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International Barometer of Education Staff

International summary | I-BEST 2023



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About the Education and Solidarity Network (ESN)



The Education and Solidarity Network is an international association founded in 2009 with the conviction that education and health are interdependent and at the heart of all human development. The Network builds bridges between education, health and social protection actors, in order to work towards the well-being of the educational communities around the world.

For more information: www.educationsolidarite.org

About the Foundation for Public Health (FESP)



Founded in 2002 in France, the Foundation for Public Health aims to identify ways of promoting the health of populations. As a multidisciplinary team, it carries out scientific studies and research in 5 main research areas: health behaviors, occupational health, environmental health, healthcare trajectories and social protection.

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Introduction

To find out more about the working conditions and feelings of education staff with a view to promoting health, the Education and Solidarity Network (ESN) and the Foundation for Public Health (FESP), with the support of Education International, UNESCO Chair Global Health & Education, have set up the International Barometer of Education Staff: I-BEST.

I-BEST is an online survey available in various languages, renewed every two years and including around a hundred questions on working conditions, professional experiences, and well-being, as well as a focus on a topical issue¹. It is distributed to educational staff by local partners via emails or targeted posts on websites and social networks.

The first edition of I-BEST took place in spring 2021 in 6 territories around the world: 8,000 teachers from France, Quebec, French-speaking Belgium², Morocco, Gambia and Mexico took part. The second edition took place between February and June 2023, and involved not only teachers, but also teaching support staff: management, administration, etc. This time, 26,281 education staff from 11 territories on 4 continents (including 4 territories that had already taken part in 2021) responded to the online survey:

- 18,932 in Europe: 10,562 in France 3,049 in Spain, 2,572 in the United Kingdom (UK), 1,690 in Switzerland (Cantons of Geneva and Vaud) and 1,059 in Belgium.
- 5,311 in the Americas: 2,277 in Argentina, 2,124 in Quebec and 910 in the rest of Canada³.
- 1,477 in Africa: 875 in Morocco and 602 in Cameroon.
- 561 in Asia, in Japan.

This high level of participation reflects the interest of the sector's staff in the subject and their high expectations in this area.

To limit response bias, the samples were adjusted to be representative in terms of gender, level of education and, if possible, age of the population of education staff at local level⁴.

I. The participants in I-BEST 2023: more than 26,000 education staff from 11 territories with varied socio-demographic and professional profiles

Each territorial sample of education personnel who took part in the second edition of I-BEST has its own specific characteristics compared with the other samples.

¹ In 2021, the focus will be on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work and well-being of education staff; in 2023, on the use and impact of digital tools in education.

² Simply referred to as Belgium in the following

³ Simply referred to as Canada in the following

⁴ Depending on the territory, the source of the enrolments used to calculate the weightings was the OECD (<https://data.oecd.org/>), UNESCO (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/>) or the Ministry of Education of the territory concerned.

Teachers make up most participants, around 9 out of 10 overall. Support staff, particularly managers, were slightly more represented in Cameroon (27%) and Argentina (21%).

While, in general, more than 7 out of 10 participants are women, reflecting the high proportion of women in the education sector worldwide, three countries have a more balanced sex ratio: Morocco (50% women), Cameroon (54%) and Japan (54%).

The different levels of school education are relatively well represented in the 11 territories surveyed, except for staff working with pupils aged over 16 in Switzerland and with pupils aged under 5 in Japan.

In Japan, part-time work among participating education staff is virtually non-existent, whereas it concerns almost half the sample in Switzerland, more than 1/3 in Argentina, 1/5^e in the United Kingdom and Belgium, and around 1/10^e in the other territories.

Length of service varies in the samples of educational staff, with the intermediate category of '5-30 years' experience, the largest in terms of number of years, also being by far the best represented in terms of numbers, at around 80%. In Cameroon, there are virtually no employees with more than 30 years' seniority, whereas they represent between 5% and 16% of the other samples.

