



BRIEFING

UNLEASH THE POWER: WHY TEACHERS HOLD THE KEY TO STRONGER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

May 2022

Photo: 'I love teaching' says Nimbona. She teaches a classroom of Burundian refugee children in western Tanzania. Photographer name: UNHCR/Georgina Goodwin. Save the Children Fund is a registered company limited by guarantee (Company No. 178159). Registered Charity in England & Wales (No. 213890), Scotland (SC039570) and Isle of Man (No. 199). 1 St John's Lane, London, EC1M 4AR



**Save the
Children**

CONTENTS

1. Summary	3
2. What is the global situation for teachers?	4
3. What is at stake?	5
4. What challenges do teachers face?	9
5. How can we better support teachers?	15
6. Recommendations	17



Mr. MacKenzie is the third grade's teacher at Zipporah's (12 years old) school in Turkana Central sub-county, Kenya.

©Jordi Matas / Save the Children

Summary

*Children don't care how much you know until they see how much you care .
Nagham Baydoun, teacher, Lebanon*

Inside and outside classrooms, in formal and informal education settings, teachers are the bedrock of our national education systems. Over the last two years, as the world has responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, 85 million teachers worldwide have been the foundation of efforts to ensure education continued through and beyond the crisis.¹

With many examples of creativity, innovation, and resilience in the face of great adversity, teachers have demonstrated how they are – and must be – fully involved in efforts to prepare education systems for future crises.

As part of a commitment to push decision-makers to Build Forward Better following the release of Save the Children's global education report², we want to highlight the unique role that teachers play in children's learning, and in maintaining and improving national education systems. We are using this opportunity to demonstrate the key interventions that have a positive impact on overcoming the challenges teachers face.

Our recommendations focus upon:

- Investing in evidence-based education system strengthening
- Supporting teachers to be the best professionals they can be
- Engaging teachers in policy making

What do mean by 'teachers?'

In all contexts, we define 'teachers' very broadly. Enabling Teachers and similar Save the Children programmes support volunteers and unregistered teachers as well as those that have limited access to professional development. In humanitarian contexts, this is also the case. Additionally, 'teachers' in humanitarian contexts are often displaced or refugees themselves.

They may be youth leaders or selected by community leaders because they have experience and interest to work with children. They may be called by another name; a facilitator, or a learning instructor but for the purpose of this brief and the examples we would like to share, they all constitute teachers.



Located in a small village in Telangana, south India is this local government-run preschool. The teacher, Vandana, has received training from our partner twice in her career. As part of this training, she learned about experiential learning, the importance of nutrition in improving learning outcomes, and a range of other skills.

©Rajan Zaveri / Save the Children

¹ UNESCO (2020) [World Teachers Day Fact Sheet](#)

² Save The Children (2021) [Build Forward Better: How the global community must act now to secure children's learning in crises | Save the Children's Resource Centre](#)

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL SITUATION FOR TEACHERS?

Even before the pandemic, education was in crisis, with a total of 258 million children and young people out of school – around one sixth of the global school-age population.³ In addition to this, UNESCO estimates that 69 million new, qualified teachers will need to be recruited by 2030⁴ to stand any chance of achieving SDG 4. The existing teacher workforce needs better resources and training – in addition, continuous professional development should be standard practice, and improved pay and working conditions are needed to be able to deliver safe, quality, inclusive education.⁵

Teachers have been historically overlooked in major global education commitments. This has led to a piecemeal approach to standards and targets meaning that the profession has suffered, and children's learning and wellbeing with it. As conflicts and crises have increased globally, teachers have not been supported in line with growing demands, and a gap in workforce numbers and capacity has grown to become a gulf, even more exposed by the recent pandemic.⁶

The dual shock of school closures and economic crises instigated by the pandemic have exacerbated challenges already facing teachers, while simultaneously presenting new ones.⁷ At least 63 million primary and secondary teachers alone have been affected by the pandemic to date⁸ due to loss of livelihoods, sickness, and impacts on protection and wellbeing. The disruption to regular learning has impacted student teachers. This threatens to worsen the existing global shortage of qualified teachers in the future.⁹

