



Carrying the Community

Addressing the Consequences of Privatization and Funding Shortfalls for Education Support Personnel

Lucas Cone & Anja Giudici
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About Education International:

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites teachers and education employees.

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1. Introduction

When discussing education – be it at home, in professional settings, news media, or parliaments – we often refer to personal experiences. This tendency is hardly surprising, given the length of time most of us have spent in classrooms, hallways, and schoolyards. For good and bad, schools often carry our earliest memories of learning, success, failure, affirmation, doubt, and authority, as well as our impressions of those we experience them with. It is often such memories that people summon when reflecting on education: the sayings of a teacher, the folders in the office of the school administrator, the light in the hallway, the advice of a school nurse, or the pat on the back from a school custodian. While no school, program, or student looks the same, such memories remind us that education is never simply a transfer of knowledge into the head of the student, but an embodied experience of being part of an educational community. This community involves both teachers as well as all those who work to ensure that students are present, safe, supported, and healthy.

Yet the many people who shape and sustain educational communities around the world are not only important to our individual experience of education. In recent years, educators, scholars, and unions have called for a greater recognition of ensuring strong and interdependent educational communities as a key aspect of realizing inclusive quality education. As a result, there has been a growing appeal to understand and acknowledge the different types of work that enable formal teaching and learning as well as provide supplementary educational experiences inside and outside classrooms.. Whether in the form of student transportation, library services, language support and translation, counselling, or wrap-around care, such work is quintessential to ensure that all children – especially those who have traditionally been excluded or marginalized by educational institutions – become an integral part of educational communities.

In recent years, Education Support Personnel (ESP) has gained traction as an umbrella term to represent the many professions that typically fall outside the conventional focus of public education yet form an invaluable part of its realization. Spanning assistant teachers, school nurses, technical and safety staff, transportation personnel, custodians, food service workers, school librarians, health aides, and other key occupations, reports from scholars, unions, and educators have documented the contributions of ESP for student well-being and socialization, school and community involvement, learning and achievement, health and safety, and other central aspects of education (e.g., Ashbaker & Morgan 2002; Butler 2019; Chopra et al. 2004; Howley 2019).

Yet while ESP are central for sustaining the day-to-day realization of quality education, their contributions are often invisible and underfinanced. In a paradoxical way, the lack of visibility in public education reforms and discourses is often a direct historical consequence of the embedded and relational nature of the work that makes the general contributions of ESP unique.

This report shows that the current rise in austerity measures and privatization in education worldwide are further endangering the ability of ESP to contribute to quality education for all. Specifically, the report documents how global trends toward cutting funding and outsourcing responsibilities in public education place ESP at elevated risks of unemployment, devaluation, and planned obsolescence through digital technologies. This report contributes to highlighting such risks by, first, mapping the challenge; second, analyzing its material, pedagogical, and social implications; and third, showcasing emerging forms of mobilization and resistance against privatization and funding shortfalls in public education.

To analytically frame and capture the challenge, the following section begins by outlining our understanding of privatization and public funding shortfalls as redefinitions of “the public” (Section 2). Section 3 situates the work of ESP within these changing understandings of public education. The subsequent three sections form the main body of the report. Drawing on three types of data gathering – a literature review, interviews with union representatives, and a participative visual ethnography – they identify how privatization and public funding shortfalls have affected, are affecting, and may affect the pedagogical (Section 4), material (Section 5), and social (Section 6) dimensions of ESP’s work. However, both individual ESP and the organizations representing them have not been passive observers of these dynamics. In Section 7 we build on findings from the union interviews and participatory ethnography to identify and discuss strategies of resistance.

1.1 Methodological Note

The report’s analyses are based on three types of data collection that capture different perspectives on the impact of privatization and public funding cuts on the working conditions of ESP. As a first step, we carried out a review of the existing literature published in Danish, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The literature identified includes academic work in education and politics, union reports, and analyses by public and labor policy think tanks.

As a caveat, the scope of the literature review was somewhat limited by the dearth of research on ESP, which is also highly skewed geographically and professionally (Butler 2019; Karatas & Caner 2024). Most of the academic research we found focused on the changing role and academic impact of



teaching assistants (paraprofessionals) in Anglo-Saxon countries. While there are notable exceptions, very little work has been done on other ESP roles, on countries in the Global South, and on the working conditions and situation of ESP themselves.

To compensate for the bias in the existing literature, the other types of data collection focused on integrating perspectives from ESP and their representatives directly. As a second step, we conducted a total of eight individual and group interviews with union representatives to document how privatization is affecting the working conditions of ESP in different countries and regions, and the strategies they have chosen to deal with these developments. Using online platforms, we interviewed a total of 14 people in 12 countries. Findings from the interviews are included both in the introductory sections describing general trends as well as in the main body of the report to illustrate what such trends look like in specific cases.¹

In the project's third phase, we engaged five individual ESP in a participatory visual ethnography to gain more concrete insights into how privatization is experienced by ESP themselves. Through a generative process, we asked ESP to share images and insights from their daily work through an encrypted application downloaded to their mobile phones. These images, videos, audio recordings, and text reflections provided essential insights into experiences, concerns, and changes in the everyday lives of the ESP that add nuance to the broader dynamics discussed in the union interviews as well as those identified in the literature review.

1 Interviews with union representatives and individual ESP took place in Spanish, French, and English. All empirical material was subsequently translated into English by the authors.



Image 1: Collage of ESP tasks in a Portuguese school. February 2024



2. ESP between Private and Public

Privatization, as one union representative put it in an interview, is a “*suitcase concept*” (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024). It can mean different things conceptually and take many forms in practice. This section explains how we approach privatization in this report.

In conventional terms, privatization is typically understood as a “shift from government provision of functions and services to provision by the private sector” (Priest 1988, 1). However, defining privatization solely by looking at the location of service provision fails to capture the dynamics of contemporary forms of public education, many of which often involve a variety of hybrid organizations, partnerships, and policy networks that “mix elements of business and philanthropy with ‘public’ policy concerns and values” (Newman & Clarke 2009, 98; see also Abrams 2016; Ball 2007; Au & Ferrare 2015; Gingrich 2011; Hursh 2005; Verger et al. 2016). Defining privatization formally in relation to the location of functions and services also overlooks instances where public services are reoriented towards private or commercial logics without implying a break with public ownership and regulation (Cone & Brøgger 2020).

Accurately capturing the effects of privatization therefore requires looking not only at how different forms of work are formally organized, but also at the *quality* of the work being done, what Anna Hogan and Greg Thompson (2021) instructively refer to as the “publicness” of schooling. Following Jessica Gerrard (2018), the notion of “publicness” as a context-specific quality encourages us to consider “the who and the which of public schooling: who is excluded and who is included; which forms of schooling exclude or include; the boundaries and borders created around the normative definitions and practices of ‘inclusion’; the understanding of what is ‘common’” (Gerrard 2018, 214).

Following this approach, this report explores how the capacity to recognize and protect ESP is shaped by policies, discussions, practices, and financial decisions that shape what is included and valued in public education – and what is excluded or made invisible. Before delving into the concrete ways in which the dynamics of privatization unfold, we first draw out three common types of reasoning that undergird attempts to narrow the who and which of public schooling (Section 2.1). While forms of reasoning often work on a more abstract level, in practice discourses and ideas about public reduction are implemented through concrete policies and mechanisms that retrench public sector capacities and shift costs, responsibilities, or benefits between actors and sectors. We discuss these policies and mechanisms in Section 2.2.

2.1 Aims of Privatization

When studying the ways in which privatization is justified, studies in education, history, and politics highlight three aims that are tied to different forms of political problematization. We refer to these as *economic*, *social*, and *technological* aims of privatization. While interrelated, each of these types of reasoning presents different arguments for challenging or narrowing the scope of the public sphere. These arguments, in turn, have specific implications for the social, material, and pedagogical dimensions of ESP's work, as well as for their modes of resistance.

2.1.1 Economic Aims

Studies in education typically frame privatization as a strategy stemming from ideologies such as neoliberalism and ordoliberalism (Ball & Youdell 2008; Verger et al. 2016). This line of reasoning is grounded in an *economic* logic that revolves around determining the optimal conditions for providing a service in accordance with the needs and rights of its users.

In essence, proponents of economic aims for privatization argue that services that are not provided by the state, or according to state-sector logics, are preferable to those with greater public control and rationales (Murphy et al. 1998). Typically, this is because private ownership is thought to be more efficient or to produce outcomes that are closer to individual preferences. In the words of neoclassical economist Friedrich Hayek: "the market really does know better than any one of us what is good for ourselves and society" (quoted by Mirowski 2013, 53).

Several studies identify this kind of economic reasoning in proposals to introduce private sector logic into education or to transfer aspects of education provision to the private sector, as promoted by some international organizations and economically right-wing parties (Abrams 2016; Ball & Youdell 2008; Gingrich 2011; Hossain 2022; Verger et al. 2016). Accordingly, rather than to engage in the bureaucratic and costly task of building an integrated education system, the role of government should be simply to "preserve the rules of the game by enforcing contracts, preventing coercion, and keeping markets free" (Friedman 1955, 1).

2.1.2 Social Aims

A second rationale conceives of privatization not primarily as a means of improving economic efficiency, but as a means of realizing certain moral understandings of society. In some situations, state regulations limit the implementation or influence of particular groups' moral beliefs.



Different groups in society may therefore support shifting power from the government to providers such as families, churches, or businesses that are more likely to realize their visions (Giudici et al. 2023; Hackett 2020; Morgan 2002).

For example, across the world, elements of the religious (far) right have embraced private provision as a means of providing the racialized and religious kind of education that democratic institutions prevent them from realizing in the public sector (Brown 2021; Hackett 2020; Payne & Souza Santos 2020; Rooks 2017). At the other end of the spectrum, progressive movements have tended to support private providers of more liberally inspired education in situations where public education was controlled by authoritarian governments (Ifanti 1994; Formosinho & Machado 2013; Neumann & Rudnicki 2023).

2.1.3 Technological Aims

A third and more recent aim of privatization is connected to technology-led disruptions and/or innovations of the education sector. Commonly assumed in technological arguments are ideas that labor-intensive (and costly) tasks can be either supported or entirely replaced by technologies based on moving images, digital codes, algorithms, automated decision making, and more recently, artificial intelligence (Holmes 2023; Sims 2017). Privatization thus becomes a strategy for fulfilling industry promises to fix or change the nature of services such as learning assistance, food and health care, or security and surveillance.

In structural terms, technological privatization can be distinguished from both economic and social logics in that it implies a lower “visibility of cutbacks” (Pierson 1996, 154). Contrary to the logics above, technological aims of privatization often do not explicitly promote state retrenchment on a fiscal or social basis. Instead, the relocation of functions into privately owned infrastructures and technologies is often paradoxically tied to aims of strengthening the supply dimension of the welfare state (Cone & Brøgger 2020).

While framed in less explicit terms, however, technological privatization still often implies transfers of responsibility to private sector actors that diminish both the public sector’s capabilities as well as possibilities for collective mobilization by reducing the visibility of reform effects (Collington 2022; Cone 2023). Recent examples include the development of teaching assistants based on artificial intelligence in the UK and the involvement of robotic technologies to supplant work previously performed by maintenance or food and nutrition staff (Department for Education 2023; Martin 2023).

2.2 *Mechanisms of Privatization*

Regardless of the motives behind it, privatization can take different forms in practice. In our interviews, we asked trade union representatives and ESP around the world what privatization means to them. The answers varied widely. Some participants described situations where private agencies provided staff to perform tasks such as counseling, maintenance, or transportation. For others, the reallocation of funds from public to private schools was the most pressing issue, while still others were concerned about parents having to pay for services previously considered part of public education.

Broadly speaking, however, the concerns of the participants as well as the issues raised in the existing literature on ESP reflect four interlinked mechanisms used to enact privatization that are mobilized by those seeking to realize the aims discussed above. Following Starr's (1989) analysis of privatization, these are:

- 1) **Privatization by attrition or austerity:** This mechanism involves eliminating or reducing public programs, charging for services previously paid for by taxes, or introducing private-sector logics into the public sector. For example, a country may eliminate special needs assessment from public provision, forcing parents to turn to private providers, or introduce performance-based pay in the public sector.
- 2) **Sale of public infrastructure or assets:** Also known as disestablishment or load-shedding, this mechanism involves the sale of publicly owned land, buildings, or infrastructure to private ownership. For example, this can include selling technological infrastructures such as servers previously maintained as public assets to private actors.
- 3) **Outsourcing:** This mechanism involves the delegation of government activities to private operators and is sometimes referred to as operational privatization. For example, instead of hiring custodial staff directly, school principals or districts may contract a custodial company to send employees to clean the school.
- 4) **De-monopolization of public services:** This mechanism involves deregulating the entry of private providers of activities and services. For instance, changes in public regulation can make it possible for private individuals and companies to open a school or develop a private teaching assistant certification without undergoing stringent checks and scrutiny.



2.3 Contexts and Impact of Privatization

All countries have committed to ensuring the right to inclusive and equitable quality education for all children. This universal commitment was stated as part of the United Nations' 2000 Millennium Development Goals to ensure free and inclusive primary schooling for all children and later expanded to include secondary education with the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. However, whether countries deliver on this commitment, and the extent to which they rely on the public sector to do so, varies widely across regions (UN 2023; UNESCO 2015b; UNESCO & The World Bank 2022).

This variation is the result, first, of contextual understandings of what “public” means. The premises of the state-centered conception of the public forged by and for the Global North do not always align with historical cultural practices, including different ways of organizing childhood, forming communities, and producing knowledge (Santos 2012). For example, some countries have institutionalized regularized forms of private provision to accommodate religious and ethnic diversity (Ansell & Lindvall 2021). In other contexts, experiences with colonial authorities and contextual understandings of democracy have promoted models in which educational tasks are delegated to local communities and collectives rather than state administrations (Brooks et al. 2020). In analyzing the “publicness” of ESP’s educational tasks this report is therefore sensitive to different contextual understandings of what public means and has meant (Barreiros & Moreira 2020).

Second, privatization has different implications depending on the expansion of mass education. Particularly in countries in the Global South, governments often lack the resources and means to ensure universal provision of inclusive primary and secondary education. This sometimes makes state authorities – and anyone interested in expanding access – rely on private initiatives and philanthropic partnerships to realize educational goals. This dependency can in turn generate cautiousness when it comes to regulating private provision (Ball & Youdell 2008; Emmett 2006; UNESCO 2015b; UNESCO & The World Bank 2022). In contexts characterized by extensive public provision of education, conversely, the visibility of public work and an established union presence can often act as a bulwark against privatization and funding shortfalls (Wiborg & Larsen, 2017). Such contextual differences are important to keep in mind when discussing the conditions of ESP, the role of unions in relation to their work, and the forms of resistance and mobilization in which they are currently or potentially engaged.

3. Defining ESP

3.1 The Changing Role of ESP in Primary and Secondary Schooling

Historically, schools have been sites of deep inequality. The education of children born into privilege has always been a comprehensive experience that involved not only highly qualified teachers, but also an array of support services ranging from counseling to boarding (Arancibia 2014; Sandgren 2017). For the majority of children, however, education was defined in much narrower terms. Not only did it involve fewer hours of instruction and a narrowly focused curriculum, but also included little of the individualized support provided to more advantaged children (Gingrich et al. 2023; Holm-Larsen et al. 2017).

The post-1945 decades saw a dramatic global expansion and integration of primary and secondary schooling (Furuta 2020; Gingrich et al. 2023). This process extended (at least parts of) a more comprehensive understanding of education to all pupils, for instance by providing transportation and meals to those previously excluded and marginalized from formal education (Garcia An. 2023). These shifts have expanded the boundaries of public education by redefining services that had previously been reserved for a select few as part of the formal, compulsory provision of education.

ESP have been essential to this project of expansion and inclusion (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Blatchford et al. 2009; Broer et al. 2005; Clayton 1993; Giangreco & Broer 2005; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Marks et al. 1999; Smilie 2022). As understandings of public schooling broadened to include, among other things, the provision of safe and clean spaces, food, transportation, and individualized support, the number of ESP increased significantly. It is estimated that, in Brazil, the number of support staff increased eightfold between 1946 and 1986, from 100,000 to 800,000 ESP (Arancibia 2014, 40). Similarly, in the United States, ESP represented 22% of all school employees in 1949; by 2002, their share had grown to nearly 40% (AFT 2002).

The role of ESP also changed. The work of ESP has always been educational, interacting on a daily basis with children in different roles – be it teaching children how to behave safely on the school bus or stopping bullying in the playground. However, the educational contributions of ESP were rarely recognized formally, just as ESP were seldom involved directly in the planning and delivery of education (Arancibia 2014; Clayton 1993). The movements to expand and build more inclusive systems of public education changed the roles of ESP and, to some extent, their social status. This is especially true for learning assistants, whose responsibilities have expanded to include



counseling, instruction, and diagnosing (Arancibia 2014; Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Bourke & Carrington 2007; Clayton 1993; French & Gerlach 1999; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Pickett 1999; Rose 2020). In many countries, new specialist roles have emerged to address needs related to bilingual teaching, counselling, crises managing, mental health, and special needs education. While other roles have changed less, aims to provide inclusive education have led to a growing recognition of their value and involvement in education, whether as school nurses, lab assistants, or janitors.

3.2 Defining ESP and the Multifaceted Dimensions of their Work

This report uses the definition and typology of ESP adopted by Education International and focuses on staff working in primary and secondary schools. Therefore, it considers the following professions:

- administration and clerical personnel;
- career guidance and counselling;
- documentalists and librarians;
- maintenance and skilled trades;
- food and nutrition;
- health and welfare;
- tutors and learning assistants;
- security personnel;
- technical, technological, and communications personnel;
- transport personnel;
- specialist professionals.

As intimated above, ESP roles vary widely in terms of status, professional history, and recognition. Some roles have a long tradition of high-status formal credentialing and professional regulation, as in the case of guidance counselors, librarians, or school psychologists (Arancibia 2014; Butler 2019). Other roles lack such mechanisms, meaning that ESP in these roles are often informally qualified. This is especially the case for food and certain maintenance roles who are, in some contexts, perceived as a natural extension of women's traditional contributions as mothers and wives – and therefore not considered to require certified skills (Arancibia 2014; Cho 2019; Smilie 2022).