A limited number of the education staff who responded to I-BEST 2023 work in private education, except in Cameroon, where more than a third do so, and to a lesser extent in Belgium (12%) and Spain (9%).

As far as workplaces are concerned, the schools of the participating staff differ widely in terms of the number of pupils and their environment: while all sizes and degrees of urbanicity are represented in the various territories, the majority are schools with fewer than 800 pupils and located in urban or peri-urban areas. It should be noted, however, that in Morocco, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, the schools run by the participating staff are slightly larger, while in Japan they are smaller and located in more rural areas.

Finally, most of the education staff who took part in this second edition of I-BEST are teachers, with relatively varied profiles within each of the 11 territories surveyed. Each territorial sample is different from the others, reflecting the organization of the education system and contrasting local realities. These particularities need to be considered when interpreting comparisons between territories in terms of working conditions and well-being.

II. Working conditions and environment of education staff: factors accessible to prevention

II.1 Workload, organization, and management: Room for improvement in most countries

When education staff were asked about their actual working hours, the answers they gave varied widely, both within and between countries, but overall, the workload appeared to be high. Staff in Japan report the highest volume of actual hours worked - around 50 hours per week on average for full-time staff - followed closely by those in the UK (49 hours) and Canada (47 hours). In the other territories, staff

estimate their working hours at around 40 hours a week, with slightly lower volumes observed in Morocco and Cameroon, but it is also in these two countries that the proportion of classes with 30 or more pupils is particularly high (76% and 84% respectively). The size of the classes taught varies greatly from one country to another, with Switzerland having a high proportion of small classes: almost 7 out of 10 classes there have fewer than 20 pupils.

Most education staff in the various countries rate autonomy in their work positively, with the lowest satisfaction rate observed in the UK (62%) and the highest in Switzerland (94%).

About the hierarchical relationship in the workplace, education staff in France, Belgium, Canada, and the UK are less satisfied than those in the other countries: the information provided, and the recognition given by superiors are judged insufficient by almost half the staff. Among these 4 countries, opinion remains fragile regarding the horizontal dimension of work (taking important decisions as a team), except in France where it is slightly more favourable.

Staff in France, Canada and Belgium are largely dissatisfied with training opportunities. In these three countries, the dissatisfaction rate is even higher regarding career development opportunities (between 61% and 82%), and in Spain, where 73% rate them negatively. In Argentina, on the other hand, staff are generally satisfied with both training opportunities (81% satisfied) and career development (74% satisfied). As for salary, satisfaction levels are highest in Switzerland (71%) and Belgium (67%), and lowest in Cameroon (39%) and France (26%). On these three aspects - training, career development and salary - the highest levels of dissatisfaction among the 11 territories surveyed are systematically observed in France.

II.2 School climate and social relations at work: a resource to build on

Overall, education staff rate the working climate favourably, although in Belgium, and to a lesser extent in the UK, Canada, and France, many still rate it negatively (39% in Belgium, 32%, 31% and 30% respectively). Argentina stands out with a working climate rated favourably by 9 out of 10 employees, closely followed by Japan and Switzerland.

When it comes to social relations with the various stakeholders in the education community - management, colleagues, parents, and pupils - satisfaction is still very high. However, dissatisfaction with management specifically is close to 1/3 in France and Belgium, where these figures are the lowest of all. This circumspection is reflected in the response to the question "To what extent is the management of the establishment concerned about the health and well-being of the staff", with a majority reservation on this point expressed in France and Belgium, but also in Cameroon and Morocco. In the 11 territories, nearly 90% of staff rated their relations with colleagues as positive, and the results were even better with pupils (over 95% satisfied everywhere, including 99% in Argentina). The quality of relations with parents was slightly lower in Cameroon, Belgium, and France (19%, 18% and 16% dissatisfied respectively).