It is worth highlighting, that the pandemic also demonstrated the natural instincts and abilities of teachers to respond quickly, effectively, and creatively to different challenges and barriers to education. In many cases all over the world, teacher roles changed overnight, propelling them into an unknown and demanding situation.¹⁰ Yet they proved they are often best placed to understand children's needs - and with that knowledge, they supported children through the crisis.¹¹

Without a shared global approach to supporting teachers, we are missing a collective opportunity to transform education systems which centres those at the heart of delivery and engages with teachers in an effective and meaningful way.

The unique role of teachers

What I value most as a teacher is my ability to see children make individual progress in their personal lives; see children complete their education and become responsible citizens.

Teacher, Mbopuma Community school, Sioma District, Zambia

Teachers are our eyes and ears into the world's classrooms, where the next generation of global citizens will emerge from. For teachers in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian contexts, taking the time, energy, and adequate resources to develop our future leaders can sometimes fall frustratingly low on the list of government priorities. Teachers are frequently caught in a battle between wanting to focus on the quality learning of their students and balancing the variety of complex pastoral needs that teachers are increasingly being expected to fill.¹²

³ UNESCO (2019) [The World is Off Track to Deliver on its Education Commitments by 2030 | Data for Sustainable Development](#)

⁴ UNESCO (2016) [The world needs almost 69 million new teachers](#)

⁵ Teacher Task Force (2021) [World Teachers Day Fact Sheet](#)

⁶ The Education Commission (2019) [Report: Transforming the Education Workforce Report](#)

⁷ World Bank (2021) [The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery \(worldbank.org\)](#)

⁸ UNESCO (2020) [Supporting teachers and education personnel during times of crisis](#)

⁹ The Education Commission (2019) [Report: Transforming the Education Workforce Report](#)

¹⁰ GCPEA (2020) [Education Under Attack 2020](#)

¹¹ INEE (2018) [Supporting Quality Decision Making for Children in Crisis](#)

¹² Education International (2021) [The Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021](#)

To free up more time for teachers to have a bigger impact, there needs to be a wholesale approach to understanding where teachers are feeling under pressure and challenged, and a commitment to work with them to develop impactful solutions.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The impact on the quality of children's learning and wellbeing

Evidence clearly demonstrates that teachers and effective pedagogy are the most important factors influencing student achievement.¹³

Teacher quality is the single most important influence on learning outcomes at the school level. An effective teacher can make a major difference to a student's learning trajectory – going from a low-performing to a high-performing teacher increases student learning significantly. Teachers can also impact long-term student well-being, future academic achievement, and economic outcomes. Several years of outstanding teaching may also improve equity, offsetting learning deficits of disadvantaged students.¹⁴

Evidence from the World Bank also shows that going from a low-performing teacher to a high-performing teacher increases student learning dramatically. The effect has been measured from more than 0.2 standard deviations in Ecuador to more than 0.9 standard deviations in India – the equivalent of multiple years of business-as-usual schooling.¹⁵

Well-trained and supported teachers are also crucial to fostering inclusive education systems. Globally, nearly 240 million children have a disability, yet they are disproportionately denied their right to an education.¹⁶ Teachers have often been left unprepared to respond to the unique challenges that schooling presents for children with disabilities, even more so when considering the switch to remote learning brought about by the pandemic.¹⁷ In refugee and emergency settings teacher quality is an even more critical driver of variations in student learning outcomes.¹⁸

Teachers now face a colossal task to address these learning losses and help children succeed, especially where these are coupled with additional health, mental health and social challenges children may have. Without increased support for teachers, the SDG4 global targets on education will be even further out of reach.