The demographic characteristics of ESP vary accordingly. Because the stratification of educational credentials tends to reflect social stratification (Domina et al. 2017), white-collar roles that require more prestigious certificates are often occupied by individuals who have had better academic opportunities and opportunities for mobility. On the other hand, roles such

as learning assistants, security staff, or transportation personnel include high proportions of people rooted in local and minorized communities (AFT 2002; Arancibia 2014; Butler 2019; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006; Genzuk & Baka 1998). Overall, ESP roles are largely female-dominated, but some are more so than others. For example, surveys show that learning assistants, nurses, secretaries, and school psychologists are more likely to be female, while occupations that maintain physical and digital infrastructure are more likely to be male (AFT 2002; Arancibia 2014; Butler 2019; Chopra et al. 2004; Giangreco & Doyle 2007).

ESP comprise a diverse group of people working in very different circumstances. What these professions have in common is that they require mastery of relevant procedures, regulations, and policies; intellectual, and in some cases, physical skills; as well as the judgment, expertise, and emotional work involved in supporting educational communities and educating children. Our findings reflect this multifaceted nature of the work of ESP. Accordingly, we have chosen to focus on the impact of privatization on three crucial dimensions – pedagogical (Section 4), material (Section 5), and social (Section 6) – that shape the contributions, abilities, and well-being of ESP and, as a corollary, the capacities of educational communities to function as inclusive and caring places to be and learn.



4. Pedagogical Dimensions

Me and my colleagues in the same role are the first person that students and teachers see when they arrive at school. My duties prove it. I open the center. I am the one who turns on the lights, turns on the heating in winter, makes photocopies, and makes sure everything is in order before school starts. I also notify the management team of any incident or anomaly. I call parents when necessary to notify them of any need their children may have. I keep an eye on the facilities and the students during class changes and recess. In short, I do essential work that helps the school day to run smoothly. (Individual ESP, Spain, February 2024)

As this quote from a control and information assistant in a Spanish school aptly illustrates, the contributions of ESP to education are as varied as they are essential. Indeed, belonging and contributing to an educational community is what marks the difference between performing a role such as janitor or cook in a school and other settings. This pedagogical role is the main reason why ESP value their positions and want to remain in them (Butler 2019; Conley et al. 2010; Ghidina 1992; Karatas & Caner 2024).

The contributions of ESP have become all the more essential in light of global ambitions to expand the quality and inclusivity of primary and secondary education (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Nel et al. 2016; Nota et al. 2007; Pickett 1999). In this regard, the contextual and professional knowledges of ESP are invaluable for accommodating increasingly diverse student populations, both in terms of supporting staff and building different types of relationships with students (Blatchford et al. 2009; Chopra et al. 2004; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006).

In their structured observations of UK classrooms, Blatchford et al. (2009) find that pupils' interactions with learning assistants were not only "more active and longer" (p. 674) than their interactions with teachers, but also of an essentially different kind that does much more than merely support an existing way of relating to students. As illustrated in the photograph of student equipment below taken by an educational assistant, the different knowledges of ESP are often a prerequisite for some students to attend school at all (Image 2).

Image 2: "My student wouldn't be able to come to school without my knowledge on how to use this equipment. This equipment brings her on equal footing with fellow students, giving her the mobility to move around the building. To be able to have dignity when needing personal care assistance means the world to this 10-year-old. Without proper training for these tools the student would not be safe, and she would be stuck in her wheelchair all day." (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024).



The union representatives and individual ESP involved in the production of this report validated the profound pedagogical value of ESP in supporting and engaging with students. Just as the case of the unique skills involved in managing the student equipment showed above, they provided us with numerous examples of the crucial and essentially educational role of ESP, without which students would not be able to solve technological problems, obtain financial support, and, essentially, learn. In all these roles, ESP were an integral part of the educational process. For example, an ESP working as an IT specialist in an Italian school described her work not only as providing the infrastructure and support to enable students and teachers to use digital equipment for learning, but also as building relationships with students:

When they [administrators] think that this work can be privatized, they don't consider the relationship with the students... As an ESP, you are on the side of the students. You listen to them and recognize their problems. Sometimes with the girls, for example, we talk about our nails. It's silly stuff, but in a way it's important. Because they know that they can come to my office and show me their nails and I will say, "Oh, they are beautiful. How are you doing?" There are a lot of people with formal roles around students today, like teachers. ESP, in a way, are the ones they can trust to support them. (Individual ESP, Italy, February 2024)

Similarly, parents, especially those whose children have special needs or are marginalized, have been shown to seek interaction with, and advice from, ESP. As studies confirm, ESP are often seen as more accessible to parents and other caregivers, both because of their close contact with children and the fact that they often spend long hours in schools (Chopra et al. 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006; Skär & Tamm 2001).

However, for ESP to be able to realize and be recognized for their pedagogical contributions in practice, certain factors must be present. Our findings highlight four key factors, which we discuss below. First, ESP must be integrated into the schools' pedagogical project (Section 4.1). Second, they need to be recruited and prepared to take on a clearly defined role (Section 4.2). Third, they should be able to act as links within schools and between schools and their communities (Section 4.3) and, finally, they must be provided with training and support to meet the complex and evolving needs of their role (Section 4.4).



4.1 *Integration into Schools' Pedagogical Project*

The teachers know that I'm in there and that I will help the students with the highest needs. They know that they can concentrate on the other students in the room. It's a team approach. We tend to collaborate and plan and brainstorm together, which is a fascinating fantastic relationship. I'm grateful for all the teachers that I've worked with that have taught me as well as allowing me to teach them. (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024)

As illustrated in this quote from an education assistant in Canada, ESP often value being integrated into educational communities. The value of seeing oneself as part of the schools' pedagogical project is reflected across much of the literature on ESP as well as in the reflections of other ESP who shared experiences and perspectives for this report. Whether working within or outside classrooms, ESP want to operate in a supportive school environment, where they are treated with respect, have designated time and space to collaborate with other professionals, and can access shared facilities (Chopra et al. 2004; Conley et al. 2010; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006).

An integrated school community is also essential to harness the pedagogical contributions of ESP. Numerous pedagogical studies show that the quality and inclusivity of education provided by schools is directly related to the ability of school staff to coordinate their pedagogical strategies and develop common approaches and goals (Albortz et al. 2009; Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Billingsley et al. 1993; Blatchford et al. 2011; Bradshaw et al. 2011; Chopra et al. 2004; Conley et al. 2010; Gerlach 2002; Ghere & Yack-Barre 2007). For instance, research shows that situations in which students with special needs are taught in isolation by learning assistants, rather than as part of an inclusive, team-taught classroom, reduce their academic achievement (Blatchford et al. 2011; Butt 2016; Dreyer 2013; Nel et al. 2016). However, such situations are common when schools are put under pressure to prioritize finances and accountability measures over pedagogical considerations (Butt 2016; Menken 2008; Ozga 2013).

Teamwork does not unfold automatically; it is the result of deliberate and conscious effort. Maintaining collaboration requires policies and resources that ensure all staff are welcome in common areas, included in events, and respected as members of the instructional team (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Billingsley et al. 1993; Gerlach 2002; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Liston et al. 2009). Working together also requires developing a clear understanding of each other's roles and approaches as well as establishing common policies and practices. This, in turn, is only possible in teams with a certain level of stability and when school staff have dedicated time and space for communication and team building (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Conley et al. 2010; Gerlach 2002; Giangreco & Doyle 2007). Yet as we shall see below,

privatization and public funding shortfalls affect both the stability and time needed to act and plan as a team.

4.1.1 *(Non-)Integration in School Communities*

While stable and structured forms of cooperation between school staff are essential for inclusive quality education, they are often hard to realize in practice. In surveys and participatory studies, ESP often report feeling excluded from educational teams (Butler 2019; Sorsby 2004). A recent survey conducted by the Federação Nacional da Educação in Portugal, for example, found that 65.5% of ESP had never been part of a school project (FNE 2023). The available literature provides evidence that this exclusion is partly linked to privatization and public funding shortfalls, and more specifically to their effects on the stability of educational teams and the time and space they have available for collaboration.

As discussed in more detail in the chapter on material conditions (Section 5), privatization and public funding cuts have worsened the working conditions of ESP worldwide. Increasing workloads, combined with the lack of time and funding for pedagogical exchange and teambuilding, have a direct impact on the quality of services that ESP and the educational community as a whole are able (or unable) to provide.

In the picture below, an education assistant shared a photograph from a school in which she had recently begun working. The photo, in her words, illustrates the negative consequences of non-integration for the



students who rely on the abilities and support of ESP at school. Contrary to the coordinative and mutual spirit permeating the school at which she was formerly employed, the lack of proper structures and training for teamwork at her new place of employment meant that students with learning difficulties were quicker to be excluded from classroom instruction. Such exclusions would happen even when both teachers and ESP “know the importance” of placing students in situations where they learn to “make decisions in relation to other students” (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024).

Image 3: “The image is of a four-year-old ASD [autism spectrum disorder] student who cannot manage a classroom of 27 students. He is given a tiny room with gym mats to sit on. He bangs his head on the floor or whatever he can get his hands on. He has only preferred items and is not challenged to do educational tasks due to his behaviour” (Individual ESP, Canada, February 12, 2024).

Existing studies confirm the negative effects of having school professionals work side by side without structured collaboration, which has been linked to increased stress levels among both teachers and ESP, higher staff turnover, and lower quality instruction (Ghere & Yack-Barre 2007;



Giangreco 2003). As intimated in both interviews and existing research, privatization and funding shortfalls often exacerbate the negative spiral of non-integration by placing pressure on schools to deliver on preestablished outcomes or cutting funding for collegial activities outside of classrooms (Nel et al. 2016). Yet as several studies show, such coordination is imperative to build the kind of culture of cooperation and dialogue without which school communities risk falling back on established hierarchies or practices that are not beneficial for students (Dourado & De Moraes 2009).

4.1.2 The Price of Outsourcing

Teamwork also requires staff continuity. However, by reducing the attractiveness of working conditions in the public sector and increasing the reliance on short-term contracts, privatization and public funding shortfalls lead to higher staff turnover (Butler 2019; Ghere & York Barr 2007). The outsourcing of functions previously provided by ESP within the school and the reliance on agencies to fill vacancies further threaten the stability of teams, as staff may be required to work across several schools depending on needs and available funding (Ghere & York Barr 2007).

Several participants noted that outsourcing support services negatively impacts the integration of ESP into the school community. For example, a union representative based in the United States pointed out that projects to outsource services tend to focus exclusively on the economic benefits promised by hiring private companies, neglecting the pedagogical value of ESP.

Many of the contracts that are being signed with private companies don't include all the extra duties that a school employee would normally do... Because there's a difference between school district employees and the private companies that come in. The camaraderie, the relationships that district employees have with the students; they live in the community for most part. For many ESP, theirs is more than just a job. It's really their livelihood, their career, they want to be there for the kids. But when you look at it from the outside much of that is invisible. (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024)

The literature substantiates such effects –or “hidden costs”, as the union representative quoted above calls them– including new issues of accountability, lack of vetting of employees, sudden raises in costs, and problems related to staff integration and new procedures that take time from both existing and new members of staff (Ball & Youdell 2008; Butler 1991; Cohen & Allen 2021; Hermann & Flecker 2012). For students, it

means less continuity in their education, less experienced staff, and staff who have less time to develop an integrated approach (Ghere & York Barr 2007). This point is reflected in the following passage from a French union representative discussing the outsourcing of custodial functions to private companies.

A private company can indeed be hired to come and clean a school. But they do not provide an educational presence for students and many times the private companies have higher turnovers of staff. Also, many times the staff work in several schools and are not known to the pupils. So, the relationship deteriorates, and it's linked to privatization. (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024)

As noted by an individual ESP working as an IT technician in an Italian school, outsourcing not only generates hidden costs in staff relations to students, but also reshapes the school's infrastructure in ways that often impact negatively on the work of ESP. In Italy as well as many other places, municipalities and large schools are outsourcing an increasing number of technological aspects to private companies based on claims that such companies can handle the complexities of data flows, privacy protections, system management, and other aspects better than local employees.

The outsourcing of technical services negatively affects the work of ESP and the school as a unit because it increases the waiting time for interventions. In fact, if the management of technical services were entrusted to internal staff, in addition to being able to follow the daily operation of the devices and systems, they could intervene immediately if something goes wrong. (Individual ESP, Italy, February 2024)

While such forms of technological contracting may be necessary in certain respects, the quote highlights the importance of looking at the services that schools provide from a comprehensive perspective, rather than attempt to optimize isolated functions with the help of (for-profit) private contractors. This applies to other services as well. For instance, outsourcing food preparation to private companies in the US and UK has been shown to negatively impact food quality and, in turn, student health (Apoliona-Brown et al. 2020; Devi et al. 2010; Gaddis 2019; Zullo 2008). However, a comprehensive perspective is often clouded by the promises of technological efficiency or disruption that neglect potential pedagogical costs.



4.1.3 Accountability of Time

Privatization by attrition increases the demands on all school staff (see, Section 4.2). Whether through the hidden costs that tend to follow attempts to run schools on restricted budgets or the introduction of new practices of accountability, these developments leave little time for both teachers and ESP to engage in cooperative approaches. Indeed, one common finding from the literature is that, across schools and countries, school staff lack allocated time to develop shared pedagogical plans and coordinate approaches (Blatchford et al. 2011; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Giangreco 2003; Ghere & Yack-Barre 2007). In some cases, such spaces do exist, but due to their busy and often fragmented schedules, ESP are unable to participate (Butler 2019; Hammett & Burton 2005; Sorsby 2004). As one participant put it: *"This job is not hard. It's the accountability of time that is hard"* (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024).

Lack of time results in staff having to implement fragmented, rather than collaborative, solutions (Giangreco & Doyle 2007). In her study of UK schools, Sorsby (2004) found that in the absence of dedicated preparation time, teachers often plan lessons at home in their spare time. As a result, teaching assistants are not involved in the planning and are sometimes asked to implement plans on the spot, without knowing a teachers' reasoning behind them and without being able to contribute their own knowledge and expertise. Such examples demonstrate the potential risks of snowball effects linked to funding shortfalls and other forms of privatization by attrition or austerity.

A more insidious way in which dynamics linked to workload hinder collaboration is by shaping the expectations and image of ESP. As the next sections will discuss, privatization and funding shortfalls are blurring ESP's professional roles and rendering their contributions less visible. This misrecognition is one of the main reasons cited by ESP themselves when asked to explain why they may not be invited to, or have access to, school meetings and professional events (Butler 2019; Sorsby 2004). It can unfold either directly, by demoting their status, or indirectly, as "there is often an assumption that it is unfair to expect them [ESP] to attend meetings or to undertake training" because other staff do not want to burden them, knowing of their low pay and lack of time (Sorsby 2004, 49).



Image 4: Presence control of ESP by eye reader in a school in Portugal (Individual ESP, Portugal, April 2024).

4.2 Alignment between Preparation and Role

ESP often work in challenging settings. Educating and caring for children outside of the classroom, in unstructured, and sometimes dangerous, environments such as buses and canteens, is a complex and sensitive task. As is supporting and adapting assignments for pupils with different special needs and learning requirements (Butt 2016; Giangreco 2003). The failure to complete such tasks has major implications for both the quality and inclusiveness of education. From a pedagogical perspective, it is essential to ensure, first, that the distribution of tasks is clear and, second, that it aligns with people's preparation and skills.

Professional roles need clearly defined tasks and responsibilities. The fact that the boundaries of some ESP roles are unclear or unknown to other staff, parents, and policymakers contributes to the misrecognition of their pedagogical contribution. It can also lead to conflicts over responsibilities that hinder collaboration among staff (Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Billingsley et al. 1993; Clayton 1993). For ESP themselves, a lack of clarity means greater uncertainty about what they need to do to fulfill requirements, and associated risks to employment, deteriorating relationships with colleagues, and personal disillusionment (Clayton 1993).

To realize the pedagogical contribution that their role entails, ESP also need specific training. As noted by several scholars, however, the expansion of public education and other fields since the 1970s has taken place in a period of political reforms characterized by waves of austerity, shrinking public budgets, and social, economic, and technological privatization (Blyth 2013; Streek & Schäfer 2013). This simultaneity of expansion and austerity has shaped the way in which new responsibilities have been allocated (Albortz et al. 2009; Collington 2022; French & Gerlach 1999; Giangreco & Doyle 2007). Because financial and political concerns have often trumped pedagogical rationales in the effort to provide education for all, additional responsibilities have often been assigned to categories of staff deemed to require less training and whose work is considered less valuable, and therefore less costly, than traditional teaching.

Ill-defined roles and boundaries, as well as a lack of preparation, are therefore systemic to many ESP roles. Both dynamics have been exacerbated by more recent waves of privatization and public funding cuts.

4.2.1 Saving Money, Multiplying tasks

Reduced public funding means that schools and governments have incentives to hire more untrained, and therefore less expensive, staff (Bourke 2009; Butt 2016; Giangreco & Doyle 2007). The incentives are even higher for private providers. As noted by several participants and in



studies on privatization, private providers often promise to deliver quality services at low costs in order to win contracts. To stay within allocated budgets, however, private providers often compromise on quality and hire less qualified people to keep wages low (AFT 2002; Aketch 2022; Cohen & Allen 2021). Privatization by austerity also means that, more generally, fewer personnel are hired. However, the tasks to be performed – and the students whose learning and well-being depends on an inclusive school system – remain the same.

Several studies report that, because of public funding cuts, ESP are often asked to take on roles and make decisions for which they are neither trained nor paid (Blatchford et al. 2009; Conley et al. 2010; Patterson 2006). This dynamic is particularly well documented for learning assistants. Although policies typically assign learning assistants an indirect role in teaching pupils, in many countries they are increasingly being asked to either work directly with pupils or to replace teachers altogether (AFT 2002; Blatchford et al. 2009; Blatchford et al. 2011; Giangreco & Doyle 2007). Yet like other ESP, learning assistants have their own role to play in schools; if placed in a role that is not aligned with their training, they cannot contribute the best of their ability to provide quality education for all (Ernst-Slavit and Wenger 2006). As one learning assistant from the UK put it, “a person becomes a teaching assistant to support in the school environment, not be a teacher on the cheap” (Unison 2018).

Cases in which learning assistants are asked to take on roles that are not theirs are particularly common in schools serving minority and marginalized communities – a situation that further evidences the detrimental impact of public funding shortfalls on education equality and inclusion. Indeed, studies in the United States find that districts with high proportions of minority students are more likely to rely on learning assistants for instruction (Ernst-Slavit and Wenger 2006, 63). A survey by the American Federation of Teachers (2002) finds that while 53% of learning assistants had been asked to substitute for a full day overall, the corresponding proportion for those working in minority schools was as high as 73% (p. 15).