II.3. Violence in the workplace: a sad trivialization

In most of the territories surveyed, almost 9 out of 10 education staff feel safe in their schools, but Cameroon is the exception, with 13% of staff saying they are "rarely" safe and even 15% "not at all" (to a lesser extent in Morocco, 17% and 5% and in Japan 15% and 2% respectively).

Most staff rate the level of pupil discipline positively, with the rate of favourable opinion ranging from 58% in Canada (the lowest rate observed out of the 11 territories) to 83% in Japan and Morocco (the highest rate).

The proportion of staff who have been the victim of violence at work in the last 12 months is varied but worrying in many countries: ranging from 40% in Canada (39% in Quebec), to half that in Morocco (22%) and Cameroon (23%) and falling to 4% in Japan. The proportion of staff who witness violence is around twice that of staff who are victims, except in Morocco, where it is lower (16%), and in Japan, where it is more like four times higher (17%).

The perpetrators of violence are often pupils, particularly in the UK, Canada, and Quebec where they are involved in more than 8 out of 10 incidents, and to a lesser extent parents. In many cases, however, other members of staff are involved. This category is particularly represented among the perpetrators of the violence recorded in Cameroon, Argentina, and Spain (around half of the incidents). The perpetrators may also be people from outside the school, especially in Morocco and Cameroon (around a third of incidents), although this is much rarer in other countries.

II.4 Physical environment: investment requirements

Opinions were divided on the physical environment in each region, with all degrees of satisfaction and dissatisfaction represented in a non-negligible proportion. Satisfaction generally prevailed, but only by a small margin for the state of the facilities in Spain and Belgium, and except for material conditions (workspaces, teaching materials, internet, etc.) in Cameroon (54% dissatisfied) and Spain (50%). Cameroon, and to a lesser extent Morocco and Belgium, have poorer indicators than the other countries in terms of amenities (electricity, drinking water) and hygiene conditions. Switzerland stands out with indicators that are almost systematically more favourable than in the other countries surveyed, and Japan also has good results for noise levels and outdoor air quality.

II.5. Private life - professional life: finding a balance

The satisfaction of education staff with their work/life balance is widely dispersed. The least positive assessment is given in France (64% dissatisfied), followed by the UK, Canada, and Japan (rates ranging from 57% to 60%), and the most positive in Argentina, Morocco, and Switzerland, where the dissatisfaction rate is below 40%.

At least 7 out of 10 employees in Cameroon (92%), Morocco (84%), Argentina (82%) and Spain (69%) provide regular support to a relative in addition to their work, the rate being more between 45 and 60% in the other territories.

In terms of journey times from home to work, the proportion of employees with a journey time of more than 1-hour one-way ranges from 2% in Switzerland and Quebec, to 13% in Morocco and 15% in Cameroon. In Cameroon, the average journey time appears to be significantly longer than in the other countries.

III. Health and well-being of education staff: different perceptions around the world

III.1 Worrying indicators of well-being at work in certain countries

The three indirect indicators of job satisfaction (balance of advantages/disadvantages of the job; if I could do it all over again...; societal appreciation) are worse in some areas, less so in others. In France, Belgium, Cameroon, and Morocco, for example, the negative view is widespread. More than 95% of staff in Belgium and France deplore the low social status of the profession. Finally, less than one staff member in two "agrees" or "strongly agrees" with the statement "on the whole, I am satisfied with my job" in Cameroon (40%), the UK (45%), Morocco (46%) and France (48%). In contrast, job satisfaction appears to be maintained in Switzerland (79%), Argentina (72%) and Spain (71%).

The proportion of staff who consider their work to be fairly or very stressful since the start of the school year varies widely between countries, from 33% in Japan (8% 'very stressful') to 76% in the UK (39% 'very stressful').

The same is true of the proportion of staff who have had sick leave during the year, ranging from 16% in Morocco to 60% in the UK. The underlying medical reasons are most often physical. However, almost a third of sick leave is attributed to a psychological condition in Belgium (35%), Quebec (34%) and Canada (32%). The average duration of sick leave over the year also varies widely, with the median observed being lower in countries such as the UK (5 days) and Japan (5 days), but much higher in Spain (20 days) and Quebec (30 days), although no simple rule can be established between rate of sick leave, duration, and reason.

