

Global Campaign for Education

Briefing paper on key priority areas informed by the Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Teachers and Teaching

1. Background

“International standards, expert bodies and reviews consistently place teachers at the centre of universal access to high-quality and equitable education”¹. Although we all share this statement, behind it lies the abyss between rhetoric and the concrete realities of countries, especially in marginalized communities, where the shortage of teachers continues to grow and those who remain in service do so with great limitations and little recognition.

According to UNESCO, globally, 69 million new teachers are required to meet the 2030 education goals, of which almost 25 million are required to serve primary school children and 44 million for secondary school. Another 28 million teachers are needed to replace their colleagues due to retirement by 2030². These data do not include teacher needs in the adult education & learning and early childhood education systems, which have historically remained at a disadvantage, given the high number of illiterate adults and the overwhelming privatization of education and care for young children, often in charge of personnel without professional education and training.

Being sub-Saharan Africa where possibly the greatest challenges exist, it is necessary to add that this region has a shortage of 4.1 million teachers: almost 1 million in primary education and 3.3 million in secondary. By 2030, the countries in the region will need to recruit a total of 15 million teachers: 6.1 million at primary level and 8.9 million at secondary level. It is estimated that, to reach SDG 4 by 2030, countries will need to recruit for 8.7 million new teaching posts and replace another 6.3 million teachers who have left the profession³.

With Covid-19, teachers and teaching situations faced new threats, caused not only by the pandemic itself, but also by the commercial appetite of some communication and technology corporations, which took advantage of the health crisis to do business. With this, tendencies emerged that directly or surreptitiously made people believe that schools are unnecessary and expensive and that it was possible to dispense with teaching work, substituting it with digital self-learning programs.

¹ UNESCO. Teacher Policy Development Guide. Paris, 2019, p.11

² <https://groundreport.in/world-needs-69-million-new-teachers-to-achieve-education-target-un-report/>

³ Teachers Task Force. Closing the gap. Ensuring there are enough qualified and supported teachers in sub-Saharan Africa. Paris, 2021.

These unfortunate events contributed to impoverishing teaching work and degrading teaching, subjecting them to mechanisms that eliminate social benefits of educational employment.

As we know, teachers are one of the largest components of a nation's labour force (2–3% or more of formal employment in many countries); they are both the principal human resource in any education system or learning environment and the largest single financial component of any education authority's budget, accounting for anywhere from 60% to more than 80% of recurrent (non-capital) public education expenditures⁴.

With the pandemic, the attempts to impose austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank deepened⁵ on a majority sector of public workers. With this, practices were extended to transplant to education, models of exploitation such as piecework and fixed time hiring, in many cases without guaranteeing the minimum wage or decent work.

These mechanisms have been consistently denounced by teachers' unions, by Education International and by GCE.

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) aims to ensure better learning opportunities and more equitable and inclusive education for all. Specifically, SDG target 4.c calls for an increase in the supply of qualified teachers, particularly in low-income countries. However, as Antonia Wulff says, "there have been numerous attempts to reframe the agenda and alter its scope, such as deprioritizing certain targets, particularly those on learning environments and teachers"⁶.

This problem should draw attention to the urgency of addressing education problems in general, and especially those related to teaching and teachers, within the human rights framework and not limiting them to the scope of the Sustainable Development Agenda.

The human rights framework contains states legally binding obligations, which include the rights to, in and through education, in a broad context that is complemented by labour, economic, social, and cultural rights, which together call for ensuring and protecting the dignity of the teaching profession.

The Global Campaign for Education has also denounced the persecution and murder of teachers in many conflict situations and has called on governments and the international community to advocate and develop comprehensive policies to protect their lives and working conditions.

GCE is also concerned about the rise of authoritarianism and threats to democracy, which include not only the closure of spaces for participation, but also the repression of peaceful and legitimate

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Education International. An Educator's guide to the WDR 2018. Brussels, 2018.

⁶ Wulff, Antonia (ed). Grading Goal Four. Tensions, threats, and opportunities in the Sustainable Development Goal on Quality Education. Brill Sense, Leiden, 2020, p.2

social protest and the criminalization of students and teachers, many of them women who defend the human right to education.

2. The GCE Strategic Plan (2023-2027)

GCE believes that teachers are pivotal to the success and future of education, so the GCE 2023-2027 Strategic Plan calls for investing in the teaching profession, as one of the smartest investments to generate returns for just and sustainable societal progress.