While several countries have adopted standards for becoming a learning assistant in recent years, this is not the case for other ESP roles (Arancibia 2014; Ashbaker & Morgan 2012). Their training backgrounds may be even more diverse, further exacerbating the mismatch between training and the roles that ESP are required to perform. Indeed, reports show parallels across ESP roles, with staff being asked to respond to emergencies and cover positions well beyond their remit, including positions that require specific types of knowledge, such as expertise in food safety procedures (Chopra et al. 2004; Patterson 2006; Unison 2018). In the UK, 70% of ESP surveyed by Unison in 2018 had taken on tasks belonging to roles with higher pay. Most indicated that they had been asked to perform these

tasks because the person who had done them before had been made redundant.

The situation, then, is directly linked to processes of public attrition and austerity described in the first section of the report. Indeed, studies of ESP in several countries report that, because of such cuts and related staff shortages, they have often had to interrupt work on a task to respond to emergencies or take on additional responsibilities (Allen & Ashbaker 2004; Chopra et al. 2004; Unison 2018). These responsibilities may also overlap. For example, one of the learning assistants interviewed by Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) reported that she had to take students assigned to her to meetings because she was required to do two tasks at the same time.

Our conversations show that this situation generalizes to other roles, including, for instance, personnel working with transportation, administration maintenance, and security. In all of these roles, cuts in public funding further increase the workload by depriving staff of the equipment that would allow them to work efficiently, as several participants confirmed. An ESP from Niger described how she monitors attendance:

I visit the schools in our area. The teachers have written the numbers of students on the blackboard, but I have to count the girls and boys to see if the numbers are the same. I do this with my portable calculator, which sometimes gets stuck. If the inspector, the regional director or even the minister comes to visit, we'll have this data to work with. (Individual ESP, Niger, March 2024)

4.2.2 Blurring Profiles

The multiplication of roles that ESP must perform in practice further blurs their professional profiles. While some ESP roles have always been characterized by a broad scope, the general tendency to attribute diverse and often random tasks to ESP in schools reflects a growing concern among ESP and unions about the lack of professional certification and licensing. Many roles lack clear standards for evaluating job performance, regulating career progression, and protecting ESP from being assigned tasks outside their training and pay scale (AFT 2002; Butt & Lance 2005; Clarke & Visser 2017).

As noted in an interview with a union representative from Portugal, the lack of clarity is often exacerbated by austerity measures that aim to reduce the number of employments or, more problematically, actively prevent possibilities for solidarity within and between different ESP categories. The representative described how, as part of a process of municipal reform, ESP roles had been grouped into three distinct macro-



categories based on their formal educational level and skills, labelled *superior staff* (including mainly specialist professionals), *administrative staff* (including librarians and administration personnel), and *operational staffs* (including maintenance personnel, and food and nutrition staff). While staff grouped under the “superior” label remained under employment by the local school, the reform moved the two latter categories under municipal employment meaning that they could both be moved to different locations based on needs and be asked to take on other tasks within the macro-category.

They can now move people around. They can say you go to one school today and another school tomorrow. You are not just staying there. You are just jumping between schools if they want you to. It's a new thing that you don't answer to the principal, you answer to the mayor. So, you work in this school now and tomorrow you will work in another school. (Representative FNE, Portugal, January 2024)

According to the Portuguese union representative, the integration of distinct professional roles into “empty” labels creates intense feelings of insecurity and risks of replacement. This point is reflected in much of the literature on (uncertain) professional profiles of ESP. For example, Butt and Lance (2005) find that efforts to “modernize” the workforce in the English public sector in recent decades have caused “a weakening of the traditional job boundaries which have previously defined the work of support staff” (p. 139). Uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities of different members of staff in schools has been identified as a problem in several countries (AFT 2002; Blatchford et al. 2009; Butler 2019; Butt & Gunter 2005; Butt & Lowe 2012; Chopra et al. 2004; Patterson 2006).

The blurring of profiles and staff categories has implications for both individual professionals as well as the quality of the education that schools offer. In surveys, ESP report that they perceive the allocation of tasks as “unethical” (Chopra et al. 2004, 228). The feeling of not being able to fulfil the responsibilities of their actual role to the best of their ability adds to the stress (Chopra et al. 2004; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006). Lack of role clarity also makes it difficult for ESP to refuse a task outside their remit, opening the door to exploitation and conflict with other school staff (Clarke & Visser 2016; Butt & Lance 2005; Sorsby 2004). As noted by the Portuguese participant above, uncertainty over their role can place ESP at further risks of outsourcing and layoffs as they are denied opportunities to build visibility and mobilize around their roles.

As ESP are often tasked with supporting disadvantaged areas and children, the disruptions of ESP profiles caused by privatization and funding shortfalls has significant implications for equality. In the UK, public funding cuts – including in the provision of specialized support and transport – have measurably worsened the inclusion and education of children

with special needs (Adams 2023; Warnock 2023). Testimonies from South Africa collected by Giangreco & Doyle (2007) report that affluent parents of children with special needs privately hire teaching assistants as a precondition for schools to admit the children. Poorer children and children with disabilities are left behind.

4.3 Connecting Adjacent Communities

One of the specificities of the work of ESP is that they often act as an interface for connecting different actors within and outside schools. In a study asking learning assistants in the US how they themselves define their role in focus interviews, for example, Chopra et al. (2004) note that they often see themselves “as connectors or bridges among parents, students, and other members of the school and community” (p. 221). This role as a connector of adjacent communities is due both to the specificity of ESP’s work profile, and to the demographic features characterizing the individuals in these positions in many countries.

First, the role of ESP often involves connecting school communities – sometimes quite literally. A participant from Niger described how she walks from school to school as part of her role in monitoring attendance across institutes:

The schools aren't next to each other. So, given the distance between schools, I really have to walk to school, and that's going to take time. I also have to go class by class. (Individual ESP, Niger, March 2024)

Conley et al. (2010) mention the example of school secretaries, who act as an interface between school and community, and students and their families. They are often required to know about, and communicate with, students’ families (for instance when a student is sick or to organize school drop-offs). But the same is true for, for instance, transportation personnel. Because ESP are often hired specifically to support children from marginalized communities and those with disabilities, they often play a crucial role in connecting and brokering formal education to the communities it has traditionally served less well (AFT 2002; Allen & Ashbaker 2004; Blatchford et al. 2009; Chopra et al. 2004; Giangreco & Broer 2005; Marks et al. 1999; Rose 2020).

Second, ESP are generally more likely than (graduate) teachers to come from, and live in, the communities surrounding their schools. As a result, they often act as a personal link between the school and these communities, and can develop personal relationships with students and their families, many whom they may meet both inside and outside of school (Allen & Ashbaker 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006; Chopra et al. 2004). As a result of these relationships and the long hours spent in schools, some studies find that ESP are perceived by families as more accessible than teachers (Chopra



et al. 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006). Studies also report that learning assistants often help students and families manage their daily lives, such as filing taxes or making doctor's appointments, often outside of regular work hours and without pay (Chopra et al. 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006).

Third, and relatedly, as a result of inequalities perpetuated by education systems, ESP tend to be more culturally diverse than graduate school staff (AFT 2002; Allen & Ashbaker 2004; Chopra et al. 2004; Genzuk & Baka 1998). This is especially true for ESP roles requiring lower levels of formal certification, some of whom often have direct experiences and knowledges of attending school in minoritized positions. Such backgrounds can be an important resource for minority students going through experiences of being marginalized and having to learn a new school language and culture. As such, they are more likely to have knowledge of the struggles that schooling entails for these communities and are often the person students turn to when they experience racism and feel unsafe (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006; Chopra et al. 2004). They often take on informal roles in educating and supporting minoritized students by engaging culturally relevant practices and acting as cultural mediators (Allen & Ashbaker 2004).

Such knowledges are an invaluable educational asset. Union representatives from Portugal and New Zealand highlighted different examples that speak to the notion of ESP as community brokers or connectors. The Portuguese representative reflected on the importance of the custodial and security personnel as community brokers.

The cleaning and security staff talk to students in the hallways. They know a lot of things that teachers don't know because they have more context. Sometimes they can just sit down with a kid who is sad and say, "What's up, what's wrong?", without having to judge or grade them. Many of them are from the community, which gives them more influence with the students. This is especially important because this neighborhood has a big drug dealing problem. And once they start using drugs as kids, they tend to do it for life. So it is important to have staff from the community. They know the kids. They live next door to them. And they can be a positive influence because the kids respect them. (Representative FNE, Portugal, January 2024)

While the extent of community embeddedness varies across roles and regions, the excerpt reflects the pedagogical value of ESP as a group who can often relate to students "without having to judge or grade them".

Another type of link is provided by ESP, who are brought in to work in schools with student populations that have historically –and in many places still today– been denied access to inclusive, quality education. In the following excerpt, a union representative based in New Zealand notes how language specialists are playing a pivotal role in brokering for indigenous people.

There's been a movement in recent years to bring our indigenous culture through and represent it in the places and institutions we're in, because it's very important as part of our treaty relationship. So, there's more and more schools that will have a role liaising with the Māori communities to connect them with the school and are involved in teaching their histories from their point of view. Typically, these connector roles will be held by language and culture specialists and support personnel rather than just teachers. (Representative NZEI TE RIU ROA, New Zealand, January 2024)

The involvement of ESP as cultural brokers noted in the excerpt above is reflected in the broader literature. For example, some studies show how US districts often address the growing mismatch between predominantly English-speaking teachers and multilingual students by hiring multilingual learning assistants. These learning assistants play an invaluable role in providing direct support to multilingual students, as well as facilitating communication between students, teachers, and families (Chopra et al. 2004; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006).

In a nutshell, ESP are essential to realize more inclusive and culturally responsive schools. Their cultural work, however, receives little institutional support and recognition (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006). Privatization and public funding shortfalls, the next section shows, further limit the extent to which ESP can both contribute to educational projects and challenge them from an intercultural perspective.

4.3.1 Privatization and Cultural Pushbacks against ESP

Through a combination of socially and economically motivated privatization, developments in several countries are threatening to devalue the work and professional autonomy of ESP involved in intercultural work, such as school librarians (Hart & Zinn 2015; Gurjot Singh 2022; Yanappa & Reddy 2023; Lance & Katchel 2021).

Studies of culturally sustaining pedagogies and cultural brokering in schools highlight that the contributions of ESP in terms of connecting communities and cultures in schools are increasingly challenged by social aims for privatization and related policies that promote “the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society” (Paris 2012, 1). Reflecting a global surge of new nationalisms in education (Giudici 2021a; Neumann 2022; Schofer et al. 2022), such aims and policies push back against diversity and inclusivity in school curricula, forms of support, and types of staff (Bergmann 2017; Neumann et al. 2020). Where political and religious criteria, rather than professionalism, are used to determine what students should read, school librarians have come under pressure. In extreme cases, for example in the US, they are labeled as “pedophiles



and groomers” working to “pollute the minds of the nation’s youth” (Fleishman 2023).

Economically motivated privatization has a similar effect. Like many other ESP, school librarians hold unique insights into the needs and capacities of students and provide safe and affirming spaces that translate into academic performance in classrooms. Yet in contexts marked by funding shortfalls, economic criteria, rather than librarians’ professional and pedagogical contributions, are determining what books to buy, and whether to protect or increase the existence of school libraries. For example, Lance and Kachel (2021) register a 20 percent reduction in the number of school librarians in the US after the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009, with three out of ten districts no longer employing librarians in the 2018-2019 school year. This statistic disfavors districts with more students experiencing poverty, higher levels of Black and brown students, and more English language learners. Similar developments have been reported for India, South Africa, and the UK, among others (Hart & Zinn 2015; Gurjot Singh 2022; Yanappa & Reddy 2023).

Another way in which privatization affects the abilities of ESP to connect communities is task overloading and dispersion. As noted by Chopra et al. (2004), for example, learning assistants often have to fulfil multiple roles at the same time, which can negatively impact their capacity to act as connectors between communities. The same logic applies for geographical dispersion. In the case of Portugal discussed above, by asking ESP to work across multiple locations, the re-categorization of ESP as a means to centralize administration of school tasks and reduce costs also negatively affects their ability to work as connectors of communities and build relationships with students and parents.

4.4 Professional Development

Workplaces, including schools, are constantly changing. Professional development is a key tool in equipping workers for such change, enabling them to feel confident in their jobs and to improve their workplaces. It also allows workers to credential their own skills and knowledge and advance their careers. In fact, studies show that ESPs themselves want more development opportunities, similar to those regularly provided to teachers in many places (AFT 2002; Butler 2019; Chopra et al. 2004).

From a pedagogical perspective, professional development for ESP is essential to integrate them in educational communities and harness their contributions (Albortz et al. 2009; Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Conley et al. 2010; Frelin & Grannäs 2015; French 2001; Gerlach 2002). However, many studies also highlight that, for schools to function as inclusive projects,

training should involve the entire staff, as teachers may be unfamiliar with the roles and skills of different staff members (Albortz et al. 2009; Ashbaker & Morgan 2012; Chopra et al. 2004; Conley 1993; French & Gerlach 1999; French 2001). Such training would also benefit from integrating the experiences, insights, and knowledge of teaching assistants regarding culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies.

For ESP themselves, professional development is beneficial in several ways. Their roles often require specialized and rapidly evolving knowledge ranging from safety protocols (e.g., when working in labs and cafeterias) to pedagogy and psychology to specific policies and regulations. In order to fulfill their responsibilities and ensure their own safety, ESP must be provided appropriate training. In fact, when asked about their desires for development opportunities, most participants wanted more training on pedagogical topics, such as how to support children with autism or who are experiencing distressing situations at home (AFT 2002; Barrio & Hollingshead 2017; Butler 2019). Scholars confirm that because ESP are more likely to work with children from marginalized and at-risk communities, both training in pedagogy and managing emotional distress and stress are essential to their well-being and that of the children (Allen & Ashbacker 2004; Chopra et al. 2004; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006).

Finally, professional development is also essential from a material and social perspective. The lack of formal training and related certification not only hinders career advancement. The inability to certify one's skills and knowledge also makes ESP more vulnerable in the labor market, a situation that is particularly problematic in a context characterized by an increase in precarious and short-term contracts. The lack of professional development also weakens ESP's voice. Studies describe a vicious circle in which ESP's lack of voice in education politics is often justified by their lack of appropriate credentials, and their lack of voice means that they cannot advocate for better credentials (Bourke & Carrington 2007; Sorsby 2004).

In general, professional development for ESP does not seem to be a priority in public budgets. However, privatization exacerbates the situation, both by directly affecting the availability of training and by affecting the ability of ESP to actually participate in such training.

4.4.1 Limiting the Supply of Professional Development

The lack of public funding not only means that schools and agencies have an incentive to hire more untrained staff, but they also lack the resources to provide them with in-service training (AFT 2002; Giangreco & Doyle 2007). Union reports and several of our interviews, particularly with participants outside the Global North and in rural areas, attest to the impact of privatization on the offer of professional development for ESP (AFT 2002; Barrio & Hollingshead 2017; EI 2023; FNE 2023).



In some cases, cuts have affected training that unions had successfully fought for. For example, the Brazilian Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores em Educação CNTE reports that cuts in public education funding under the 2019-2022 Bolsonaro government directly affected the training budgets established by the previous government for ESP (EI 2023). Similarly, in Italy, cuts have suspended the professional development courses that ESP need to complete to advance in their careers, according to an agreement negotiated by the main unions. As a result, *“people are stuck in their position”* (Representative UIL-S, Italy, January 2024).

In some cases, budgets are reduced rather than eliminated. Studies show that, when faced with limited resources, authorities and employers prioritize training on tasks relevant to accountability and reporting requirements. This means that the availability of training will depend on where someone is employed and whether their role require mandatory training rather than on actual needs of the individual ESP (Conley et al. 2010). In practice, this can mean that employers prioritize the professional development of teachers and sometimes learning assistants over that of other ESP. For example, Odden et al. (2006), analyzing the implementation of accountability-based reforms in a US city, report how one district decided to focus on professional development by “allocating almost unlimited resources for training” (p. 11). Learning assistants benefited from this development by receiving the same level of professional development that was available to teachers. To pay for this training, however, districts cut back on food and nutrition, maintenance, as well as administrative and clerical personnel.

However, for ESP themselves, and sometimes for their employers, professional development is essential. Our interviews revealed that unions have stepped up their own provision for ESP to make up for the lack of training by the public sector (see, Section 7.3.1). In other cases, ESP are turning to the private sector to keep up with developments in their respective fields of work. One participant told us that she had completed more than eight Microsoft certifications over the past few years to keep up with the updates and responsibilities of her job maintaining the school’s technology infrastructure. Yet because the school leadership would only fund professional development courses for teachers and learning assistants, she had done all of them *“on my own private time and with my own private money cause the school does NOT invest in ESP training”* (Individual ESP, Italy, February 2024, emphasis in the original).

However, the privatization of the training offer itself can limit the reach and recognition of certificates on the labor market. Broadbent and Burgess (2003) portray an initiative by Catholic private schools in Australia, which involved learning assistants in the development of professional needs in inclusive communities. While the program was judged to be useful, it was tailored towards the needs and ethos of Catholic schools, and

thus provided less value for those looking for employment outside the private school sector. Similarly, not all school leaders recognize privately granted certificates as valid or valuable when choosing where to place responsibilities. This was, for example, the case of the individual ESP cited above, whose proactive engagement in courses to receive various Microsoft certifications was not fully recognized by the school leadership, who continued to outsource increasing aspects of the school's technical infrastructure to private companies.

4.4.2 Limiting Access to Professional Development

Privatization through attrition, outsourcing, and public funding shortfalls can limit not only the supply of professional development, but also the demand by reducing the time, energy, and financial resources that workers can devote to training. The impact of these developments varies across roles, thus introducing further heterogeneity in access to professional development.

Broken schedules, long hours, and multiple locations complicate access to professional development. This is particularly true for those roles that come with no entitlement (or duty) for professional development, which are typically the roles requiring less prestigious certificates in the first place. A union representative from Costa Rica emphasized that all categories of staff had come forward with demands for more training that would allow them to integrate into the pedagogical community and increase their confidence in supporting students. However, she added:

Security agents, for example, have very different work schedules. Some work from six in the morning until four in the afternoon. Others come in from four o'clock in the afternoon until ten o'clock at night, and then there are others who work from ten o'clock at night until two o'clock in the morning ... The time they have for training and education is limited by their workday. This means that when they want to contribute something to the school, they may not have enough knowledge to integrate. And so, what they do is they tend to stay away from working with students and teachers. Janitors and cooks are in a very similar situation also because their salaries don't allow them to go for training. (Representative SEC, Costa Rica, February 2024)

As the participant also pointed out, when training is not free, costs are another barrier to participation for those in low-wage jobs.

New forms of management that require staff to work across schools make access to professional development more difficult, even for those roles that are entitled to professional development. The following example from a union representative in Quebec illustrates how the lack of a



comprehensive training strategy can prevent employees from exercising their right to professional training in practice.