The role of teachers beyond education

Increasingly the roles and responsibilities of teachers are becoming blurred. This is most acute at the onset of a crisis, when children require immediate support – sometimes physically, as well as emotionally. In addition to the continuity of teaching and learning, teachers have important child protection and safeguarding responsibilities. This is particularly critical for the most at risk children – girls, children with disabilities, refugees, conflict-affected children – where teachers work with parents and primary caregivers to identify appropriate interventions.¹⁹

Teachers are critical duty bearers in schools, contributing to ensuring emotional and psychosocial protection, physical protection and a positive teaching and learning environment. Teachers have a role in promoting equitable gender norms and supporting children to develop risk management and social and emotional competencies – skills to help prevent and respond to protection concerns in and around schools.²⁰

¹³ Economic Policy Institute (2003) [Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes](#)

¹⁴ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Full-Report](#).

¹⁵ World Bank (2019) [Jan2019_SuccessfulTeachers_PrintVersion\(worldbank.org\)](#)

¹⁶ UNICEF (2022) [Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities](#)

¹⁷ UNESCO (2021) [Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the education of persons with disabilities: challenges and opportunities of distance education](#)

¹⁸ Save The Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

¹⁹ The Education Commission (2019) [Report: Transforming the Education Workforce Report](#)

²⁰ Save the Children (2018) [Safe Schools Common Approach](#)

Teachers, alongside caregivers and community members, can also be trusted adults for vulnerable children. This is especially true if a teacher understands issues on health and hygiene, reproductive rights, and threats from sexual exploitation, child marriage and female genital mutilation. Where female teachers are available, this factor becomes even more important, with evidence indicating that girls' education in crisis contexts can be improved with an increase in the presence of qualified, trained female teachers.²¹

Unfortunately, this dynamic is very rarely considered by policy makers when addressing the kind of support and training that teachers need. This often means an extra burden placed on teachers in what is already a challenging time. Unrealistic expectations are being placed on teachers not just by decision makers, but by caregivers and children too.

Before the school received (our) COVID-19 grant, I mobilized fellow teachers to donate small funds to buy face masks for 16 learners from disadvantaged homes who didn't have face masks so they too continued coming to school.

Ms. Katongo Mpundu, ECE teacher, Mbopum, Zambia

Investing in Teachers

The largest investment in any education system is teacher salaries. In over half of all low- and lower-middle income countries the cost of the education workforce accounts for 75% or more of the national education budget.²² In countries such as Malawi, Namibia, South Sudan, Togo, and Zimbabwe, 95% or more of the national education budget is spent on teacher salaries.²³

Investing in the education workforce to improve recruitment, professional development, and retention requires sufficient, sustainable, and consistent financing. However, the failure to allocate sufficient, equitably distributed financing to education in many low- and lower-middle income countries results in teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and poor conditions for teaching and learning.²⁴

Between 2014 and 2019, 48 countries missed both education financing benchmarks of 4-6% of GDP and 15-20% of public spending.²⁵ To achieve SDG 4, UNESCO has estimated that education spending in low and lower-middle-income countries needs to increase from an average of 3.5% to 6.3% of national budgets.²⁶

What is clear is that the current approach to financing the education workforce needs to be improved. Despite teachers' salaries dominating a large percentage of some national budgets, the lack of investment in continuous professional development and appropriate resources means that this is not an efficient use of money as teachers continue to be under-prepared and supported to have the kind of impact that is needed to make this approach effective. What is needed is not just smarter and more efficient allocation of existing resources, but increased spending on education as a whole.

Promising commitments were made at the Global Education Summit in 2021 where 19 leaders endorsed the Kenyatta Declaration²⁷ to increase government spending on education, with a goal of hitting the global benchmark of spending 20% of their national budgets over the next five years.²⁸ Yet there is still a lack of flexible funding available to truly invest in the type of support teachers need, and more importantly, the type of support that helps them to be an effective solution to the growing learning crisis. Without addressing this, there is a risk that limited resources will be allocated inefficiently, where their impact cannot be maximised.

