

Recovery in education: The imperative to support and invest in the education workforce

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March 2020 heralded something unprecedented in the history of education - close to universal closure of educational facilities on the planet. Since that time, teachers, education support personnel and school leaders have been on the front line, struggling to provide quality emergency remote education to all students. Beyond applauding the professionals in public and essential services who continue to support and lead communities as we work through this crisis, the critical question is: How are we going to treat them as we move towards recovery?

Educators during COVID-19: going above and beyond for all students

Learning new skills and deploying new or unfamiliar teaching and learning tools overnight,¹ recording lessons for radio or TV stations, delivering learning materials, and sometimes free

meals, to students in far flung communities— these were some of the daily realities for teachers and education support personnel across the world during the pandemic.

While we are all in the same storm, we are certainly not navigating it in the same boat. In high-income countries, emergency remote education has meant mostly online teaching and learning for which most teachers lacked training, tools and support. In lower income countries, where even electricity is unreliable, teachers had only pen and paper to work with in order to reach their students.

Everywhere, teachers and education staff shared the same concerns about their students' well-being:² their ability to access appropriate devices and a decent Internet connection to participate

in classes, the availability of a safe and quiet place at home to study, support to deal with bereavement, or adequate services to respond to violence they may have suffered at home, not to mention keeping up with curricula. For many educators, these added issues meant long hours spent on individual students and their families and providing additional support well beyond their academic duties.

Working in a female-dominated profession, members of the teaching workforce also experienced a disproportionately high workload at home. In addition to the expanded professional responsibilities, female teachers saw their care burdens surge, putting many teachers on the verge of burnout.

In contexts where schools re-opened and face-to-face instruction resumed, teachers also experienced increased levels of stress and anxiety as they adapted to ever-changing health protocols and teaching modalities, all under a cloud of concern that they might contract the virus, putting themselves and families in jeopardy. To date, most teachers around the world continue to

1 Lisa O'Donoghue, A teacher's experience having to get to grips with online teaching in the midst of a global pandemic, 6 May 2020. Education International, <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/23342:a-teachers-experience-having-to-get-to-grips-with-online-teaching-in-the-midst-of-a-global-pandemic-by-lisa-odonoghue>

2 Armand Doucet, Should we continue student learning during covid19? A question of Maslow before Bloom, 26 March 2020. Education International, <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/23273:should-we-continue-student-learning-during-covid19-a-question-of-maslow-before-bloom-by-armand-doucet>

lack access to COVID-19 vaccines, because of global inequalities in vaccine production and distribution, but also because of governments' failure to prioritize teachers in national vaccination strategies to protect them and ensure a safe and permanent return to on-site education.

A deepening crisis: The global teacher shortage

Even before the pandemic, the United Nations estimated that 69 million teachers were needed worldwide to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 and ensure quality inclusive education for all. However, the global teacher shortage is very likely to increase in light of the pandemic: Education International (EI)'s upcoming *Status of Teachers Report 2021* reveals that more and more teachers are planning to leave the profession.

It is easy to understand why this is the case. Beyond the experience of the pandemic, our research shows that teacher workloads have steadily worsened over the last three years, while salaries have remained the same or even decreased. Permanent tenure is being replaced with casual and temporary contracts, especially in higher education. Continuous professional development is not available and teachers have paid the price for it during the pandemic. This has led to teacher well-being plummeting across the board.

Keeping teachers on the job and attracting a new generation to

the profession will remain an unattainable goal unless teaching ceases to be an overworked, undervalued, and underpaid profession.

Education personnel leading in solidarity for an equitable recovery

Since the beginning of the pandemic, education unions have supported teachers and played a crucial role in helping them to navigate this crisis: providing information, support and training every step of the way.

Social and policy dialogue and decision-making during this crisis - and as we start planning recovery - should be informed by practitioner insights and experiences. In April 2021, in partnership with the OECD, EI published 10 "Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery" (PEEER),³ a clear roadmap for a collaborative way forward for education systems that places education personnel and their representative organizations at the core of the recovery process.

Education International advocates for equity audits to be conducted at all levels of education in order to assess the impact of the

pandemic on the most vulnerable students and educators and inform an effective and equitable recovery.⁴ A whole set of measures can and should be urgently introduced to support the profession: quality working conditions and terms of employment; continuous professional development opportunities; adequate and effective mechanisms for social dialogue. Addressing teachers' well-being and focusing on the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are also critical steps.

As schools reopen, teachers are expected to address loss of learning among students and minimize the long-term impact of the crisis on students' education. Supporting and investing in the profession are absolutely imperative going forward.

How will we know if governments are serious about 'building back better' in education? Adopting a collaborative approach that includes teachers and their unions will be a critical first indicator.

³ See https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/24825:ei-and-oecd-launch-principles-for-effective-and-equitable-educational-recovery?_cldee=c3RldmUuc25pZGVyQGVpLWllLm9yZW%3d%3d&recipientid=contact-e642561e2c0be311af37005056ad0002-6bf018a67945422088bfa7575b8926f8&esid=69fe16f8-e342-41d2-9100-5b133c9d0812

⁴ See <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/24239:auditing-educational-equity-in-light-of-the-covid-19-pandemic>