A professional such as a school psychologist may work at four or five different schools each week. Ultimately, it's up to the principal of each school to decide if they have access to training on any given day. For example, if a professional says, "I need autism training", the director can respond, "Do you have autistic children in my school? No? Well, even if you work with autistic children in some of the other schools, I say no. Because on Tuesdays, when the training takes place, you're in my school". There's no global vision for the realization of the right to training, and this creates problems for professionals who would like us to recognize all their tasks, all their activities, and not just work according to the short-term vision of a principal. (Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec, January 2024)

Other participants discussed the impact of privatization by attrition on access to professional development. Specifically, they noted a negative spiral where new forms of pressure and accountability reduce the energy – and even desire – to think about anything else than the here and now. As one individual ESP put it when discussing whether ESP actively engage in trainings or union meetings after work, support staff are often *"navigating two or even three different job positions a day and are often filling in tasks when someone's away. This means that there is no time for anything outside of the working day"* (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024). Where training is not linked to career progression, or even implies considerable cost for potential participants themselves, the incentives for ESP to attend existing offers are particularly low (Ashbaker & Morgan 2001; Sorsby 2004).

5. Material Dimensions

Working conditions that respect their health, safety and dignity are a right of all workers (ILO 2022). As discussed in Section 4, they are also necessary to achieve the goal of quality education for all. Indeed, the amount of time, stability, and resources ESP can devote to building pedagogical relationships and contributing to a school's educational project is directly related to their working conditions. If ESP are employed on short-term contracts that require them to change employers repeatedly, or if they are sent from school to school by privately operated agencies, they cannot engage in the long-term collaborations needed to fully support students. Long hours, low pay, and uncertainty about being able to work in the same position in the medium term all reduce the means to engage in professional development. However, as the literature shows, privatization and public funding shortfalls are exacerbating the conditions that would enable ESP and school systems to turn the tide.

Material working conditions are the bread and butter of trade union work. In this report, we focus on four aspects. These are working time and workload (Section 5.1); pay, benefits, and career progression (Section 5.2); work stability (Section 5.3); and, finally, health and safety (Section 5.4).

5.1 *Work Time and Workload*

Although no systematic data exist, studies suggest that the regulation of ESP work varies widely across countries and roles. In some countries, ESP tend to have full-time contracts with guaranteed benefits on par with other public employees. In other contexts, working hours for some roles are linked to the opening hours of schools and, as a result, ESP in these roles are typically employed on a part-time basis (Butler 2019; Conley et al. 2010; McCain 2009). US data shows that, for example, food service workers (58%) and crossing guards (95%) are more likely to work part-time, while teacher assistants (43%) and secretaries (18%) are less likely to do so (AFT 2002, 7). National (and sub-national) regulations, traditions, and collective bargaining agreements all contribute to shaping the extent to which positions are defined as being full-time or part-time, as well as the conditions of their length and renewal. However, as this section shows, privatization is changing the dynamics of ESP work time and workloads overall.

Defining roles as being part-time is a double-edged sword. For some, the opportunity to work part-time can be attractive. For instance, school secretaries interviewed by Conley et al. (2010) appreciated the ability to combine work and care responsibilities in their role. At the same time, in



practice part-time roles are only open to certain groups (e.g., couples with multiple incomes) and can put workers in financial distress (Conley et al. 2010). This is even more the case where benefits such as pensions, paid or parental leave, or sick pay are linked to full-time employment and/or salary thresholds. As noted by a union representative based in the US, low salaries due to part-time work is also a major impediment to unionization since even the lowest tier of union dues can break the budget of ESP whose income places them near the national poverty line (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024).

The situation is even worse if the paycheck reflects someone's part-time status, but the actual hours worked do not. As described below, however, privatization and cuts in public funding are making such cases still more likely, with implications for individual levels of stress and financial well-being, as well as the provision of quality education for all.

5.1.1 Increasing and Fragmenting the Workload

Privatization and public funding shortfalls increase the workload in two ways. First, they multiply the tasks that ESP are called upon to perform. Second, they reduce the number of people hired to do them. In interviews, participants discussed several examples of such shifts in workload and their effects on the experiences and recognition of ESP. A participant from Spain described how, as a result of staff cuts, his tasks were both increasing and overlapping more frequently:

One consequence of privatization is that, in my professional category, Control and Information Assistant [i.e., technical and maintenance personnel], many jobs have been eliminated across schools ... Obviously, the lack of personal resources increases work pressure. Tasks multiply and accumulate at the same time in many cases, such as class changes, breaks, arrivals and departures.

(Individual ESP, Spain, February 2024)

However, his salary had not been adjusted accordingly.

A union representative from Italy shared how, in the last two decades, schools had begun outsourcing maintenance and food and nutrition tasks only to realize that many private providers were either over-charging for services or not delivering what had been promised. As a result, the tasks were reintegrated into public provision, but without supplying the staff or resources needed for adequately realizing them.

Without a warning, they [administrators] again reassigned the task of cleaning to custodians, all those people that until that moment had only watched over the students and helped the teachers move

materials and furniture around to set up more effective learning environments. They suddenly had cleaning as one of their tasks without an increase of the salary or an adequate increase in staff numbers to replace external cleaning services. (Representative UIL-S, January 2024)

Studies show that the detrimental effect of privatization on workload is not only caused by direct cutting of staff, but can also emerge as effects of hidden privatization that instigate precarious restructurings within existing public services (Ball & Youdell 2008). In an example centering on school transportation personnel in the US, Restrepo et al. (2015) note that school districts were limited in “increasing workloads of the drivers and bus aides given the logistics of getting kids to school on time, whereas there could be pressure placed on mechanics to speed up work and to do more with fewer workers” (p. 264, see also Conley et al. 2010).

Another documented effect of privatization by attrition, and related policies of test-based accountability, is that they incentivize teachers to focus their attention on stronger students and the academic content included in standardized tests (Berliner 2011; Booher-Jennings 2005; Levatino et al. 2023; Lubienski 2005; Menken 2008). As a result, teachers have less time to devote to other students and to tasks that are essential to make education happen, such as providing emotional support. As noted by several participants, it is often ESP who pick up the slack and who find themselves dealing with the consequences of (dis-)stressed students in buses, cafeterias, and schoolyards. As students and their families face increasing welfare cuts and poverty, both the distress and the tasks ESP further increase, with ESP reporting having to assemble food bags and help with welfare checks even in richer countries (Unison 2022; Williams 2023).

Public funding shortfalls mean that staffing levels are dictated by financial constraints rather than educational needs. Reports from several countries suggest that recruitment has not been matched to demand – quite the opposite. In a 2018 Unison survey in the UK, 87% of ESP members indicated that cuts had recently been made or announced in their schools: “Remaining staff are usually left formally with the same amount of work, but fewer colleagues do it” (Unison 2018; see also FNE 2023). These difficulties are reflected in a recent study of janitors working in Turkey, where administrative staff acknowledged a mismatch between an increasing number of tasks and the formal working hours (Karatas & Caner 2024).

Increases in de facto duties of ESP are rarely reflected in official wages and workloads. Examples from the literature include Quebec, where, instead of increasing their official hours in contracts, ESP are increasingly hired on broken schedules. Their official working hours may be 15 hours per week.



However, their workdays start at 7 a.m. and end at 6 p.m. from Monday through Friday – with long forced breaks in the middle of the day when the children are in class (Butler 2019). Similarly, participants and studies on other countries report that, due to increasing and increasingly fragmented responsibilities, ESP report skipping lunches and breaks to meet their work obligations (e.g., Ernst-Slavit & Wenger 2006; Unison 2018).

The lack of compensation for increasing workloads further devalues these professions, both materially and socially. This means that – even if employers are willing to hire new staff – it might be difficult to find them (Unison 2018). This dynamic, in turn, is itself fueling new waves of privatization as schools and authorities turn to agencies to find and employ personnel (Butler 2019; El 2023).

5.1.2 Pressure and Individual Well-being

Increasing workloads have implications for the well-being of ESP. Studies of workload typically approach work-related stress and job burnout based on a combination of factors, including physical demands, psychological demands, decision latitude, skill discretion, and social support (both managerial and from coworkers) (Karasek & Theorell 1990). This combination of factors is very much present in the work life of ESP. Surveys by trade unions in the UK and US report increasing levels of stress among ESP linked to unrealistic deadlines, improper staffing levels, and poor management (AFT 2002; Unison 2018). Many ESP report that they feel that the quality of their work is suffering as a result—a feeling that further adds to the level of stress they experience. In the UK, 80% of the 6000 ESP surveyed by Unison in 2018 reported that they felt they were neglecting their core duties, and that they felt overwhelmed and anxious as a result.

These findings apply across roles. Restrepo et al. (2015) surveyed 859 public school county transportation workers – including bus drivers, bus aides, mechanics, and clerical workers – at three bus depots in the US southeast. They find that increasing job demands due to budget cuts interact with decreasing control over their job in generating negative psychosomatic effects and emotional exhaustion. The study diagnoses “overall sense of apathy and helplessness among all of the employees” involved – a situation the authors directly link to “[s]uccessive years of budget cuts have led to stagnant wages and little investment in the worksites that were rundown” (Restrepo et al. 2015, 262).

5.2 Pay, Benefits, and Career Progression

As a result of their commitment to providing high-quality, nurturing, and safe school environments, many ESP face significant financial challenges. Despite working long hours, in many roles, ESP are among the lowest paid workers in schools and their opportunities for career progression are extremely limited (AFT 2002; Aketch 2022; Butler 2019; Giangreco & Doyle 2007).

In countries as diverse as the US (AFT 2018) and Zimbabwe (Butler 2019), most ESP earn salaries that do not allow them to support a family. While precise data are scarce, surveys suggest that this situation can be generalized to other contexts, with wages being particularly low for certain occupations, such as janitors, food preparers, and cleaners (Butler 2019; Wolfe & Kamper 2021). Employment patterns in which ESP are hired only during the weeks that schools are in session mean that, in addition to facing low pay and long hours during the school year, these staff members are not employed during extended breaks, which can be 10 weeks or more in some countries (McCain 2009; Wolfe & Kamper 2021).

Low wages and part-time work can also affect access to benefits. For example, food and transport personnel, especially when these jobs are outsourced, are often not employed during school holidays in the US. As a result, they are considered part-time workers. This in turn means that they do not always receive sick or vacation leave (McCain 2009). Some find maintenance or teaching assistant work between trips to make up work hours (AFT 2002) or seek other employment during breaks (Wolfe & Kamper 2021). In South Africa, workers in the National School Nutrition Programme are employed on short-term contracts that do not provide access to benefits such as unemployment insurance (Labour Research Service 2023).

In its 2002 *Education at a Glance Report*, the OECD stated that “Teacher salary levels can affect both the desirability of entering the teaching profession and the ability of schools to retain the most skilled teachers” (p. 208). The same reasoning also applies to ESP. To avoid retention problems, salaries must be attractive relative to other employment opportunities (AFT 2002; Ghere & York Barr 2007; Hay et al. 2021). If they are not, then schools will begin to bleed their expertise into the private sector.

This is exactly what many see happening. Where salaries are competitive, alternative work is becoming increasingly attractive. As noted by a union representative based in the UK:

You've got other employers out there, even supermarkets now are alternative employers. And people will think, "I can remain in my job with all the pressure that it implies, or I can go and sit at a till in a shop". For some support staff there are alternatives out there and they could probably find in the current labor market. Obviously,



people who work in the education sector generally love it. The education bit is what they enjoy. The rest of the stuff that goes with it that's the problem. (Representative NEU, United Kingdom, February 2024)

Indeed, surveys show that, in 2022, almost 50% of ESP in the UK were actively looking for a better-paid job, including in retail (Unison 2022). But even for roles in which wages are (above) average, performing them in a public school context—rather than for instance as a private IT consultant or a psychologist in a business firm—generally implies a loss of pay (Ghere & York Barr 2007). A study from CSQ in Quebec, based on extensive data collection across school boards and centers, shows that the private companies to which schools turned for professional services, such as speech therapy, charged between C\$60 and C\$350 per hour. The corresponding salaries for staff hired within the public-school sector ranged from C\$26.23 to C\$48.59 (FPPE-CSQ 2022).

Career ladders, and thus the ability to improve one's position and pay with experience, are also limited in many roles. This phenomenon applies to the education system more generally (Coolahan 2002), but in many ESP roles the career ladders appear to be even flatter. Sometimes progression is possible in theory, but may be impossible in practice due to lack of funding for or provision of opportunities for professional development (see, Section 4.4).

These patterns of pay, benefits, and career opportunities are part and parcel of broader social inequalities. Chopra et al. (2004, 228) quote one US participant as saying: "if the districts would respect us and compensate us for what we do, that would really be better. Because right now we just have to accept what [rewards and compensation] comes from the kids". This reasoning reflects what sociologists call the "prisoner of love" phenomenon. Employers and society use emotional satisfaction as a reason to legitimize structurally low pay – a justification that has been found to be particularly prevalent in care-related jobs held primarily by women, and even more prevalent in positions where women and minority workers are overrepresented (England 2005) – such as some ESP roles (AFT 2002; Wolfe & Kamper 2021).

Wages for some ESP roles have traditionally been low. However, the literature identifies several mechanisms through which privatization and public funding shortfalls are exerting further pressure on wages – across roles.

5.2.1 Decreasing Alignment between the Workload and Pay

One mechanism through which privatization and public funding shortfalls affect the financial remuneration of ESP work is by adding tasks to their workload (see, Section 4.2). When responsibilities and working hours increase, but salaries do not keep pace, work becomes financially devalued.

Learning assistants are a particularly well-documented case in point. Patterson (2006) finds that in the US they are often asked to substitute teach, even though it is not part of their official duties. While some enjoy the responsibility, 77% of the study's participants reported that they were expected to do so without specific instruction or financial compensation (p. 6). According to Butler (2019), the situation is similar across countries and roles. ESP in all countries surveyed report that they are expected to work overtime and during holidays without extra pay. The percentages are particularly high in Zimbabwe, suggesting that the situation may be worse in the Global South.

However, salaries are not only not keeping pace with workloads and responsibilities; they are also falling in real terms. The most reliable data comes from the US and UK. Unison reports a 25% drop in the value of pay for some ESP roles in England from 2010 to 2024 (Unison 2024). The AFT (2002), notes “a disconcerting trend to reduce the number of hours worked by paraprofessionals so that their total hours fall under the threshold number to qualify for benefits” (p. 7). Such procedures not only create more hardship for the workers involved, especially the most vulnerable, but also further reduce their visibility. When workers fall below a standard number of hours per year, they are not counted in US labor statistics—making it more difficult to evidence their struggles (AFT 2002).

Another worrying consequence of underinvestment is the branding of ESP work as “voluntary” work that is a community duty. An example of this is the National School Nutrition Programme in South Africa, which classifies 60 000 workers as volunteers and pays them a stipend, rather than a salary (Labour Research Service 2023). The workers employed in this role are typically women (Labour Research Service 2023), further illustrating the highly gendered nature of the “prisoners of love” phenomenon (England 2005). In many places, ESP—like teachers—feel compelled to compensate for the consequences of austerity out of their own pockets. A third of ESP in the UK contribute to children’s well-being not only through (unpaid) work, but also by paying themselves for lunches, uniforms and stationary (Unison 2022).

5.2.2 Outsourcing and Pay

Outsourcing is another driver of wage erosion. Around the world, cuts in public funding are leading the public sector to outsource ESP work to private companies (EI 2023). These can be private firms contracted to perform a task (e.g., a cleaning company) or agencies that provide employees on their payroll directly to schools. Regardless of their specific nature, private employers tend to pay their employees less. They are often allocated services based on the extent to which they can promise to fulfil them at a lower cost. To stay within budget, they typically lower salaries



and benefits, or compromise on quality by hiring less qualified people (AFT 2002; Aketch 2022; Cohen & Allen 2021; McCain 2009).

Private providers may find it easier to lower wages, because, although this has not always been the case, the private sector is currently less unionized than the public sector (Blanchflower & Bryson 2007; Farber 2005; Schneider 2022). Low unionization rates give private employers more leverage to compress wages (Cho 2019; Hermann & Flecker 2012; see also Section 6.2). An AFT survey in 2022 found that, in the US, ESP salaries were generally higher in areas with higher union coverage. Labor statistics show that in South Korea, where outsourcing is particularly common, 53 percent of outsourced and subcontracted workers were not covered by the national pension system in 2013, and 61 percent did not have access to unemployment benefits (Cho 2019, 55).

Even where workers remain within the scope of the public sector, the fragmentation and multiplication of employers and contracts makes it harder for unions to defend them, with obvious implications for wages. For example, Conservative governments in the UK have pushed for schools to become autonomous academies, and many schools in England and Wales are now run by academy trusts that operate multiple types of schools. In 2023, unions were involved in a battle to defend ESP who were being withheld pay by a large academy trust, which claimed that, it intended to only implement a legally negotiated pay award in specific types of schools (Chinchen 2023). This case illustrates a more general phenomenon. Privatization is increasing the variation in the pay and conditions of ESP across schools (Blatchford et al. 2012), making it harder for unions to negotiate pay conditions and ensure that they are upheld.

5.2.3 Outsourcing, Invisibility, and Precarity

Privatization by attrition can also have more insidious effects. A 2018 Unison report highlights an important one. A typical consequence of privatization by attrition is budget autonomy where schools become responsible for how they spend, and sometimes raise, the money that goes to fund staff salaries. One effect of such a policy is to make ESP feel responsible for the financial well-being of the school. Indeed, some UK interviewees reported that they were afraid to ask for better pay (for example, to cover their overtime) because they felt it might lead to problems in balancing the school budget.

As the cost of living rises around the world, the impact of stagnant or falling salaries is being felt directly, even in wealthier countries. In 2022, Unison surveyed ESP in the UK and found that 98% were concerned about their pay not being sufficient to cover the rising cost of living. Members reported skipping meals and not heating their homes. The situation is even more dramatic in the Global South, where representatives report withheld

salaries and increasing shares of work being branded as voluntary (Aktech 2023; Labour Research Service 2023). A participant from Costa Rica described how outsourcing often meant that employees lost benefits because private employers are less regulated:

Benefits are removed. For example, private employers take away pension and bonus entitlements, or in the case of security guards, overtime. So the guards will work extra hours on their days off, outside of their contracts, to get some extra money. They need this extra money because of the low salaries. (Representative SER, Costa Rica, February 2024)

In terms of career progression, the impact of privatization and public funding cuts is more ambiguous. Indeed, in some countries, the need to hire more ESP—as a less expansive way to finance the expansion of educational provision—combined with union pressure has forced authorities to formalize career progression in some roles. For example, in 2003, in response to a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention, the then UK government signed an agreement with trade unions and providers in England and Wales that provided new pathways for progression (Blatchford et al. 2012). However, such initiatives tend to be limited to roles such as learning assistants and, as in the case of the UK, are not accompanied by pay increases that unions and workers consider to be appropriate.