²¹ Plan International (2021) [Education in Crisis](#)

²² The Education Commission (2019) [Report: Transforming the Education Workforce Report](#)

²³ Teacher Task Force (2021) [Closing the gap – Ensuring there are enough qualified and supported teachers in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

²⁴ World Bank (2021) [The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery](#)

²⁵ UNESCO (2021) [Global education monitoring report, 2021/2: non-state actors in education: who chooses? who loses?](#)

²⁶ UNESCO (2015) [Pricing the Right to Education: the Cost of Reaching New Targets by 2030](#)

²⁷ Global Partnership for Education (2021) [Heads of State call to action on education finance](#)

²⁸ Global Partnership for Education (2021) [What happened at the Global Education Summit](#)



Ms. Mahenge assists one of her pupils during a comprehension lesson at Igamba Primary School in Mbozi, Tanzania. As part of the High Performing Teachers Programme, teachers are introduced to a multi-dimensional and individualized professional development programme, which aims to improve their skills so that they can deliver better quality education.

©Martin Kharumwa / Save the Children

Teachers as advocates for learning

No-one is more capable of setting out what needs to change to improving teaching than teachers themselves. Teachers have the best experience of what they need, want and expect in order to do their job. Teachers must be able to take part in national, district and school level policy discussions in a meaningful way.

It is very important that I take part in policy discussions because I know what is required in the school, classroom and children's individual needs. This would also avoid wastage of resources whereby government and other development actors end up buying us wrong materials.

Teacher, Mbopuma Community school, Sioma District, Zambia

We know teachers are brilliant advocates, not just for their profession, but for the children they teach. Through national unions, still seen as the most effective mechanism for engagement between teachers and decision makers,²⁹ teachers have regularly demanded improvements to education systems. Most recently, for example, pushing education ministries to facilitate the safe return of children back to classroom after the Covid-19 school closures.³⁰

The pandemic has highlighted that for teachers to best use the important knowledge they have about their students, ongoing dialogue with policymakers is essential.³¹ Through a report from Education International, it emerged that policy dialogue between governments and education unions is vital, as teachers' understanding and support for education policies is necessary for successful implementation of policy reforms.³² Most importantly - where teachers are not supportive of new policies or initiatives - whether due to different analysis of needs, lack of resourcing or fears over implementation support - the reform is unlikely to be successful, as teachers are key actors for their implementation.³³

Recognising the importance of motivated and empowered teachers, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in Uganda set out a commitment to establish a Teacher Social Dialogue Framework.³⁴ The Framework operates on the basis that main driver of the variation in student learning at school is *'the quality and commitment of teachers'*. Therefore, through social dialogue, *'the country can go a long way in minimising the wastage of resources and teaching time normally attributed to teacher ineffectiveness*

²⁹ Educational International (2021) [The Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021](#)

³⁰ Education International (2017) [Gabon: striking teachers call for social dialogue to improve the education system](#)

³¹ OECD (2021) [Ten Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery from COVID](#)

³² Education International (2020) [FORWARD TO SCHOOL – Guidance, Considerations and Resources for and from Education Unions to Inform Decision-Making in Times of Covid-19](#)

³³ UNESCO (2018) [Enhancing teacher participation in social dialogue](#)

³⁴ Uganda Ministry of Education and Sport (2018) [Uganda Social Dialogue Framework](#)

and dissatisfaction'.³⁵ The Framework also sought to create a reliable platform for capturing teachers' concerns in decision making processes and policy formulation. This helped the MoES implement teacher welfare schemes while promoting professionalism and standards of performance for all categories of teachers.

Unfortunately, however, most teachers globally have not benefitted from the same type of consultation and support. Instead, the pandemic has exposed already difficult and strained relationships between themselves and decision makers.³⁶ In the latest global *Status of Teachers* survey, 29% of unions surveyed responded that they were rarely or never consulted on education policy.³⁷ In particular, the increased number of strikes by teachers³⁸ demonstrates that policy makers are not seeing teachers as a key partner in education delivery, an approach which is hindering the potential for an engaged and empowered workforce.

³⁵ Uganda Ministry of Education and Sport (2018) [Uganda Social Dialogue Framework](#)

³⁶ Education International (2021) [The Global Report on the Status of Teachers](#)

³⁷ Education International (2021) [The Global Report on the Status of Teachers](#)

³⁸ Education International (2021) [strikes demand better conditions for teachers](#)

What challenges do teachers face?

