space at the beginning of the conference for delegates to share their stories was also proposed by one respondent.
13. Participants were asked what they learnt from the conference. All respondents answered this question. The key take away that was mentioned most often was that *ESP around the world face many common challenges*. Some respondents noted the importance of unity to address these challenges. A few respondents highlighted the issue of funding, noting that it was a key driver to improve ESP working conditions.



14. Participants were asked what aspect of the conference they found most valuable to help their union defend the rights and status of ESP. Answers included:

- Sharing strategies to realise our vision
- Discussing budget issues
- The sessions on privatisation and precarious work
- The focus on union wins
- The development and adoption of the Aveiro Statement
- The sessions on union renewal
- The opportunity to make connections with other unions.

15. Participants were asked what action (if any) they would take as a follow up to the conference. Many respondents relayed a commitment to disseminating and advocating for the realization of the Aveiro Declaration. Many also committed to reporting back on what they had learnt and sharing with others in their union, including staff, leadership and members, as well as the wider education community and adopting new strategies to defend the rights and status of ESP. Some committed to commemorating World ESP Day. Some committed to carrying out joint union work and continuing to share and collaborate with other unions to defend the rights and status of ESP. One respondent shared quick action taking following the conference: *"Our union has already proposed a joint mobilization in defense of safe and decent work, fighting precarity, raising wages, and securing rights to public education."*

16. Participants were asked how EI could further support their work to defend ESP rights and status. Suggestions included:

- Hold online meetings on ESP issues
- Publish more articles on ESP
- Provide capacity building
- Financial and technical support for unions to mark World ESP Day
- Conduct further research on ESP
- Facilitate dialogue with other sectors
- Sharing information



- Continue to advocate for the UNESCO and the UN to recognize ESP as education professionals, formally recognize World ESP day, and mark it each year.
- Enable continuous exchange of “virtuous practices”
- Provide information to support unions in making legal claims
- Encourage all union members to champion ESP.
- Carry out a global campaign to value ESP.

17. Participants were asked for suggestions for the next world ESP conference. Suggestions included:

- Award an ESP worker
- Increase the number of days of the conference
- Improve the support for assisted delegates
- Refrain from limiting the number of places per union
- Run more sessions in other languages / more rooms with interpretation
- Put more focus on union wins and practical gains made by unions, which unions can adapt to their own situation.
- Promote participation of [unions representing] teachers
- Take stock of the implementation of the decisions made at the 2nd World ESP conference and the realization of the Aveiro Statement.
- Give more focus to the work of specific ESP categories.

18. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to make further comments. One participant noted the importance of taking into account the diversity of situations ESP work in, and in particular recognizing the difficult situation of ESP working in emergency contexts. Many respondents congratulated and thanked the Secretariat for organizing the conference. Some sum-up remarks included:

“A very enjoyable informative conference, great chance to network, in a beautiful environment.”

“Valuable information provided and the networking was a great source of confirmation”



"I am very grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this conference, an incredible experience, I hope to participate again to share more knowledge and experiences with the colleagues who were there. The organization was very good and attentive. Thank you so much for the opportunity and dedication of EI."