In other situations, the tendency to hire ESP on part-time contracts can serve as a proxy for avoiding competitive examinations and structured negotiations regarding promotions and pay increases for certain roles. As discussed by a union representative based in Spain:

Here in Spain, there have been, I don't exaggerate, 20, 25 years without competitive exams in many categories. I mean, imagine, people who entered a profession when they were 30 years old, and now they're 50-something years old and they've always been temporary workers. They've always worked, often at the same place, but have never had a permanent position. And because they are temporary and not permanent, they haven't been promoted because promotions are only for permanent staff. (Representative F.E.CC. OO., Spain, February 2024)

Structural discrimination of certain job categories and its impact on career progression can be further amplified by gendered, racial, and geographic inequalities. The latter issue was raised in a poignant case discussed by a union representative based in Uruguay regarding the considerable difference between the “elitist” conceptions of the government and educational boards based in the capitol of Montevideo and the realities of



schooling in more rural areas where “*support staff and teachers work hand in hand*” (Representative ATEs, Uruguay, February 2024). As a result of this distance, support staff in areas with fewer resources and weak union participation are made more vulnerable to decisions of governments to ‘streamline’ the education system by introducing privatization measures such as increased accountability of time and outsourcing of distinct functions.

5.3 Work Stability

In order to be integrated into pedagogical teams, to invest in training, and to build relationships to support students and communities, ESP need long-term and stable employment contracts that provide protection from unwarranted staff reductions. The literature also links job stability to workers’ well-being and ability to plan for their future and that of their families (Salvatori 2010). From an efficiency perspective, high turnover creates significant costs related to recruiting, training, and adaptation (Cotton & Tuttle 1986; Dube et al. 2010; Jacobs & Graham-Squire 2010).

Looking across studies and reports on ESP contracts, it is important to note that typical contracts vary widely across countries and roles. As a result of collective bargaining, some countries still have strong protections and collective agreements in place, particularly in the public sector and for administrative roles (e.g., Canada). In other countries, such as South Korea (Cho 2019), Honduras, and Chile (Arancibia 2014), also as a result of outsourcing, more precarious contracts are increasingly becoming, or have already become, the norm. In all contexts, however, privatization is reshaping the nature of contracts and the stability of ESP employment.

5.3.1 Short-term Contracts

Work stability and the lack thereof is a major concern for ESP whose lack of formal recognition often leaves them in a position of economic vulnerability. In many cases discussed in literature as well as in interviews for this report, this vulnerability appears to be exacerbated by the socioeconomic status of ESP as well as the gendered nature of ESP work in different countries (Arancibia 2014; Cho 2019; Chopra et al. 2004). In the following excerpt, a union representative based in the US reflects on her former work as a school bus driver employed through temporary contracts.

I used to be faced with the threat of being let go at the end of the year because there wasn't enough funding. And it was an awful, awful experience for me. I was a single mom. I was raising two kids...

And to get that notice in May saying that you might not have a job and you must wait until August to find out is a horrible feeling. Because then you had to figure out how you were going to survive for those months. And then when August came and you got the notice that you were coming back to work, it was like, okay, my life is back to normal again. (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024)

Other participants confirmed the negative effects of short-term contracts, the ability to be fired easily, and constant staff turnover on individual ESP, many of whom, like the interviewee above, are often also primary caretakers at home. As noted in the following excerpt from a union representative based in Costa Rica, these effects are exacerbated in contexts where schools use the threat of outsourcing as a way to prevent investments in ESP working conditions.

The risk of privatization limits the interaction of support staff with students. But it is only an employment issue, a matter of fear of losing one's job for fear of making a mistake. So, these staff members keep to themselves and focus exclusively on the function that they are required to perform. And they avoid participating in other things in the school. Because of the fear of attracting attention and the risk of losing their jobs. (Representative SER, Costa Rica, February 2024)

Research in the UK and reports from across Africa all find that short-term contracts and their late renewal are among the conditions that most contribute to ESP feeling stressed (Aketch 2022; Hammett & Burton 2005). They also have obvious consequences for the stability of educational teams, continuity for students and their families, and thus for the quality of schooling.

5.3.2 Linking Employment to Market-like Logics

Studies and interviews point to both outsourcing (McCain 2009) and market-based decentralization as key drivers of instability. The latter may not be obvious. However, several countries, including France, Italy and Portugal, have moved in recent decades to decentralize ESP employment, delegating it from central authorities to local authorities and schools. While, conceptually, decentralization does not equal privatization as long as tasks remain within the public sector, a participant from France described how, in practice, these moves often imply a narrowing understanding of the public:

In France, maintenance and catering staff are no longer managed by the central government, but by regions and departments. You might



think, “Great, that gives us new management capabilities”. But at the same time, the French state has limited resources. For example, the regions used to be able to rely on business taxes to generate their own fiscal resources, but now they no longer have that option. So this decentralization is in fact a form of privatization, since the central authorities are telling the local authorities to manage maintenance and catering staff, but to do so with the means they are given... too bad if the costs increase. Outsourcing often follows. (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024)

Decentralization coupled with austerity does not only limit funding for ESP. In the absence of strong collective bargaining agreements, school autonomy means that principals or districts can more easily hire ESP on precarious contracts and, therefore, more easily fire them. This is also because ESP’s wages, unlike those of teachers are sometimes paid out of the operating budget for infrastructure, over which schools typically have more autonomy (Butler 2019). As a result, as reported by unions around the world, ESP are the first to be laid off when school budgets become tight (EI 2023) – and when crises occur. African unions report that many ESP lost their jobs during the pandemic, because their contracts allowed schools or authorities to dismiss them as soon as schools closed (Aketch 2023).

In many cases, decentralization interacts with school choice, another increasingly common policy worldwide, to shape working conditions. School choice introduces a market principle to schooling by allowing parents to choose among schools that compete for students and funding (Ball & Youdell 2008; Gingrich 2011; Verger et al. 2016). For ESP with insecure contracts, this combination of policies only contributes to making their positions even more insecure, either because funding for their position depends on the total number of students enrolled, or because their employment hinges on the number of particular categories of pupils (e.g., students with special needs or bilingual students).

In Italy, for example, a union representative discussed the consequences of municipal employment and weak job protection. While teachers are employed by the state and can bargain collectively at the national level, municipal employment puts learning assistants at greater risk of layoffs if the student population changes.

If schools stop receiving children with disabilities because no parent ask to enroll their children there... then teaching assistants are out of work. Teachers who work with disabled children can move within the state system and go back to teaching their subject or change schools if they want to. But the people who work as teaching assistants have to be hired on another contract to keep working. They cannot be sure that they will be able to find work in another school and continue to have a salary. (Representative UIL-S, Italy, February 2024)

Examples such as the one discussed above illustrate the risks of austerity and school choice policies with regards to the working conditions of teaching assistants and other ESP whose employment is hinged on a market-like logic that follows student enrolment (see, Butler 2019 for other examples).

The combination of school autonomy and austerity is reflected across most of the available research which documents the different ways in which schools are reshuffling roles in the effort to save resources. ESP in the UK report that “staffing restructures have almost become a way of life in many schools” (Unison 2018). Due to funding cuts, restructuring often means a reduction in staff. As analyzed by a Canadian teaching assistant in Butler’s (2019, 46) survey: “Each year, the number of positions decreases, despite the fact that the needs increase”. Even in highly unionized countries such as Canada and New Zealand, ESP report that they may not know whether they have a job for the coming school year until a few weeks before the school year starts (Butler 2019; AFT 2002).

5.4 Health and Safety

Schools without proper health and safety measures are not only dangerous for students and staff but also reduce attendance and educational performance (Alexander et al. 2013). Hazardous school environments are a direct result of limited budgets and a general inability to fund both proper materials and the staff required to maintain buildings and infrastructure. Research in Kenya, for example, shows that while investments in improving the infrastructure generally helped, the schools who profited most were those who also prioritized funds to hire support staff to maintain it locally. Hiring such staff relieved students of cleaning duties, allowing them to stay in class longer; required teachers to spend less time supervising student work; and increased the effective use of cleaning supplies (Alexander et al. 2013).

Many of the tasks performed by ESP around the world can be unsafe if proper training, infrastructures, and protections are lacking. Some of these hazards are role-specific. For example, professionals who work with dangerous substances and equipment in kitchens and laboratories or who are required to do hard physical work as transportation personnel, maintenance staff, or caring for children with physical disabilities, need specific training and quality infrastructure. But working with a cross-section of children and young people (and their parents) in general can be dangerous to the physical and mental health of individuals if they are not trained to deal with crisis situations and are not protected from violence.

In many ways, privatization and cuts in public funding are affecting both the physical and human environments in which ESP work, with significant consequences for their health and safety. The climate crisis and ongoing warfare in some countries only exacerbate this situation (Unesco 2011).



5.4.1 Unsafe Infrastructures

Proper funding and continuous dialogue with students and staff are vital to ensure adequate and beneficent investments in buildings, resources, and other infrastructures that enable schools to thrive. Due to material neglect and funding cuts, however, health and safety are often major concerns for ESP – and especially for those whose jobs include more direct physical contact with hazardous materials, technologies, or spaces (Butler 2019). As shown in the photograph below shared by an IT technician employed at an Italian upper secondary school, lack of resources can mean that schools often have to prioritize between student-related investments and material investments. As she explained:

We [support staff] are often the ones who see problems in the building or in the technological infrastructure and bring them to principals' attention. But there are not enough resources... But working in a humid environment is definitely not good for anyone's health, especially for someone like me who already has respiratory problems. (Individual ESP, Italy, February 2024)

Surveys confirm that health and safety is a major concern for ESP. In their ethnography of learning assistants in the US, Ernst-Slavit and Wenger (2006) cite inadequate classroom and infrastructure conditions as a standard feature of ESP work. The classrooms assigned to learning assistants were often noisy, lacked ventilation, and were generally unsafe. However, this may only be the tip of the iceberg. In Butler's (2019) survey, 41% of ESP respondents from the Philippines, 37% from Zimbabwe, and 31% from Brazil reported feeling unsafe at work. This seems to indicate that health and safety is a particular concern in the Global South, a finding that is linked to both unsafe infrastructure and increasing violence.



Image 5: Humidity in a school building in Italy
(Individual ESP, Italy, February 2024).

5.4.2 Neglecting Health and Safety

In studies of ESP, increasing risks to workers' health and safety are often directly related to funding shortfalls and increasing workloads. ESP across the world take on an increasing number of responsibilities during the day due to lacking funding and structuring – some of which may require specialist training – but may lack proper training in relevant safety procedure or simply lack the time to consider them.

Ko and Jeon's (2019) study on South Korea is a case in point. Accordingly, safety policies in South Korea are designed primarily with teachers and students in mind, while little is known about the specific risks of ESP. Risks are distributed accordingly. Using official statistics, the authors find a high number of reported injuries among food and maintenance personnel. Both groups were at significant higher at risk of injury than teachers (Ko & Jeon 2019, 572). By directly relating such risks to subcontracting and labor turnover, the study documents the risk that limited training and working in unfamiliar places pose to ESP. Other studies confirm that standardized working processes, adequate training, and proper onsite supervision are crucial to ensure the health and safety of ESP (AFT 2002).

The lack of proper consideration for the health safety also affects the mental health of ESP. Increased physical and psychological demands, coupled with a lack of social support and decision-making latitude, have been shown to contribute to work-related stress and job burnout (Karasek & Theorell 1990). And indeed, surveys report increasing stress levels among ESP due to both the changing nature of their work and the increasing precariousness of their contracts and working conditions. (AFT 2002; Restrepo et al. 2015; Unison 2018).

While the negative impact of stressful school environments and working with vulnerable children on teachers is well documented (McIntyre et al. 2018; Mérida Lopez et al. 2017), we were unable to find any comprehensive documentation for similar effects on ESP. However, it is likely that comparable situations would also affect ESP profoundly, especially since many roles require professionals to work as closely as teachers, or even closer, with children and their families. At the same time, as the findings in Section 4.4 suggest, ESP tend to have less access to professional development that might help them deal with these situations. This adds to the increased stress documented in surveys due to increasing workloads, insecure contracts, and rising rates of child poverty in some countries (Butler 2019).



6. Social Dimensions

Individuals do not choose careers solely on the basis of material rewards. Whether someone enters a profession and then stays in it also depends on whether they feel that their work is socially valued and that they have a voice in shaping it. The social status of professions is linked to, but not entirely determined by, material conditions. Local cultures, the characteristics of the people who perform particular roles, and their presence in public and political life all shape the extent to which professions are socially valued, the degree to which they are organized, and the strength of their collective and individual voice (Abbott 1988; Hammett & Burton 2007).

This section examines how privatization and public funding shortfalls affect these three aspects, focusing on the status (Section 6.1), unionization (Section 6.2), and voice (Section 6.3) of ESP. There is very little research on how privatization affects these social dimensions. This section therefore draws largely on our conversations with union representatives and individual ESP while consulting academic work on public sector work and representation more generally where relevant.

6.1 Status and Visibility of ESP Work

In interviews with union representatives and individual ESP participating in this report, assessments of the social status of ESP roles varied widely. This variation is consistent with findings of the professional status literature, which identifies qualifications, visibility, and demographic characteristics as key factors contributing to professions' social status (Abbott 1988; Abbott & Meerabeau 2020; Butler 2019; Chopra et al. 2004; England 2005). ESP roles vary widely across all three dimensions.

First, the qualifications needed to perform ESP roles vary widely. Some roles require tertiary degrees, while others have few or no formal qualification requirements. The people working in the latter, as noted in the literature, often have "to prove themselves because they [are] not viewed as professionals" (Chopra et al. 2004, 228).

Second, the visibility of ESP roles by parents and the public also vary. For example, many people will intuitively know what a school nurse does but may find it difficult to grasp the myriad of tasks of maintenance or clerical personnel and to understand how they relate to children's education. Such understandings (or lack of the same) are reflected among the participants; as one of our participants noted, they themselves did not know what a teaching assistant did when they were first approached about entering the profession (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024).

Third and finally, the social status of a professional role is also closely linked to the characteristics of the people associated with it. This is where intersectional dynamics come into play. For instance, the literature shows that, while effects can be context-specific (Magnusson 2009), many professional roles traditionally performed by women – particularly those associated with notions of caring – tend to have a lower status than roles with similar skill requirements that are more male-dominated (England 2005). The gendered nature of roles intersects with their class composition, and with whether they are more likely to be performed by indigenous population or by minorities in determining their social value (Dustmann et al. 2022; OECD 2020). As discussed in Section 3, the social and ethnic composition of ESP roles vary. Especially roles with lower qualification requirements tend to be filled by people from ethnic minorities and lower social classes– a situation demonstrating once again how important it is to improve education systems' capacity to promote equality (Butler 2019; Chopra et al. 2004; Domina et al. 2017).

Social status has material effects on salaries and working conditions. Ethnographic work finds that it is also inscribed in educational infrastructures. In a study of janitors in South Korea, Cho (2019) observes that their sense of being “at the bottom of the hierarchy” (562) is reinforced by them being assigned staff rooms in basements or under stairwells, which physically signal their separation (and different status) from the rest of the school (see also, Smilie 2022). This sentiment was echoed by one union representative and school conflict manager who observed that, when it comes to Portuguese ESP, *“it is as if they [management] chose the worst room in the school, they make it as ugly as possible, and then leave them there”* (Representative FNE, Portugal, January 2024). On the other hand, ESP professionals such as school psychologists or speech therapists are more likely to be assigned to more private and attractive offices.

Structural reasons related to credentialing, visibility, and demographics therefore contribute to determining the social and professional status of ESP roles and their stratification. This report finds that privatization reinforces both such stratification and devaluation at the bottom of the existing social hierarchy. It does so by promoting the disintegration of educational teams (Section 6.1.1), increasing the stratification of ESP roles (Section 6.1.2), devaluing ESP work relative to similar roles performed outside the public education sector (Section 6.1.3), while also having an ambiguous impact on the visibility of ESP work (Section 6.1.4).



Image 6: Pictures of different workplaces shared by ESP in Canada, Italy, Niger, Portugal, and Spain.



6.1.1 Disintegrating Educational Teams

The integration of ESP into a school's pedagogical team is not only key to improving the provision of inclusive, quality education (Section 4). It also affects ESP's social status. Only when the pedagogical dimension of all ESP roles is acknowledged can their work be given the recognition it deserves. Indeed, several participants expressed frustration at the fact that this aspect of their work was rarely acknowledged in public. A participant from Costa Rica exemplified this by discussing who was typically invited to pedagogical training in schools:

Pedagogical training is only for teachers. It is not for all staff, ESP and teachers. It's only for teachers. There we see inequality, both in wages and in training. Because really, ESPs also have the right to be certified and to learn... Cooks, guards or counselors have a very involved and nurturing relationship with the students.

(Representative SEC, Costa Rica, February 2024)

As repeated across interviews, the recognition of ESP as an invaluable part of public education provision and investments often begins with the development of collaborations at a local level, where teachers and ESP work as a team to foster an inclusive educational environment.

However, privatization is deteriorating the conditions for such collaborations. As discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.1, one apparent reason for this lack of integration is the increase in workloads faced almost ubiquitously by ESP across the world (Blatchford et al. 2011; Ghere & Yack-Barre 2007; Giangreco & Doyle 2007; Giangreco 2003). Outsourcing, which implies that ESP are managed by different employers and often work in different locations at the same time, further increases the distance between teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as between ESP and students. As ESP are less connected to and present in individual schools, they are less likely to be perceived as an integral part of the educational community by the remaining staff, by parents, and, ultimately, by members of governments and elsewhere in the public sphere.

Through the introduction of market logics, competition, and high stakes testing in education systems, privatization by attrition risks amplifying risks of devaluing the pedagogical aspect of ESP work. Such logics have produced a shift in dominant understandings of education, with a focus on measurable academic learning increasingly replacing more comprehensive understandings of education as a culturally embedded and relational process (Biesta 2010, 2011). This shift lessens educational professionalism in general, but specifically underappreciates work that seems to only indirectly contribute to testing regimes or mitigates their consequences for student inclusion and well-being (Heissel et al. 2021). It fails to recognize that, in the words of a participant from Uruguay: *"Education does not work without us"* (Representative ATEs, Uruguay, February 2024).