The Strategic Plan also suggests a series of actions that the GCE movement should undertake so that education policies, systems, and institutions:

- Adequately value and remunerate teachers at all levels and put in place enabling and equitable working conditions
- Engage teachers, education support personnel and teachers' unions in shaping education systems and institutions
- Urgently fill the growing teacher gap, duly considering the diversity and equality of the teaching profession
- Provide continuous professional development and learning opportunities for teachers at all levels to meet the changing needs of learners in all their diversity and society overall
- Maximize safety and security for teachers, education support personnel and learners in all contexts

These measures must be accompanied by the general mobilization of GCE members, to ensure that states provide free and open, easily accessible, contextually relevant education and learning and protect the professional autonomy and academic freedom of teachers at all levels and modalities and in all contexts, including emergencies.

3. Critical challenges

GCE believes that teacher shortage and threats to the teaching profession affect the entire planet because the construction of global citizenship based on the respect and promotion of human rights as a way of life can only be achieved by overcoming all forms of exclusion and marginalisation everywhere. However, GCE notes that teacher shortage is dramatic in specific regions and countries -with a perverse effect on students with disabilities and indigenous populations- and it is not a problem in others.

As GCE's founding member Education International rightly states, the world must commit to increasing investment in quality public education systems, guaranteeing labour rights and good working conditions for teachers and education support personnel, and respecting teachers and their pedagogical expertise. Improving teaching conditions in these regions and countries require implementing new decolonizing strategies, which imply eliminating austerity measures that

prevent states from paying decent salaries to teachers, for which it would also be necessary to resolve the debt weight in low and middle-income countries.

Global data reveals that the learning crisis reported daily in various media is partly due to the growing weakening of teaching work and the exclusion of teachers from participation in decision-making.

This weakening has a dramatic effect on all education processes, but mainly it reveals that rather than a learning crisis, the world is facing a crisis of inequality, in which low- and middle-income countries and early childhood, youth and adult populations that have historically been discriminated against, pay the consequences of this type of structural violence.

Gender responsive education policies; financial investments to secure teachers a decent living standard; access to technology and pedagogical training to teach in the most diverse and complex situations, are some of the gaps that governments should urgently address to secure everyone's right to education, including women and people with disabilities. We should not forget that teachers in refugee camps are teaching in overcrowded environments and poor sanitary conditions that not only make their lives considerably complex but also limits the children, youth, and adult's possibilities to learn.

Lastly, GCE agrees that teachers play a crucial role in developing and fostering democratic values in communities. However, the failure to instill values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law – accompanied by open discussion and critical thinking – is not an accident in dictatorships.⁷

As a society, we cannot simply expect that teachers, living without the necessary protection and training - can successfully undertake the responsibility of educating children, youth, and adults in emergency situations. Teachers require special training for supporting communities affected by war, climate change, disaster and amongst other emergencies, hunger. As we continue to witness emergency situations such as the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh⁸, the massive displacement within and across national borders of civilians in Afghanistan⁹, and people facing food insecurity in the Horn of Africa¹⁰ these emergencies often intersect.

It is unfair to expect teachers to solve problems that are not discussed or resolved in the corresponding national and international political arenas. But it is impossible for these problems to be solved without the participation of teachers. Breaking double standards is a task we must undertake with determination.

4. Way forward

⁷ Education International. On Education & Democracy. 25 Lessons from the Teaching Profession. Brussels, 2019. , p.18

⁸ M. Mahruf C. Shohel (2020) Education in emergencies: challenges of providing education for Rohingya children living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, Education Inquiry.

⁹ See UNHCR (2021). Urgent: Rapid escalation in Afghanistan.

¹⁰ Brain, L, and Hammond, L. (2020). Food security during the COVID-19 pandemic: overlapping challenges, emerging responses in the Horn of Africa. SOAS.

GCE's advocacy work should continue to focus on teachers' needs and rights, ensuring that they remain at the centre of education.

It is convenient to expand the focus, though, so teacher unions are progressively included in all National Education Coalitions. In this way, the voice and experience of teachers -especially the young ones- will enrich decision-making on advocacy actions.

A critical element of democracy in education, anchored in international standards and good practice, is academic or professional freedom. Part of developing democracy competencies is creating and maintaining an environment of free speech, so if academic freedom is effectively protected for teachers, it creates a good climate for learning about democracy for students.¹¹

This principle opens new challenges for GCE, because the ability of teachers to instill democratic values, environmental justice, gender equality, and building critical mass, requires a type of initial education and training, to which not everyone has access. Influencing teacher education programs, then, is a strategic path that should be explored more decisively, especially in universities or equivalent institutions in charge of teacher's education.

Other advocacy actions should be directed towards the adoption of legal frameworks and concrete policies to ensure teachers the best working conditions, including preparation in emergency contexts.

Particularly important is to guarantee the necessary conditions for teaching work in refugee camps, migrants and asylum seekers shelters and similar facilities, with special protection to female teachers and learners and to include teachers and their representative organizations in decision-making structures at all levels.

¹¹ Education International. On Education & Democracy, op cit, p. 28