From speaking to teachers directly and evidence from our programmes, we can highlight some of the most serious challenges that teachers are facing.

Not enough teachers are being recruited

A mismatch between the rise in pupil numbers and the supply of teachers by governments means that teachers in low- and lower middle-income countries regularly face class sizes that exceed UNESCO's recommended benchmarks (40:1 primary, 25:1 secondary).³⁹ This is most pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa, where despite slight improvements, the 'pupil / trained teacher ratio' is almost double the global average.⁴⁰ To improve this situation, 15 million more teachers will need to be recruited in this region alone by 2030,⁴¹ in addition to the growing professional development needs of existing teachers to respond to the vulnerability of education systems.⁴²

Despite acknowledgement that there is a global recruitment crisis in teaching, so far there appears very little concerted effort from high-level decision makers globally to prioritise this issue. This means the teachers that remain in the education system not only have to absorb increasing pressures, but do so with the reality that the situation will only get worse.⁴³

There is no comprehensive plan to keep teachers in the profession – both at the international level, and in national education frameworks. A combination of increasing workloads, poor and unreliable pay, and direct risks to teachers' health and safety continue to add to already high attrition rates, causing unsustainable pressures on the teachers that remain.⁴⁴

Still too few decision makers are making the link between investing in the development of their teachers and solving one of the biggest challenges to sustainable education financing by keeping well trained and motivated teachers inside the profession.

The Education Commission highlights that one effective example of how teachers can be retained is to offer different career tracks. In Singapore, after three years of teaching, teachers are assessed annually to gauge their potential for three different career paths: a teaching track, a leadership track, and a senior specialist track⁴⁵. Teachers with the potential to be school leaders are moved to middle management teams and receive training to prepare them for their new roles. Middle managers are assessed for their potential to become assistant principals or principals, and specialised training is provided for school principals, therefore keeping the process of progression underway and investing in existing staff to bolster the experienced workforce.⁴⁶

Lack of provision for continuous professional development

In some low-income countries, many teachers do not have access to quality training, or do not need qualifications to enter the profession, having limited pedagogical and subject knowledge. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 62% of teachers in primary schools and only 45% of teachers in secondary schools are trained to teach.⁴⁷

Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, including on gender-transformative, inclusive practices, as well as on child protections issues, is integral to improving the safety, quality and inclusivity of education. Gender transformative teaching has the potential to positively transform the root causes of gender inequality with and for all children and effect change in harmful gender views and practices.

³⁹ UNESCO (2021) [Simulating-Benchmark-Africa-Feb-2021](#)

⁴⁰ UNESCO (2021) [Global education monitoring report, 2021/2: non-state actors in education: who chooses? who loses?](#)

⁴¹ Teacher Task Force (2021) [Closing the gap – Ensuring there are enough qualified and supported teachers in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

⁴² Save the Children (2021) [Build forward better | Save the Children International](#)

⁴³ UNESCO (2020) [Inclusion and Education | Global Education Monitoring Report](#)

⁴⁴ The Education Commission (2019) [Report: Transforming The Education Workforce](#)

⁴⁵ The Education Commission (2019) [Report: Transforming the Education Workforce Report](#)

⁴⁶ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Full-Report.pdf \(educationcommission.org\)](#)

⁴⁷ Teacher Task Force (2021) [Closing the gap – Ensuring there are enough qualified and supported teachers in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Evidence suggests that training is most effective when subject-specific, tailored to local need, and supported by opportunities for peer-to-peer coaching and collaboration.⁴⁸ Too often however, teachers are left with little formal support to continue improving in their field. This results in stagnated and outdated pedagogy, as well as poor adaptability for new and emerging challenges.⁴⁹

One example of this is the failure to support teachers to engage with education technology innovations and provide them with a platform to engage with the design and delivery of programmes. This is despite the fact that during the pandemic, many teachers created or rapidly expanded distance learning initiatives often on their own.⁵⁰ Another example being the lack of formal opportunities to learn and implement positive changes created during the pandemic in the longer-term where appropriate.