6.1.2 Amplifying Status Differences between School Staff

Privatization can increase not only the separation of educational communities, but also the hierarchies within them. Across countries, participants were adamant about the need to forge more equitable understandings of educational teams. As one participant from Costa Rica put it:

At the end of the day, we all have an education-related profession, whether it is as a teacher, a custodian, or a janitor. By formally distinguishing categories of personnel, we segregate and create inequality between groups, so why not unify the term education professionals? (Representative SEC, Costa Rica, February 2024)

This statement reflects a widespread view of the need to equalize the status of different ESP roles and, according to some participants, between ESP and teachers.

Privatization, however, pushes in the opposite direction. As a result of outsourcing, de-monopolization, and the (selective) decentralization of governance that often accompany privatization by attrition, staff in schools are increasingly subject to different working conditions set by different employers (Arancibia 2014; Butler 2019). Our conversations with participants revealed that this diversification leads to multiple levels of bargaining, increased competition among educational staff, and difficulties for union representation, all of which, as one participant from Zambia put it, serves to “*increase social stratification*” (Representative ZNUT, Zambia, January 2024).

First, due to decentralization and outsourcing, working conditions for employees are decreasingly negotiated centrally for several categories of staff at the same time. Instead, different levels of government and public and private agencies negotiate and set working conditions and regulations. Thus, in addition to the material conditions of ESP roles, their social status is also subject to negotiation. As a participant from Uruguay remarked, the social status of each role within the public sector “*depends on the will of each partner in the negotiation, in the conclusion of the negotiation of that role*” (Representative ATES, Uruguay, February 2024). Those who are more vulnerable to outsourcing and more easily replaced naturally have less leverage in negotiations, with obvious implications for the stratification of roles.

Second, in contexts characterized by shrinking public budgets, the diversification of employers, working conditions, and contracts promotes competition among ESP roles and between ESP and teachers. That new forms of management fuel individual ambition and tactical advantage is well documented in the literature (Diefenbach 2009). Our participants

observed this dynamic as well. One participant from Uruguay referred to this phenomenon as “self-discrimination”, as people begin to compare workloads and salaries, asking “*why does so-and-so do fewer tasks than me and why do I do more?*” (Representative ATES, Uruguay, February 2024). A French participant described this development particularly vividly. Privatization, he noted:

creates competition between categories. ... Because the system as a whole does not create unity nor, in fact, meritocracy. There is no standardized pay and career scale. I dare not say uniform, but at least standardized. As soon as there's competition, individualistic instincts kick in. (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024)

Such forms of competition threaten to divide the ESP workforce, ESP and teachers, and further fuel social hierarchies between roles (Clayton 1993). Scholars observe similar dynamics for the public sector more broadly (Hermann & Flecker 2012; Keune et al. 2008).

Finally, on a more practical level, the involvement of different employers and government levels complicates the work of trade unions. Increasingly, union representatives must be aware of, and work with, different employers, bargaining bodies, and types of contracts that often undergo rapid changes in terms. As several participants confirmed, this situation makes unions' efforts to improve working conditions harder and increases the risks of outsourcing and deteriorating working conditions, especially for those in more vulnerable positions.

An increase in the stratification of ESP work, with a concomitant devaluation of the roles placed at the bottom of the professional hierarchy, has concrete implications. Not only does it make it more difficult to integrate ESP into educational teams, but it also makes it easier for politicians or consultants to argue in favor of outsourcing their tasks. A union representative based in the US noted this dynamic:

When a school district wants to privatize ESP's careers, oftentimes the community doesn't fight it because they don't know much about school support staff and the impact privatizing these careers will have on the students. The majority of ESPs live in the communities they work in. For ESPs, this is not just a job, these are their careers. 65% of ESPs plan to stay in their career until retirement. The pay is nowhere near what it should be but ESPs love working with students and being a part of their success. (Representative NEA 2, United States, January 2024)

Even more worryingly, the devaluation of some ESP roles is fueling new forms of exploitation. As has been observed in some countries, this can



mean that staff in more senior positions take advantage of ESP with lower social status, exploiting their work for personal errands. It can also mean that ESP's work is viewed to hold so little professional value that it can be delegated to private individuals. Participants from contexts as diverse as Canada, Italy, and New Zealand described situations where schools are increasingly relying on parents and local communities to provide not only funding, but also services such as building maintenance or supervision. Case studies document similar dynamics in the Global South as a result of decentralization and community participation (Taylor 2009). This individual privatization of labor tasks is made possible by their systemic devaluation. As one Canadian participant noted:

It is a big problem that we are trying to address by inviting the community instead of, basically taking our jobs, to make a political choice to make these positions attractive and offer them to people who are committed to the school, who are paid, and who have job security. (Representative FPSES CSQ, Québec, February 2024)

6.1.3 Increasing Disparities between Working Within and Outside the Public Sector

Privatization and lack of proper funding also exacerbate the distance between the work performed in the (public) education sector and work outside of it. As the literature notes, the social and material status of occupations are interrelated (Abbott 1988; Butler 2019; Hammett & Burton 2007). Deteriorating working conditions in the public sector, such as those brought about by outsourcing and new forms of management (Flecker 2009; see also Section 5), therefore reduce the status of public sector work in relation to other forms of employment.

Participants from several countries pointed out that while public sector careers have been, and in some contexts still are, considered desirable, deteriorating working conditions are gradually reducing their social status. They linked these dynamics to a broader devaluation of public sector work, rooted in common stereotypes but reinforced by the rhetoric of economic and social privatization. In some cases this rhetoric comes directly from the government.

France provides a particularly vivid example. As discussed by a French participant, the government in place since 2017, led by the liberal Renaissance Party, has announced plans to “*de-bureaucratize*” France and transform it into a “*start-up nation*” (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024). This rhetoric, based on the typical arguments of economic privatization, associates private-sector logics with modernity, while connecting public-sector administration, including in schools, “*with an image of conservatism, of people who have difficulties adapting to the*

modern world. They are part of what the President calls the old world and are opposed to the new world" (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024). At the same time, the participant remarked, administrators were not given the "*new-world means*" that they required to actually complete their tasks more efficiently.

Deteriorating working conditions interact with this rhetoric to further devalue the status of public sector work. Several participants told us that ESP roles, including those requiring less prestigious qualifications, have often been socially valued in the past, both for their perceived pedagogical value and for their comparatively stable working conditions. This is still the case in some countries and regions. In the following quote, for example, a participant from Italy reflects on how families appreciate the reliability of ESP:

The one thing that a school needs is to have a very, very strong group of ESP. People who do not change all the time, who stay there. Because, for example, the janitors, if you can count on them, families feel safe knowing that the children will not get lost, will not run away from school, because they know that these people are there. (Representative UIL-S, Italy, January 2024)

Similarly, a participant from Uruguay argued that, in rural areas, "*it is very difficult to find a parent who looks down on a support service officer*" (Representative ATES, Uruguay, February 2024). Both representatives also noted that this appreciation was due either to the still relatively stable nature of some ESP contracts (Italy) or to locally low levels of social stratification (Uruguay).

On the other hand, where the disparity between public sector work in schools and other work becomes more apparent, the social value placed on towards ESP diminishes. According to a participant based in Costa Rica, parents showed much less appreciation and respect for ESP in more affluent cities, where the disparities between the two groups are greater (Representative SEC, Costa Rica, February 2024). A union representative from New Zealand observed a similar issue, reflecting in this case on the work of teaching assistants:

There has been a long standing perception in some places that teacher aides are nice paid mother-help kind of people, but actually many of them are very highly skilled and have been in their roles for a very long time and have very specialized skills around kind of one-on-one pedagogy that is often not taught in teacher training. (Representative NZEI TE RIU ROA, New Zealand, January 2024)

In Quebec, the FPPE-CSQ trade union conducted an in-depth study comparing the costs of providing selected educational services through



public education versus purchasing them on the private market. The report argues that the significantly higher pay in the private sectors reflects a disparity in status (FPPE-CSQ 2022). A representative of the union highlighted this point when explaining that:

Regarding social status, I often hear this from members. People say, “Ah, you could do the same job in the private sector”. They are almost surprised that the professionals in the schools are real speech therapists, real psychologists. (Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec, January 2024)

The devaluation of ESP work has both individual and societal consequences. At the individual level, several participants noted a tendency among ESP to internalize the rhetoric devaluing their work. *“We undervalue ourselves”*, noted a Spanish participant (Representative F.E.CC. OO, Spain, February 2024), while according to a French participant, *“the tragedy is that a large number of civil servants internalize this kind of ideological bombardment, which returns them to an outdated role”*. As a result, people *“become less and less proud of what they do”* (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024). An ESP from Canada observed that *“I used to say, I’m just an educational assistant, because that is how I felt. You’re not important enough”* (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024).

At the societal level, this situation has implications for recruitment. Countries that have experienced a devaluation of education-related work in the public sector are currently struggling to recruit not only teachers but also ESP. In England, as of March 2024, one of five teaching assistant positions was vacant (Merrick 2024). Reports from other countries reveal similar situations (ABC News 2022; UNESCO 2015a). According to UNESCO, the shortage of education professionals currently threatens the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO 2015a). If the motives that research shows make ESP roles attractive – their educational contributions, social value, and material conditions – all vanish in the smoke of austerity, people will choose (and are choosing) other positions with competitive salaries, such as in retail or hospitality. Such a development was observed by several participants, who also feared its consequences for the workload of those ESP who remained in their jobs, as well as for the quality and inclusiveness of educational provision.

6.1.4 The Ambiguous Effects of Privatization on the Visibility of ESP Work

ESP are often referred to as the “invisible workforce” (Butler 2019). While many participants agreed with this characterization, they tended to frame the low visibility of many ESP roles as a result of structural issues rather than privatization. Structural issues mentioned include the smaller number of ESP compared to teachers and the fact that some roles are almost by definition behind the scenes. The work of school administrators is “*the backbone of the education system*”, a participant from France explained, but their low visibility means that “*politicians talk to teachers, talk to school leaders and very, very often forget about administrators, even when it comes to anecdotal things such as greeting staff*” (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024).

Participants described ambiguous effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the visibility of ESP work. On the one hand, several participants agreed that the outbreak had served to highlight the importance of some ESP roles. According to a participant from Québec, the Covid-19 pandemic “*put a spotlight on support staff, because they were the people who had to continue working in the schools when everything was closed*”. This meant that, although there was still a long way to go, “*little by little, we’re coming out of the shadows and getting more recognition*” (Representative FPSES CSQ, Quebec, February 2024).

On the other hand, several participants also noted that the Covid-19 pandemic left other roles in the shadow. The technological privatization that it facilitated also further blurred the boundaries between ESP’s personal and professional lives, shifting some tasks into the more hidden private sphere. Participants from France and Italy, for example, explained how the fact that people could work from home, and were sometimes provided the technology to do so, fueled the idea that they could always work and respond to inquiries and emergencies. These expectations have not disappeared, and with the technological solutions now available, people are increasingly asked to work in their private time, and sometimes while ill (Representative UIL-S, Italy, January 2024).



Image 7: Staff room assigned to ESP in a school in Portugal (Individual ESP, Portugal, April 2024).



6.2 Unionization

Organizing of ESP varies from place to place. Surveys from Latin America show that in some countries, ESP are organized in education sector unions, in others in larger public sector unions or in more specialized unions (Arancibia 2014). This variation appears to be mirrored globally (Butler 2019).

A common tendency across systems, however, is that the number of ESP in different types of unions appears to have grown (AFT 2002; Butler 2019; Dourado & De Moraes 2009). In some cases, this development has led to a reconceptualization of professional and organizational identities. For example, in 1990/91, the Confederation of Teachers of Brazil (CPB) and the organizations representing ESP in Brazil merged into the National Confederation of Education Workers (CNTE). As discussed below, this merger was intended to signify a unified understanding of the nature and priorities of education-related professions (Dourado & De Moraes 2009). In other places, existing unions are giving more attention to ESP concerns in their programs and campaigns – as evidenced by the very existence of this report.

Strong union density and representation are antidotes to the developments discussed so far. However, as preliminary findings from our interviews and the literature on labor policy show, privatization makes it more difficult for unions to both organize (Section 6.2.1) and defend (Section 6.2.2) ESP members.

6.2.1 Complicating Union Organizing

In recent decades public sector unions have grown in most regions, resulting in higher unionization rates in the public sector than in the private sector in many countries (Hurd & Pinnock 2004; Reder 1988; Ross & Savage 2013; Schneider 2021). According to scholars, this development can be explained in part by the deregulation of private sector employment which has complicated union organizing (Hurd & Pinnock 2004; Reder 1988; Ross & Savage 2013). As privatization increasingly extends to the public sector, public sector unions now face similar challenges.

While the literature on public sector unions is still scarce, the union representatives that we interviewed identified several mechanisms through which privatization makes organizing more difficult. The extent to which these apply depends largely on domestic institutions (Scruggs & Lange 2002). In Western democracies with strong employment protections and compulsory membership, such as Canada, participants reported less of an impact of privatization on union membership – except where schools rely on self-employed professionals for some types of (typically, highly qualified) work. But even in these contexts, privatization makes it more difficult to register members. While for regular school

employees membership is automatic, unions may have to go through a legal process to prove that outsourced workers should be unionized with them (Representative FPSES CSQ and Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec, January 2024; see also Aketch 2023).

In contexts without compulsory membership, outsourcing and the growth of precarious and part-time contracts can have more profound consequences. One reason for this is primarily material. Low wages and employers hiring ESP for a minimum number of hours to avoid paying benefits mean that some ESP find it difficult to pay membership fees. (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2023).

Moreover, in places where employers can access information on whether a given employee is a union member or not, ESP, especially those on precarious contracts, often face threats and fear retaliation from employers. A participant from Italy noted that this *“happens in the private sector, of course, because in the public sector, precarious workers are not worried about being a union member. But in the private sector they are”* (Representative UIL-S, Italy, January 2024). Threats and retaliation are even more dramatic in countries where trade union rights are systematically violated. Reports from African and Arab countries indicate that several private employers have banned ESP from organizing at all (Aketch 2022).

With ESP as well as other forms of employment, it is those in the most vulnerable positions with lower social status that are most threatened by outsourcing, precarious contracts, and low wages. These developments are therefore not only problematic in terms of overall union density, but also risk further increasing inequality by reducing representation among those who need it most.

6.2.2 Thwarting Representation and Defense

Privatization also makes it harder to defend unionized workers. First, it does so directly by multiplying the number of employers with whom unions must deal. This was a common observation among participants, who explained how decentralization, where new, meant the need to adapt organizational structures in order to negotiate at multiple levels. According to one participant from England, the country had been fortunate that, despite ongoing decentralization and privatization through the transfer of control to academy trusts, collective bargaining for ESP was still centralized:

A more radical decentralization would mean you'd have workplace bargaining for 23000 schools, and that's madness for a trade union. How do you organize? How do you negotiate? It's impossible. (Representative NEU, United Kingdom, February 2024)



However, this is a development that characterizes other countries. A participant from Uruguay, for instance, explained how outsourcing makes it more difficult for unions to defend ESP because of the different regulations that characterize the public and private sectors (Representative ATES, Uruguay, February 2024).

Privatization also has an indirect effect on representation. Indeed, as discussed in Section 6.1.2, privatization and cuts in public funding risk increasing the competition between ESP roles, and between ESP and teachers, as status and material conditions are increasingly negotiated separately for each category. This development creates trade-offs for unions representing different roles and can increase frictions between unions representing different categories of staff – for instance in situations where learning assistants are increasingly pushed into teaching roles (Clayton 1993).

6.3 Voice

Political scientists define voice as the ability of an individual or group to express their views and be recognized as active participants (Lehman Schlozman et al. 1992; Phillips 2003). In the case of ESP, active participation may refer to participation in both school and institutional politics. We could not find any existing research on how privatization affects the voice of ESP (or similar professionals). While further research is needed to determine whether these observations apply more broadly, the evidence presented in the previous sections as well as additional observations from participants, suggests that privatization could hinder both the ability of ESP to express their views and to be recognized at different levels.

Indeed, in existing research and the conversations underlying this report, ESP often express a sense that their voice counts for less than that of other educational stakeholders, such as teachers or parents (Arancibia 2014; Butler 2019; Chopra et al. 2004; Conley et al. 2010; Sorsby 2004). In our participatory ethnography, a Canadian ESP shared a picture of a picket line outside a school (Image 6).



Image 6: Picture of a picket outside a district school board (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024)

In the text accompanying the picture, she noted:

The odd thing about this photo is, I honestly can't even remember what we're fighting for. I feel like we do protests and campaigning at political offices to make the government understand how underfunded we are. In this picture I honestly can't even remember what we were fighting for because we fight every year, I'm not sure why we can't seem to make any headway or any difference. But there I am in the middle holding that sign. (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024)

Participants provided various structural explanations for their perceived lack of political voice. Accordingly, the low visibility and status of some ESP roles, as well as their smaller numbers compared to teachers and parents, explain why the media, politicians, and parents are less likely to acknowledge issues concerning ESP. While maybe natural or explainable, the lack of a voice for ESP is problematic from both a pedagogical and material point of view. The realization of more inclusive educational communities and projects requires the integration of all professional perspectives in school-level and official policy (Chopra et al. 2004; Albortz et al. 2009).

From a material perspective, a lack of voice is a risk, especially when the interests of different stakeholders diverge. As one participant put it, US unions are working to strengthen the voice of ESP to make sure *"that we are sitting at the table and that we are included. Because in some places ESP are not on the negotiating or bargaining teams. And, if you're not at the table, somebody else is making the decisions for you"* (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024).

6.3.1 Potential Risks of Privatization on ESP's Voice

One way in which privatization and public funding shortfalls contribute to weakening the voice of ESP is through increased workloads and precarious work. This effect is vividly illustrated by a participant from Canada who described how the ESP she knew not only found it difficult to attend union meetings because they had taken on multiple jobs but could not even *"talk to colleagues anymore about anything that's going on outside of the workday because they're just exhausted and burnt out with the amount of shortages and the administrative work that's piling up"* (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024). Increased workloads leave little time and energy for the exchange of ideas, identification of problems, and coordination that are essential to protect ESP's influence in both schools and politics.

Through different mechanisms, outsourcing poses another potential risk for ESP's ability to coordinate and speak out. Indeed, several participants noted that in sectors that have been outsourced, employees tended



to be less involved – due to fear, or to lack of time and knowledge of the local context. According to a Portuguese participant, there was a clear difference between food and nutrition personnel who had been outsourced, and non-outsourced ESP roles: *“we don’t know who the cafeteria staff are, because sometimes one person is working one day and another the next, so it is like a different system. They have no voice and no influence”* (Representative FNE, Portugal, January 2024).