Conversely, between 7 to 9 out of 10 staff, depending on the region, have worked while sick, except for Japan, where 3 out of 10 have done so. Education staff primarily cite commitment to pupils as the reason for their presenteeism, except in Japan where the responses are more balanced between the impossibility of replacement, commitment to pupils and commitment to colleagues.

As far as voice disorders are concerned, in most territories around 2 or 3 out of 10 staff have been unable to work for this reason in the past year, but this rate is relatively low in Japan (4%), and particularly high in Spain (39%) and Morocco (39%).

III.2 Contrasting quality of life, health that is often preserved but psychologically weakened

The satisfaction towards quality of life is relatively high in Switzerland (75% satisfied), Argentina (68%), Japan (68%) and Quebec (67%). With less than 50% favourable opinion, it is lower in Cameroon (41%),

Morocco (42%), Belgium (44%) and France (49%). The choice of the "worst possible life" option by 10% and 7% of the Moroccan and Cameroonian samples respectively raises questions, echoing the security, material and environmental difficulties reported by staff in these territories.

Subjective health appears to be good on average, with less than 20% of staff rating it as poor or very poor (even less than 10% in Switzerland, Argentina, and Quebec), except for Morocco, where the rate rises to 38%. Psychological health as assessed by education staff nevertheless appears to be under threat in many countries, particularly Belgium, France, and Canada, and to a lesser extent the UK: in these 4 countries, around one in two staff report experiencing negative feelings often, very often or always, or lacking the time/energy to do their job often, very often or always, or being dissatisfied with their sleep. For these indicators, education staff in Switzerland, Japan and Argentina always respond most favourably.

The proportion of staff who feel that their day-to-day tasks have been restricted for health reasons in the last 6 months is nowhere insignificant, ranging from 30% in Japan to 76% in Morocco. The reasons most often given relate to mental health: severe fatigue, sleep problems, depression, psychological problems.

IV. Digital tools: a well-established practice, good adherence mixed with a hint of ambivalence

The extent to which education staff are equipped with digital tools for professional purposes varies considerably from one territory to another. Japan has the highest rates for computers and internet connections (almost 100%) and tablets (>75%), but it is in Argentina that the availability of a smartphone for professional use is most common (although still moderate: 25% of staff equipped).

In all regions, the use of digital tools is very frequent, if not daily, except for Morocco and Cameroon, where only 1/3 of staff claim to use them every day, in line with the lowest rates of professional use observed.

Rates of use of personal digital equipment for work are never low, with up to 2/3 of staff using it systematically in Argentina and Morocco (compared with 21% and 23% respectively in Quebec and the UK, the lowest rates observed).

Overall, the adherence to digital technology by education staff appears to be good, with at least 2 out of 3 staff in the 11 territories feeling comfortable with digital tools and in favour of using them with pupils. However, using digital technology remains a source of stress for a significant proportion of staff. In addition, a certain amount of reserve is observed regarding its impact on social relations. At least 6 out of 10 staff disagree with the statement "digital tools improve my relations with pupils and families" in France (60%), Belgium (63%), Switzerland (69%) and Japan (70%).

In Quebec and Canada, staff attitudes to digital technology are almost always the most favourable compared to other territories.

In Morocco (69%) and Cameroon (67%), more than 2/3 of employees consider that the use of digital technology is not supported by management, a view that is also far from marginal in Japan (52%) and France (48%).

V. Training, professional support, occupational medicine... areas for improvement in the responses from education staff

The statistics reveal several levers that could be triggered to promote the well-being of educational staff, depending on the region. If there is one need that is expressed vigorously almost everywhere, it is that of 'health/wellbeing' training/prevention resources, with a particularly strong demand in Morocco (92%), Cameroon (89%), Belgium (84%) and France (84%). Moreover, in the latter two countries, staff feel that they are rather poorly informed about health, both from a general and professional perspective.