Unfortunately, due to growing class sizes and poor teacher retention rates, CPD is not prioritised for the remaining workforce, creating problems for the future of the profession and the next generation of learners.⁵¹ One way to deliver positive CPD is by strengthening the teaching workforce and embedding a culture of peer-to-peer learning which can then develop into a more formal structure driven by the teachers themselves.

Save the Children spotlight: Peer-to-peer learning in Vietnam

To facilitate capacity building for teachers, Save the Children in Vietnam implemented a model of 'demonstration lessons supported by peers'. In this model, a teacher who delivers a practice lesson is technically supported by a more experienced teacher (called a coach). The coach is usually from the same school and is responsible for supporting the teacher with lesson planning, observing the lesson in person, and providing constructive feedback afterwards.

In October 2021, a survey was conducted among supported teachers to collect their feedback on the model. The findings showed that 94% of preschool teachers and 98% primary school teachers reported that the model was useful or very useful to them. The majority of surveyed teachers stated that peer support really helped them to improve their technical knowledge and teaching skills, and they appreciated the opportunity of working together and helping each other to do better. The value of this peer-to-peer learning approach is also demonstrated in its sustainability, with two-thirds of surveyed teachers reporting that they were now confident or very confident in offering peer support to another colleague.

Reaching the children most impacted by poverty & inequality

Another challenge teachers face is trying to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised children, and those with needs which might not be met by generalised approaches to learning. Despite teachers often being one of the first to signpost that a child has specific and unmet learning needs, there is very little in the way of support for teachers to act on this information. They often struggle to find extra resource or adaptations which can be implemented quickly and for low cost. Despite the role teachers can play in tackling gender inequality, many lack the training and support needed to disrupt gender stereotypes and norms.⁵²

After Covid-19 struck education systems globally, teachers were first responders tasked with understanding and meeting the learning and social needs of their students. In many cases they switched to distance learning as standard and turned to technological approaches where possible.⁵³ This leads to an extra challenge for teachers to ensure that distance learning is accessible to all. They must reach learners with complex needs, taking a 'radical inclusion' approach and targeted interventions towards the most marginalised children first.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Executive-Summary](#)

⁴⁹ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Full-Report.pdf \(educationcommission.org\)](#)

⁵⁰ World Bank (2021) [The State of the Global Education Crisis : A Path to Recovery](#)

⁵¹ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce-Full-Report](#)

⁵² Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

⁵³ Save the Children (2021) [Build forward better | Save the Children International](#)

⁵⁴ UNICEF (2021) [Radical inclusion in education](#)

An example of a successful intervention to reach the most marginalised children is the *STAGES II* project in Afghanistan.⁵⁵ *STAGES II* contributed to the learning and transition of girls enrolled in primary- and lower-secondary community-based education and accelerated learning programmes – with a focus on girls with disabilities, girls who do not speak the language of instruction and girls from poor households. To make this successful, key project activities focused on training teachers in community-based education and government schools; and providing female teacher apprenticeships and flexible school grants. In addition, through the *Girls Learning to Teach Afghanistan* project, adolescent girls were supported to apprentice as teachers for community-based education classes to increase girls' enrolment and address the lack of available qualified female teachers.⁵⁶

Following the onset of the pandemic, the project ensured the continuity of learning through a combination of printed materials and telephone lessons delivered by teachers. A Rapid Gender Analysis found that most girls were able to access and use these distance learning opportunities and also received support from School Management Committee members who helped with participation, and dealt with issues of violence, early marriage, workload and depression.⁵⁷



A teacher teaches the alphabet to children inside a classroom of a temporary learning space in an informal settlement on the Colombia-Venezuela border.