Finally, the misrecognition of the pedagogical role of ESP also means that they are less likely to be recognized as active participants, especially within schools. Many participants described situations of friction between teachers, school leaders, and ESP, and linked them to misrecognition of ESP’s pedagogical knowledge and role. The Canadian educational assistant sharing their experiences for this report provided a glimpse of how such situations can unfold on the ground:

I am not allowed to have any ideas. Yesterday, I was so excited because I brought in new materials. I worked on them for six hours on my own time and went to professional development. And my supervisor says, “Who are these for? I do the programming”. I feel like a clipped bird, and I don’t understand why we can’t have a little bit of freedom to bring in some ideas. (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024)

To the extent that such individual observations can be generalized, it appears that the protecting and strengthening of ESP voices requires not only ensuring their representation in relevant bodies and organizations. To fully be able to formulate and express their views, and to be recognized as active and valued participants on a local and broader level, it is also necessary to improve their working conditions and pedagogical recognition. The next section discusses some strategies that unions and ESP have used to work towards these goals.

7. Resistance

ESP and their organizations have not been passive recipients of recent tendencies to outsource support roles, cut funding for support personnel, and reorganize labor under more strained conditions. Our conversations with the participants who shared their experiences and knowledges for this report revealed multiple ways in which ESP and their organizations seek to shape and resist these and related developments in schools and in local and national politics. Because they have rarely been the subject of scholarly research, this section draws largely on interviews and union reports to discuss such strategies of resistance.

Political and sociological work broadly defines resistance as the actions taken to oppose a certain development. It emphasizes that resistance can take different forms, ranging from highly coordinated instances of public mobilization to more individual and (strategically) hidden forms of everyday resistance (Choi 2017; Giudici 2021b; Hollander and Einwohner 2004; Scott 1985). Our review includes examples of both but mainly focuses on the former.

When participants were asked about strategies of resistance, many of their answers focused on tools of trade union work that are neither specific to ESP nor to privatization. The participants' discussions of collective bargaining, striking, and other forms of collective action, as well as their focus on strengthening corporatism and ensuring the individual defense of members, provide evidence of the deep interrelation between the struggle for better working conditions and the fight against privatization and public funding cuts. As previously discussed, these actions have been complicated by privatization.

In this report, we focus on strategies that ESP and their organizations have implemented or would like to see implemented, to specifically address the impact of privatization on the working conditions of ESP. Thus, we report on strategies that participants shared with us because they believed they would be useful to others, and we discuss them based on insights from the report and the literature on labor policy and privatization. We distinguish four types of strategies based on the goal of the underlying action. They are, first, to develop and publicize a comprehensive concept of education (Section 7.1), to increase the visibility of ESP work (Section 7.2), to address working conditions (Section 7.3), and to forge links with the international and academic spheres (Section 7.4).



7.1 Reclaiming a Comprehensive Definition of Public Education

This report began by defining privatization as projects that aim to reduce the scope of publicness. If the dominant definitions of the services and communities that public education is supposed to include are narrowed, then the ‘publicness’ of all the services and professionals not included in that definition is called into question, putting them at risk of being outsourced or cut. Countering this trend requires dedicated conceptual and informational work to develop and reclaim a comprehensive conception of education.

7.1.1 Redefining Public Education

Modern state-building triggered worldwide efforts to expand conceptions of who and what to include in the creation of education as a public service (Gingrich et al. 2023; Meyer et al. 1992). However, in recent decades this trend has begun to reverse (Abrams 2016; Ball & Youdell 2008; Biesta 2011; Cohen & Allen 2021; Cone & Brøgger 2020; Cone & Moos 2022; Lubienski 2005; Schofer et al. 2022). More exclusive and sometimes illiberal conceptions of education are gaining ground, often undervaluing or excluding the work, knowledges, and demonstrated value of ESP. To resist this trend, it is necessary to develop alternative, comprehensive conceptualizations of education, grounded in an understanding of publicness that recognizes ESP and the services they provide as an inherent and essential component of inclusive schooling.

Some unions have already begun this type of conceptual work. One example is the Brazilian CNTE, which was created as a merger between the Confederation of Teachers and the organizations representing ESP. The CNTE has not only taken into account the concerns of different categories of staff, but has also worked to integrate them into a comprehensive concept of schooling in which all staff interact to ensure the right to inclusive quality education, rather than as a series of individual learning processes confined to isolated classrooms (Arancibia 2014; Dourado & De Moraes 2009).

According to those involved, the transition to seeing ESP as educators is not straightforward. It “requires a cultural battle within schools, educational communities, and a significant number of teacher organizations” (Arancibia 2014, 14). However, such conceptual work is essential, given the potential of privatization to further increase disintegration and competition among educational professionals. To protect public education from privatization and cutbacks, it is important to strengthen internal unity within organizations and provide them with a coherent and integral understanding of its scope. As a participant from Uruguay put it: *“We are trying to bring us all together so that we can at least fight together. Our struggle today is multidisciplinary teams”* (Representative ATES, Uruguay, February 2024).

Unions may wish to discuss the extent to which such a comprehensive approach to education requires the maintenance of current social, material and professional hierarchies among educational staff. Protecting teachers' professional qualifications and salaries has been a traditional core demand of teacher unions. However, several participants questioned whether this should be done by confirming existing professional hierarchies, as exemplified in the following quote from a Spanish union representative:

If you work in the same workplace, why is one person worth more than another? You're a teacher, you're an educational technician, you're a cook, you're a cleaner, everyone has their own team, but we're all here for the students. In other words, the students are the link. (Representative F.E.CC.OO., Spain, February 2024)

As we have noted in this report, cultural practices, embodied histories, and stereotypes concerning what and who matters most in education can provide both positive as well as negative reinforcement of how efforts to establish a comprehensive approach to public education are perceived. To prevent further competition within the education sector and political exploitation of divergent interests, it is therefore crucial to engage in this debate.

7.1.2 Publicizing the Public

Projects involving economic, social, and technological aims of privatization often draw on similar arguments to claim that private logics are more efficient or better suited to meet the needs of students, parents, and school systems (Section 2.1). The fact that these arguments sound so familiar is surprising, if we consider that just a few decades ago most debates regarding private involvement in schooling centered on families and religious groups vis-à-vis public entities (Ansell & Lindvall 2021; Giudici et al. 2023).

The ubiquitous presence of arguments promoting the alleged efficiency, innovation, and individual adaptability of markets today can be read as evidence of what philosopher Michael Sandel (2013) calls the shift from market economies to market societies, in which market principles are applied to more and more areas, including schooling (Abrams 2016). This shift has not occurred organically or by accident. Decades of campaigning by privatization advocates have worked to convince the public and policy-makers of the merits of markets. A similar response is now required. As Donald Cohen, director of the US nonprofit In the Public Interest, put it, "we have to realize that privatizers have played the long game and we need to play the long game, too [...] We need to wade back into those battles" (in Flannery 2022; see also Cohen & Allen 2021).



Participants outlined two ways in which they were ‘wading back’ into the battle. The first was by emphasizing the advantages of public education as an inclusive quality service provided collaboratively by teachers and ESP for all. A participant from Quebec described an example of such forms of lobbying for a comprehensive public education system:

We have to talk to journalists, to talk to our partners in the school network, because we’re in a situation where we risk losing control if we don’t regulate the use of private services in education... The angle we’re using is to promote what’s being done in the public sector and to show that it’s better, to demonstrate the added value of working as a team in the school system. (Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec, January 2024)

One way to counter the dominance of privatization arguments, then, is to not only develop but also actively promote alternative, comprehensive understandings of public education and inform the public about their benefits. In this sense, EI’s “Go Public! Fund Education” campaign,² is also essential in countering the erosion of ESP’s working conditions.

7.1.3 Denouncing Privatization

A complementary approach to promoting the advantages of public education is to highlight the disadvantages of its alternatives. We should not assume that support for privatization is always based on an informed decision. Some participants noted that while the privatization of other public sectors, such as energy or health care, is frequently discussed in public and in the media, the privatization of education remains relatively hidden. As a result, the potential detrimental effects of privatization may not be widely known by the public.

One way to address this lack of knowledge is to develop and provide materials that explain how privatization can undermine the quality and inclusiveness of schooling. Some participants reported positive experiences with materials that focus on challenging the idea that outsourcing improves quality. For example, a participant from France described how, to counter projects to outsource school catering in a French region to a private management group,

we tell families, “We cannot guarantee that your children will eat as well tomorrow as they do today. You won’t know exactly what’s going to be on the plate, because it won’t be provided according to the logic of public service, but according to the logic of private profit. Beware.” (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024)

2 <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/dossier/1537:go-public-fund-education>

Other participants focused on personalizing implications for social inequality. According to one participant, it is becoming increasingly common for schools in Italy to ask parents to contribute either financially or through free labor to the maintenance of school infrastructure. Unions have countered this trend by educating parents about both the political and social implications of such practices. Without such information, the participant outlined,

parents might think “Okay, I’m doing the right thing. I’m giving my kids’ school some money so they can have more music or renovate the gym”. We have to explain to them that, if they give the money, then the municipality can say, “Oh, the school does not need public money”. So, in the future, if they happen to be unemployed and cannot give money, then their children’s school will not get the funding it needs from the municipality. We must remind people of the politics of these issues, and about what the wrong politics can do to human rights and social equality. (Representative UIL-S, Italy, January 2024)

An example of publicly available materials is the “Ask the right questions before privatizing” checklist developed by *In The Public Interest* (2019).³ Designed for the public sector in general, the list suggests that people working in school systems threatened by privatization highlight potential consequences for democratic rights of participation, accountability, and the cost of services in the long run. In some cases, materials such as these are not publicly available. To facilitate campaigning across different roles and geographies, unions may find ways to pool and share them.

Participants emphasized that campaigns like these go beyond informing the public. Concrete issues such as the quality of school meals, it was argued, “*can be used to forge new forms of resistance that unite the school users and staff*” (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024). Participants from Quebec mentioned reaching out to parents’ associations and school principals (Representative FPSES CSQ, Quebec, February 2024), while a participant from Uruguay explained that the union she represented aimed to “*create empathy [for ESP] among the public. Because if today or tomorrow someone is threatened by privatization, they are going to need to have the students and families on their side*” (Representative ATEs, Uruguay, February 2024). These statements express the need to forge a coalition in support of a comprehensive definition of public education that includes not only school personnel and their unions but also other powerful stakeholders, such as parents and principals.

3 https://www.inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/ITPI_10Questions_June2019.pdf



Indeed, successful campaigns to prevent concrete privatization projects, such as those in the US, have often relied on mobilizing parents, to whom ESP had cultivated a strategic relationship over the years (AFT 2002; Rosales 2017; Walker 2019). For example, in the early 2000s, bus drivers in the US district of Orchard Park faced threats of privatization and used a cookbook with recipes from school staff to reach out to the local community. According to a local organizer this “gave the transportation department some respectful recognition within the school system and the community,” and talk of privatization died down as a result (Sherry Yates-Voss quoted in AFT 2002, 17).

7.2 Increasing the Visibility and Recognition of ESP

Despite its importance, the work of many ESP roles has low visibility. The reasons are partly structural and cultural. Some roles, such as administrators, interact less with parents and are less frequently depicted in popular culture than teachers or school principals. By devaluing the pedagogical contributions of ESP and further distancing them from educational communities, privatization and funding shortfalls risk adding a further veil of invisibility to the work of ESP. This has potentially serious consequences. The more invisible the work, the easier it is to outsource or cut.

Several participants identified raising the visibility of ESP’s work as a central component of their strategy to resist privatization. For example, a participant from the US emphasized that *“It is up to us, the employees and union members to show our worth within the community”* (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024). Campaigns aimed at increasing the visibility and recognition of ESPs can target different audiences. The strategies mentioned by participants thus looked very different depending on whether they targeted policy-makers (Section 7.2.1), unions and education politics (Section 7.2.2), or parents and the wider public (Sections 7.2.3 and 7.2.4).

7.2.1 Formalizing ESP Task and Skills

A first strategy to enhance the visibility of ESP qualifications and work, particularly for policy makers and school leaders, is to certify them. The New Zealand Education Institute – Te Riu Roa provides a fruitful example of this strategy. As part of a lengthy, research-based process that involved learning assistants, school managers, and administrators, the union catalogued the tasks performed by learning assistants (Butler 2019; EI 2023).

The union then relied on equal pay rights to leverage this data politically. It used job descriptions from various ESP to demonstrate that jobs that had similar skill profiles but were less female dominated (e.g., prison

guards) than ESP roles were systematically paid more. Through successive collective bargaining, it eventually managed to significantly correct the wages of some ESP roles, including those with expertise in the Māori language (EI 2023).

Another way to make ESP's work visible and codified is through the development of professional standards. This strategy was adopted by the AFT in the 1970s for learning assistants, resulting in the publication of *Standards for a Profession* (AFT 1998). The document specifies the role and responsibilities, pre- and in-service training, basic skills and entry-level requirements, and advanced skills for permanent qualification considered necessary for the role of learning assistant. It thereby aims not only to draw a professional profile to inform hiring and training strategy, but also to counter the common misconception that teaching assistants are merely an extension of domestic care roles and motherhood (AFT 1998). The document has since informed other initiatives, as well as state and federal legislation formalizing training requirements (e.g., 2001 No Child Left Behind Act) and professional progression across ESP roles and subsequent pay rises (e.g., Garcia Am. 2023; NEA 2021).

One participant discussed an example of such an initiative, when she described her success in working with legislators in a US state to pass formal licensing requirements for school bus drivers.

Many drivers were skeptical because they had to take a test. But the upside was that their pay went up because I had argued that this license was the same as a teaching certificate; that you couldn't do your job without it. That brought value to who you are and more respect because now you're trained. You're handling other people's children. And these people now know that you're properly trained to drive that vehicle and transport their children back and forth to school. (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024)

Similar approaches can be found in other countries, such as Brazil, where the formalization of ESP roles was followed by the implementation – under a left-wing government in 2009 – of both a federal training policy (Profucionário) and pay increases across various categories of ESP (Arancibia 2014; Dourado & De Moraes 2009).

Some of these initiatives, especially the more recent ones, strive to ensure inclusivity by involving all ESP in an attempt to formally catalog skills and tasks (e.g., NEA 2021). However, until comprehensive concepts of education are established and properly funded, such inclusive initiatives face an uphill battle, as discrimination and a lack of certification traditions have traditionally downplayed care-related skills (England 2005; Labour Research Service 2023) and minority cultural knowledge (Ka'ai-Mahuta 2011). As a result, so far, the most successful certification initiatives in



terms of their impact on the material working conditions of ESP are limited to roles that are considered more professionally prestigious or more directly involved in teaching, such as learning assistants. The extent to which this type of formalization conflicts with efforts to de-hierarchize and equalize the social and professional status of those working in education is another issue that unions should address in order to avoid increasing competition and fragmentation.

7.2.2 Foreground ESP in Union Work and Representation

Especially when ESP or some ESP roles are organized together with teachers or other public sector workers, the sheer difference in number risks marginalizing the concerns and issues of ESP. This issue was of concern to participants, who described efforts to increase the political visibility of ESP by bringing them into and to the forefront of trade union work and politics. The extent to which and the way in which this can be done varies according to union structures and fragmentation.

The case of Brazil demonstrates the impact of effective representation. It was a former ESP, Fátima Cleide Rodrigues da Silva, who, once elected to the Federal Parliament, sponsored the bill that would become Law 12.014/2009. The Law expanded the concept of educational workers to include ESP, significantly strengthening their rights and recognition (CNTE 2019; Dourado & De Moraes 2009).

Several participants mentioned examples of unions working to include ESP representatives in working groups and branches in order to ensure that ESP representatives are included in negotiating processes. Especially given the more recent tradition of ESP representation in some places, as well as the potentially divergent interests and sensitivities between them and other school staff, it is imperative to work toward such forms of structural inclusion, even if it may require investments in capacity building and training (see, Section 7.3.1).

Additional opportunities to increase the visibility of ESP exist in countries that have institutionalized stakeholder participation at the national, local, or school level. Participants mentioned that unions have begun to support ESP candidates in elections where participatory structures allow for ESP representation. In many places, stakeholder participation is limited to teachers, parents, and sometimes external stakeholders (Gingrich 2011; Hossain 2022; Schneider 2022; Taylor 2009). This is another issue that unions may want to address as part of campaigns for a more comprehensive understanding of education, also to counter the risk of ESP being distanced from educational communities through outsourcing and other forms of privatization.

7.2.3 Showcasing the Work of ESP and its Value to the Community

Many participants emphasized that initiatives to showcase the work of ESP should target not only policymakers, but also parents and the general public. These constituencies are crucial potential allies in defending ESP against the threat of privatization and public funding cuts (AFT 2002; Rosales 2017; Walker 2019). As argued by Tim Barchak, a senior policy analyst with the NEA:

ESPs need to tell their stories about what they do and develop relationships with stakeholders. It's relatively easy to privatize the 'bus drivers' or the 'custodians.' It's a lot harder to privatize the individuals who have names that you know and that take care of your kids. (quoted in Walker 2019)

As noted above, the participants involved in the present report identified a wide range of strategies to increase the visibility of ESP to the public. When discussing strategies raised by others with a certain participant, they often reacted with surprise. What may sound sensitive and potentially effective in one context may seem very strange in another. These reactions illustrate the importance of tailoring strategies to local sensitivities, institutions, and goals, as well as to the motivations of their addressees.

Participants in the US, Italy, and Uruguay particularly emphasized the importance of community engagement. They shared cases of motivating ESP to showcase their work through the radio, at sports events, and at cultural events such as Carnival (Uruguay), local assemblies (Italy), as well as fairs and parades (US). Having ESP representing schools in public spaces, such as malls, a US participant explained, showcased to local communities that, *"We do have a lot of pride in public education ... it's all about showing the worth of the school employees, what they do and bring in, and what kind of service people should expect from the school districts"* (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024).

Several participants also mentioned online spaces and social media. This strategy has been adopted, for example, in the Labour Research Service's campaign to redefine volunteer food handlers in South Africa as workers (school chefs) in order to inform the public about the value of their work. The website and social media strategy relies on both data and visual documentation to make the struggle of these ESP relatable, including a video documenting "A Day in the Life of a Volunteer Food Handler" (Labour Research Services 2023). Relatedly, a representative from Portugal mentioned pushing schools to systematically include ESP in schools' online profiles (together with teachers) and outward communications as a way to signal that they are part of the educational community (Representative FNE, Portugal, January 2024).



Again, this kind of community involvement may not be culturally appropriate in all contexts. Instead, other participants mentioned more academic and political approaches. A participant from Quebec discussed a symposium organized to showcase ESP members' expertise and *"highlight their role because they represent only 5% of school staff. There are a lot of job categories. So, we're trying to show another side of unionism too, with a positive vision where it can reach out more to another audience"* (Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec, January 2024).