In all regions, and particularly in France and Belgium, education staff deplore the lack of concern for health and well-being at work on the part of school management, and even more blatantly on the part of their superiors. Finally, in most territories, a large majority of staff never see the occupational health doctor. Argentina, Spain and especially Japan are exceptions (and Quebec to a lesser extent), however, with 1 in 3 staff in Argentina and Spain and 2 in 3 in Japan (1 in 5 in Quebec) benefiting from an annual appointment with the occupational medicine.

The rate of positive responses to the question "Are you satisfied with your access to healthcare in your country?" varies widely, from 83% in Switzerland and 76% in Belgium (the highest rates observed) to 6% in Morocco and 9% in Cameroon. The same is true of people giving up healthcare for financial reasons: from 6% in Japan to over 71% and 73% respectively in Morocco and Cameroon.

VI. Health/work indicators for teachers in France, Quebec, and Belgium: contrasting trends between 2021 and 2023

Three countries with satisfactory sample sizes and structures⁵ took part in both the 2021 and 2023 editions of I-BEST: France, Quebec, and Belgium, making it possible to apprehend changes over two years in various health/work indicators in these countries. For the teaching population⁶, the indicators showed a globally favourable trend in France, a mixed trend in Quebec, and an unfavourable trend in Belgium.

In all 3 countries, encouraging developments in terms of training, career development and pay were observed, but as the 2021 level was low, there is still room for improvement in absolute terms, particularly in France.

⁵ Morocco also took part in both editions, but the size and structure of its two samples differed too greatly to allow any interpretation of the trends observed.

⁶ Only teachers had been targeted in 2021; in order to reason on a like-for-like basis, the teaching support staff (non-teaching staff) who took part in the 2023 edition have not been taken into account in the analysis of changes in indicators over 2 years.

In Quebec, while perceptions of stress at work are improving, the relational climate is tending to become more strained, with the rate of staff who are victims of violence jumping by 14% to 41%, and satisfaction with recognition by management and teamwork falling by 5% and 7% respectively.

In Belgium, at the same time as violence has become commonplace, commuting times have lengthened and sources of stress at work have intensified, well-being indicators have deteriorated in terms of quality of life, general health, depressive symptoms, and job satisfaction. As a result of this downward trend, the feelings of Belgian teachers are on a par with those in France, except in the areas of training, career development and pay, where they remain significantly better off.

Conclusion

The second edition of the International Barometer of Education Staff, with its 26,000 participants from 11 territories on 4 continents, highlights even more clearly than the first edition the wide diversity of working conditions and experiences of education workers around the world. It also points to the room for improvement in terms of their well-being, as close as possible to local realities.

Education staff in some areas enjoy more favourable conditions than others, particularly in terms of the working environment and digital tools. However, working time indicators, the lack of recognition and support, the imbalance between advantages and disadvantages and between professional and personal life, and the level of violence at work are almost universally worrying.

In 2023, the quality of life and health indicators for education staff are very mixed, drawing attention to the deep malaise among staff in some areas. Most staff still agree with the statement "if I had to do it all over again, I would choose my job again", illustrating their commitment and resilience despite the many challenges.

Among the countries that have taken part in the two editions of I-BEST, the evolution of the situation over 2 years is variable, but points in the direction of a certain return to equilibrium after the COVID-19 pandemic, which shook the organization of schools and tested teachers, as I-BEST 2021 showed.

Across the world, education staff are calling for more training, more career development opportunities, more recognition for their work and better attention to their health: professional medical check-ups and access to training and prevention resources on health and well-being.

Given the major short- and longer-term societal impact of the well-being of education staff, it must continue to be a priority to monitor it over time in different areas, to compare views and perspectives, and to identify areas for improvement in a responsive and appropriate manner.