©Save the Children

Meeting the needs of displaced children

The continued rise in the global forcibly displaced population means that close to half of all refugee children – 48 per cent – remain out of school⁵⁸ and compared to other children and youth around the world, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school.⁵⁹

If we are to achieve the commitments in the Global Compact on Refugees⁶⁰ to provide quality education to all refugee children within a few months of their displacement, investing in teachers should be a high priority. However, well-prepared and supported teachers are often an afterthought, and, to date, there has been a woeful lack of investment in ensuring teacher quality in refugee settings. Many teachers in refugee contexts lack even the minimum 10 days of training required by UNHCR.⁶¹ In Ethiopia, for example, only 21% of teachers of refugees had a professional teaching qualification.⁶²

In Jordan, Save the Children works with teachers through the Transforming Refugee Education towards Excellence' (TREE) programme. This is a joint initiative between Save the Children and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL), in collaboration with the Jordanian Ministry of Education (MoE) and in partnership with Community Jameel and Dubai Cares. Embedded in the national education system, the project aims to provide a

⁵⁵ FCDO (2021) [Girls Education Challenge – Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success \(STAGES\)](#)

⁵⁶ Save the Children (2021) [Let Girls Learn](#)

⁵⁷ FCDO (2021) [Girls Education Challenge – Steps Towards Afghan Girls' Education Success \(STAGES\)](#)

⁵⁸ UNHCR (2021)

⁵⁹ UNESCO (2016) [No more excuses: provide education to all forcibly displaced people](#)

⁶⁰ UNHCR (2018) [Global Compact on Refugees](#)

⁶¹ Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

⁶² Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

durable solution to the decline in the occupational wellbeing of teachers and learning outcomes of children, including refugee children.

TREE engages teachers and other education professionals to co-design, prototype, and test a new Teacher Professional Development (TPD) curriculum - focusing on improving teacher occupational wellbeing and the quality of teaching practices in relation to creativity, innovation, and learning resources. As part of the programme, TREE developed a new survey which has been shared with over 4,500 teachers, asking them to self-report their own levels of wellbeing, and work together to develop solutions to deal with any negative results. This research highlighted that helping children recover psychosocially, and supporting them to learn in a new language, is a key challenge teachers face, and for which they need continuous teacher development and support.⁶³

Teachers often struggle to meet the needs of displaced students of different ages, learning levels, backgrounds, and proficiency in the language of instruction. In addition, overcrowded schools and a lack of sufficient teachers and resources compromise the quality of education. Both refugee children and teachers may demonstrate psychosocial distress inflicted by their displacement, including depression, anxiety, and panic attacks.⁶⁴

Additionally, to increase the quality and supply of teachers in refugee settings, refugee teachers should be given the right to work. Unfortunately, refugee teachers from the country of origin are often refused the right to work in the host country, depriving refugee children and the host country of a valuable resource.⁶⁵

In Uganda, South Sudanese, Burundian and Congolese refugee teachers are not allowed the status of teacher until they have gained Ugandan certification. Instead, they must settle for lower status – and lower pay – as a teaching assistant, whilst class numbers and demands on existing teachers skyrocket.⁶⁶ The recent example of teachers fleeing Ukraine and being granted rights to continue working in Europe⁶⁷ however show that it is possible – but now implementation of this commitment is urgently needed.

Accelerated and flexible pathways to certification are required to ensure that existing teachers from the country of origin can be quickly brought into the teaching force, whilst also better supporting host community teachers to get increased support to respond to the specific nature of the challenge.⁶⁸

Teaching through a crisis

When a crisis hits, teachers are the first education responders. Teachers are often, alongside caregivers and communities, the only educational resource available to children during times of emergency and are usually left to find ways of continuing children's learning without adequate support, training, or infrastructure, and often at risk to their own safety and wellbeing.⁶⁹ To unlock education in emergencies, children need well-supported, well-trained teachers.⁷⁰ However, during crises, support to teachers is sporadic, uncoordinated, and of varied quality.⁷¹

Educational disruption due to the climate crisis is having a devastating impact on the well-being and futures of children. At the same time, teachers are not equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement risk reduction measures in classrooms to protect the safety, security and well-being of learners and themselves.