Another way to highlight ESP's work and struggle is through the media. Some participants noted that issues related to ESP, especially if they are administrative in nature, can be difficult to get the attention of the news outlets. However, there have been instances where issues related to certain roles, such as learning assistants, food and nutrition as well as transport personnel, have been covered by national media. This includes, for instance, articles in the *New York Times* on how privatization threatens the quality of food (Komisar 2011) and on the struggles of transportation personnel, custodians, food and nutrition staff, and teaching assistants in schools (The Learning Network 2023). The latter article presents extensive quotes from students "praising the often "invisible" school employees who make their education possible", including "touching stories about how these adults have supported them, advised them, fed them, cleaned up after them, taught them and befriended them" (The Learning Network 2023). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the *TIME* magazine ran a long read and cover story on "the educators who saved the school year", which includes an essay by the First Lady Jill Biden and profiles of a librarian, as well as health, food and nutrition, and transportation personnel, among others (Aguilera et al. 2021).

A more comprehensive understanding of ESP, which links different categories as part of the same struggle and relates it to privatization, might help here to address the universal, "hidden" causes of different issues and structural challenges, and to raise their public profile and appeal.

Initiatives to highlight the value of ESP work may have a welcome side effect. As discussed in Section 6.1.2, privatization has led to steeper hierarchies of social status, which in turn affects the self-perceptions and experiences of ESP. As noted by a participant from New Zealand,

I think there is an inherent struggle to get that acknowledgement that these are really vital roles in schools. We tend to think of teachers as educators and you'll hear our support staff say, oh, I'm not a teacher, right or 'I'm just a teacher aide'? And we say, no, no, no, you've got a really key role. (Representative NZEI TE RIU ROA, New Zealand, January 2018)

However, policy and public discourse often fail to recognize this significance, leaving it up to organizations to remind ESPs of their value and rights.

7.2.4 Education about the Threat of Privatization on ESP work

Several participants emphasized that, in addition to the value of ESP, the public also needed to be educated about the struggles that ESP face. Parents are often unaware of how privatization affects the pedagogical work and working conditions of ESP. Ironically, this may also be due to the dedication of the staff, who try to do the impossible to personally cover the shortfalls caused by political and financial decisions. A participant from Portugal described this dilemma in the perceived competence of ESP and their current challenges:

Parents respect us and trust us because they think we can do our jobs very easily. This is because we don't show how the shortfalls affect us. We do not like to show that sometimes we are not as good as we could be, although we still try to do the best we can to support the students. (Representative FNE, Portugal, January 2024)

The strategies outlined in Section 7.1.2 for enhancing the visibility of ESP's work, such as participating in local events, organizing symposia, and connecting with the media, can also be utilized to bring attention to the challenges that ESP encounter. As discussed in a 2023 EI report, this can also include alternative methods such as the practice of wearing black on Thursdays by ESP in South Africa to draw attention to budget cuts and humanize their effects (EI 2023).

While shedding light on the impact of political decisions on staff is important, some participants also mentioned that this strategy could become a double-edged sword – especially where staff have been outsourced. A representative from Uruguay described this dilemma. On the one hand, she noted, denouncing poor working conditions in the private sector and their impact on performance is important to advance collective demands. On the other hand, such denunciation could also hurt individual outsourced employees whose jobs may be at stake: *“if you denounce their bad working conditions, that worker might be out of a job. If you are a trade unionist, you have to defend workers' rights, it's a dichotomy”* (Representative ATEES, Uruguay, February 2024). This observation shows once again how important it is for unions to combine the local defense of workers and the denunciation of their current working conditions with campaigns aimed popularizing a renewed comprehensive concept of public education.



7.3 Improving Working Conditions

The strategies discussed in the preceding sections aim to improve the working conditions of ESP indirectly, either by expanding their coalition of allies or educating the public and policymakers about the value of their work. But unions also address working conditions directly and have a wide range of strategies for doing so. In this section, we discuss two strategies mentioned by participants as particularly relevant to resist the effects of privatization and public funding cuts: building capacity among ESP (Section 7.3.1) and negotiating with and lobbying policymakers (Section 7.3.2).

7.3.1 Training and Capacity Building

As mentioned earlier, one of the main concerns highlighted in the literature and by participants is the insufficient provision of opportunities, time, and funding for ESP to attend professional development. According to several union representatives, organizations have responded to this situation by either opening up existing education-related training opportunities to ESP or creating new training tailored to the specific needs of different roles.

Participants in this report highly valued unions for providing the training opportunities that public agencies and private employers do not organize. They emphasized that union-provided training should be tailored to both professional needs and organizational capacity building.

Participants from around the world challenged the notion that ESP are inherently less inclined to organize and engage politically than teachers. In their experience, where resistance was lacking, it was either due to material financial constraints and insecurity, or to workplace cultures and traditions that could be changed through capacity building and training. Some participants credited their unions and organizations with giving them more agency and the ability to see the political aspect of the problems they experienced in their daily work. Indeed, Sorsby (2004) finds that by providing learning teaching assistants with training and qualifications, they also became more vocal in questioning school policies and expressing their views.

Participants identified both the lobbying for more publicly funded and organized professional development for ESP as well as the provision of union-based training as strategies to resist privatization. The importance of the former has increased worldwide due to accelerating social and technological change (Carstensen and Emmenegger 2023; Han 2001; Tchamyu 2020). Several professions, including teaching, have implemented compulsory or publicly funded professional development programs. However, this is rarely the case for ESP, particularly for those in

positions with lower levels of professional accreditation. One strategy for improving training is to advocate for the extension of such arrangements for all ESP roles. If implemented carefully, such initiatives can be incredibly successful. For example, in Brazil, the uptake of state-financed ESP training was almost 92% in the first year after it became one of the rights acquired by ESP under Law 12.104 of 2009. Unions credit their success to the dissemination of information about the training through websites, agendas, and forums (Dourado & De Moraes 2009).

In some contexts, establishing publicly provided, paid training opportunities may not be a realistic goal for unions. As an alternative, they can advocate or organize less extensive but equally targeted forms of training. Several participants noted that due to the specialized nature of ESP work, courses and related information must be planned and disseminated with particular care. ESP, especially those on precarious contracts, may be less aware of training opportunities, face more barriers to enrolment, and have fewer financial resources and less time to participate. Therefore, it is important to ensure accessibility, such as keeping courses free for union members, paying attention to timing, and maximizing dissemination. In addition, many participants emphasized the importance of ensuring training relevance and countering perceptions of training as “wasted” time, especially given the high relative cost of training for staff with low salaries and heavy workloads. Greater representation and involvement of ESPs themselves can ensure that these criteria are met.

Participants also highlighted the value of more informal training opportunities, including on issues specifically related to privatization. These opportunities include information on the effects of privatization, as well as mentoring programs such as those offered to ESP in the US. The latter can provide ESP with professional support, help them defend their rights and those of their colleagues, and identify and resist privatization projects. Such forms of mentoring and collegial support are already happening on an informal level in many of the contexts discussed with the participants who shared their perspectives for this report. For example, a representative from Italy described her role in advising members on contract negotiations and providing guidance on countering the intrusion of private companies and corporations in schools. This was achieved through daily resistance strategies, such as avoiding materials and infrastructure provided by specific publishers and firms (Representative UIL-S, Italy, January 2024).

7.3.2 Lobbying and Advocacy

In the end, privatization and public spending cuts are largely the result of government policy. While financial or other factors constrain decision-making, the extent to which funds are going towards public or



private providers are political choices that lay in the hands of political representatives. It is no surprise, then, that influencing political decision-making was the main strategy mentioned by participants. A participant from Zambia made this priority clear: *“Our aim as the labor movement is to influence government to review policy and to provide the necessary funding”* (Representative ZNUT, Zambia, January 2024).

The ways in which such influence can be realized depend on contextual factors including domestic institutions of government, corporatism, and the existence of established links between parties and unions. Similarities across the worldwide ESP workforce, however, also create one important commonality: financially, improving the working conditions of ESP is less costly than realizing the demands of other categories of staff. This is due to both lower numbers and, ironically, lower pay. Several participants, including in Spain and the UK, mentioned lobbying towards raises of minimum pay as a successful strategy to increase ESP pay across the private and public sectors.

Participants also had other suggestions to increase the likelihood of success. One suggestion was to, whenever possible, cultivate long-term relationship with policymakers. According to a US participant, in order to maximize chances of success, *“the relationship has to continue to be nurtured and grow through the course of the year and not just when you need something”* (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024). Like other participants, however, she also highlighted that the extent to which this was possible depended on policymakers' political leaning, and the extent to which they endorsed privatization aims. Changes in government, participants from Italy and Uruguay also noted, can radically disrupt existing fruitful relationships with administrators and policymakers.

A second suggestion was to diversify one's allies. Several participants mentioned trying to engage with both government and opposition parties, or with different sectors of state administrations, in order to seek allies in different places. Unions in the UK have embarked on this strategy. As a result of this cooperation, in September 2023, the UK Labour Party – in opposition at the time – committed to restore the School Support Staff Negotiating Body if they won the upcoming general election. A similar body had existed in the past but had then been scrapped by the Conservative Government elected to power in 2015. The goal of the new body, which should include representatives from the main unions organizing ESP in England, would be to provide ESP with a voice in national education politics, to improve and standardize pay and working conditions, as well as to grant opportunities for professional development (Jackson 2023).

7.4 Research and International Connections

Education policy is still largely determined by national, regional and local authorities. Therefore, when asked about strategies for resistance, participants first mentioned seeking links with actors who have a direct influence on domestic policies, i.e. parents, political parties and the general public. However, several participants also mentioned reaching out to fields without such direct influence, namely research (Section 7.4.1) and the international arena (Section 7.4.2). These strategies can only have an indirect effect on policy, but several participants saw it as key to improving the effectiveness of trade union work, identifying and articulating issues, and focusing priorities.

7.4.1 Incentivizing Research on ESP

Research on ESP is both scarce and highly uneven in terms of both roles and geography. While much has been written about the effectiveness and impact of learning assistants, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries, there is very little to no data on the working conditions of other ESP professionals and countries, and even less on the extent to which these have been affected by privatization and public funding cuts.

From a scientific perspective, this situation is problematic. It leaves us with a large gap in knowledge about an essential and growing part of the educational workforce. There is a wealth of literature on the pedagogical, social, and material aspects of teachers' work, as well as on how they have been affected by changes in governance and narrowing definitions of publicness in education. The lack of similar attention to the impact of these dynamics on the school staff who are more marginalized and precarious to begin with, contributes to making them even more invisible (Cho 2019; Magoda & Delman 2016; Smilie 2022).

Several participants expressed a sense that more research and data could support the work of those trying to resist privatization projects on the ground. Efforts to document and name the effects of privatization on the quality and inclusiveness of education and on the working conditions of staff were identified as particularly useful.

Some participants reported that unions had begun to collect and analyze such data themselves. Several organizations, including AFT in the United States, UNSA in France, and FNE in Portugal, have begun regular surveys of views and conditions of ESP that highlight the effects of structural changes and austerity measures. Since 2023, Education Solidarité includes both teachers and ESP in its well-being survey (Education and Solidarity Network 2023). These data are essential to increase the visibility of ESP, their work, and the challenges they face. As noted in the example of the NZEI TE RIU ROA discussed in Section 7.2.1, they can also play a crucial role in enabling



unions to prove gender- or ethnicity-based pay discrimination and argue for pay equality.

Other unions have used systematic comparisons of similar work in the private and public sectors to support their position in collective bargaining. One French participant credited this strategy with contributing to the success of the 2018 renegotiation of the collective agreement for school administrators (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024).

The Fédération des Professionnels et Professionnelles de l'Éducation of Quebec used a similar strategy to expose the costs of privatization and argue for retaining functions in the public sector. The union filed access to information requests with school boards in Quebec to compare the cost of external, privately hired personnel, such as psychologists or speech therapists, with the typical salaries of the same role hired within the public school sector. Their report shows that increased reliance on the private sector to fulfill these roles is problematic from an equity perspective since it can lead schools to reduce the range of free, quality services offered in-house. But this is not the only consequence. The report also provides concrete evidence that relying on private professionals increases the cost of such services to public budgets. Such proactive research can thus empirically demonstrate that more regulation would not only promote equality, but also optimize the use of financial resources (FPPE-CSQ 2022; Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec, February 2022).

Another strategy is to delegate research to others. One union representative from the US described how research can help depoliticize issues that are perceived as belonging to a certain political ideologies or worldviews – such as the cultural attacks on school librarians discussed in Section 4.3.1. The organization she represents had partnered with an outside organization to study the potentially detrimental effects of privatization on students and communities:

Because I think sometimes when the message comes from the union, decision makers have a tendency to shut down. And so, we are trying a different tactic by having an outside organization be the authors of this study and deliver it at school board conferences, and to principals, school administrators, school boards, and all the people who are making the decisions on privatization. (Representative NEA 2, United States January 2024)

A union representative from France made a similar argument for international studies. In his experience, policymakers and employers see them as more reliable and less biased. He mentioned that, in negotiations, *"I like to rely on international studies. Employers are often interested when they hear the word "international" because it sounds modern to them* (Representative UNSA Éducation, France, February 2024).



7.4.2 Forging an International Community

Finally, several participants also mentioned international relations as a source of energy and expertise. Their praise often went to EI for connecting ESP worldwide. Participants had concrete examples of how these connections not only made them feel valued and strengthened their commitment, but also led to concrete change – as they were able to share strategies and common approaches (see also EI 2023). In one example, a participant from the United States told us how she stayed in touch with school transportation personnel from Ghana whom she had met at an EI conference. By sharing perspectives and approaches to contract negotiations, the former had provided advice on contract negotiations; *“I gave them a lot of language [for negotiating], because I felt that language was more important than money”* (Representative NEA 1, United States, January 2024).



8. Conclusion

Privatization and funding shortfalls are narrowing the boundaries and capacities of public education worldwide. As a consequence, the quality and inclusiveness of schooling is deteriorating. As this report shows, support personnel are caught in the crossfire of the ongoing negotiations concerning the meaning and scope of public education. Their fate is inextricably linked to the furthering of strong, inclusive, and quality public education systems.

ESP roles have been created and expanded to extend quality education to all. At the same time, the policies that have shaped their working conditions, qualifications, and status have placed many supporting roles at the bottom of the hierarchy of educational professions and employed workers from historically marginalized communities. As a result, education support personnel are often the first casualties of projects aimed at narrowing the scope of schooling based on economic, social, and technological rationales.

This report, we hope, outlines the pervasive and negative effects of various mechanisms of privatization and funding cuts on the working conditions of education support personnel. Based on both existing research and testimonies from around the world, it aims to show that these developments affect the extent to which ESP can contribute to schools' pedagogical projects, their material conditions, as well as their social status and visibility both within schools and in the public sphere writ large.

Yet the report does not wish to shed light solely on difficulties and struggles. While there are significant challenges impeding the conditions of ESP worldwide, the report's findings also vividly illustrate the value that education support staff bring to our educational communities. Without these professionals, schools would not be warm (or cold) and clean, children would go hungry, their behavioral issues and health issues would go unaddressed, and they might not make it to school safely. At the same time, all ESP work with children and families in an educational capacity as part of their role. By reporting the strategies of resistance that the participants shared with us, we hope to offer some ways forward, for unions to discuss locally and internationally.

As stated by an individual ESP from Canada, "*Better conditions for the students is better for us*" (Individual ESP, Canada, February 2024). This report demonstrates that in the end, ensuring better conditions for education support personnel is crucial to provide better education for students – and hereby move toward more inclusive, caring, and equal societies.

9. References

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10. List of Interviews

- Individual ESP, Canada. *Participative ethnography with individual ESP working in Canada.* February and March 2024.
- Individual ESP, Costa Rica. *Participative ethnography with individual ESP working in Costa Rica.* February and March 2024.
- Individual ESP, Italy. *Participative ethnography with individual ESP working in Italy.* February and March 2024.
- Individual ESP, Niger. *Participative ethnography with individual ESP working in Niger.* February and March 2024.
- Individual ESP, Spain. *Participative ethnography with individual ESP working in Spain.* February and March 2024.
- Representative ATES, Uruguay. *Online oral interview with representative of Asociación de Trabajadores de Enseñanza Secundaria, Uruguay.* 6 February 2024.
- Representative F.E.CC.OO, Spain. *Online oral interview with representative of Federación Enseñanza CC.OO., Spain.* 6 February 2024.
- Representative FNE, Portugal. *Online oral interview with representative of the Federação Nacional da Educação, Portugal.* 18 January 2024.
- Representative FPPE CSQ, Quebec. *Online oral interview with representative of Fédération des Professionnels et Professionnelles de l'Éducation de la Centrale des Syndicats du Québec, Quebec Canada.* 24 January 2024.
- Representative FPSES CSQ, Quebec. *Online oral interview with representative of Fédération du Personnel de Soutien de l'Enseignement Supérieur, Centrale des syndicats du Québec, Quebec Canada.* 24 January 2024.
- Representative KTU, Iraqi Kurdistan. *Online written interview with representative of Kurdistan Teacher Union, Iraqi Kurdistan.* 8 January 2024.
- Representative NEA 1, United States. *Online oral interview with representative of the National Education Association, United States.* 8 January 2024.
- Representative NEA 2, United States. *Online oral interview with representative of the National Education Association, United States.* 18 January 2024.
- Representative NEU, United Kingdom. *Online oral interview with representative of the National Education Union, UK.* 9 February 2024.
- Representative NZEI TE RIU ROA, New Zealand. *Online oral interview with representative of the New Zealand Educational Institute – Te Riu Roa, New Zealand.* 18 January 2024.
- Representative SEC, Costa Rica. *Online oral interview with representative of Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Educación Costarricense, Costa Rica.* 6 February 2024.
- Representative UIL-S, Italy. *Online oral interview with representative of Unione Italiana del Lavoro Scuola, Italy.* 18 January 2024.



Representative UNSA Éducation, France. *Online oral interview with representative of Administration et Intendance Union Nationale des Syndicats Aautonomes - Éducation, France.* 6 February 2024.

Representative ZEHSSCWU, Zimbabwe. *Online written interview with representative of Zimbabwe Educational, Health, Scientific, Social and Cultural Workers Union, Zimbabwe.* 23 January 2024.

Representative ZNUT, Zambia. *Online written interview with representative of Zambia National Union of Teachers, Zambia.* 8 January 2024.





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Carrying the Community

Addressing the Consequences of
Privatization and Funding Shortfalls
for Education Support Personnel

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