⁶³ Save the Children (2018) [Hear it from the teachers: Getting refugee children back to learning](#)

⁶⁴ Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

⁶⁵ Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

⁶⁶ Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

⁶⁷ The Guardian (2022) [Ukraine refugees given right to live in EU for three years](#)

⁶⁸ Save the Children (2018) [Time to Act: Providing refugee children the education they were promised](#)

⁶⁹ GCPEA (2020) [Education Under Attack 2020](#)

⁷⁰ UNICEF (2020) [How prepared are global education systems for future crises? - Evidence for Action](#)

⁷¹ Plan International (2021) [Education in Crisis](#)

In countries where a crisis is increasingly likely, extra support for teachers in emergency contexts needs to be at the heart of any education resilience planning.⁷² Teacher agency must be central with educators best placed to understand the specific needs of their children and schools. Mechanisms and structures should therefore be provided to ensure that teachers are heard by policymakers in emergency planning and responses, including through teacher unions.

Risk of attack and threats to safety

Between 2015 and 2019 there were more than 11,000 global reports of attacks on education or of military use of educational facilities.⁷³ In conflict settings, teachers often put themselves at risk to continue teaching, either delivering lessons from unsafe buildings or areas. Teachers themselves are at high risk of attack or reprisal.⁷⁴ By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration,⁷⁵ 114 member states⁷⁶ have promised that *'every teacher, professor, and school administrator should be able to teach and research in conditions of safety, security, and dignity'*.

In addition to the risks posed to teachers because of conflict and direct attacks on education, the global response to Covid-19 has also demonstrated that teachers continue to face higher than average risks to the virus. It is essential that teachers are treated as essential frontline workers, with priority access to health care, including virus testing and vaccinations when they are available.⁷⁷

Teachers in Zambia told us that *teachers need to be supported financially to buy medical supplements especially vitamins and other personal protective equipment and materials'* whilst another added that *'teachers acted as front-line staff by sacrificing their time and life to see to it that schools remained operational during peak periods of Covid-19 pandemic'*.

These examples demonstrate the layered risks that teachers face both physically and emotionally – often whilst responsible for the wellbeing of the children they teach.

Lack of focus on teacher wellbeing or livelihoods

Teachers are one of the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and quality in education and key to sustainable global development.⁷⁸ But teachers are also people, just like us. They have families, hopes, fears, needs, and wants. For teachers to do the job they are most passionate about; we need to ensure that teachers' basic needs are being met.

Supporting teachers' wellbeing is the first step towards ensuring they can effectively respond to the diverse psychosocial and learning needs of children. But according to a recent survey, nearly two thirds of teachers' unions report deteriorating working conditions.⁷⁹

In my school an older teacher left because he had no contact with other teachers (due to Covid-19 school closures) because it was very difficult for him, and he preferred to leave. I can't say it's the teachers' fault that we don't learn, you have to put yourself in their shoes. If we get frustrated, so do they: being in front of a screen with nobody responding to you. They didn't even have the Internet and they had to get the Internet into their homes and pay for it out of their own pockets because the governments should have paid them for this and they haven't done so.

Statement from Paula from Colombia, Nicole from Guatemala and Ana from Peru. All three girls are part of our Regional Advisory Group of Children and Adolescents in Latin America.

During a crisis, like the pandemic, teachers' pre-existing mental health concerns are likely to be exacerbated.⁸⁰ This is especially likely if support and interaction with other colleagues is absent, as well

⁷² Save the Children (2021) [Build Forward Better: How the global community must act now to secure children's learning in crises](#)

⁷³ Save the Children (2021) [Stop the War on Children: A crisis of recruitment](#)

⁷⁴ GCPEA (2020) [Education Under Attack 2020](#)

⁷⁵ GCPEA (2021) [Safe Schools Declaration](#)

⁷⁶ GCPEA (2022) [Endorsement – Safe Schools Declaration](#)

⁷⁷ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce](#)

⁷⁸ UNESCO (2021) [Teachers](#)

⁷⁹ Save the Children (2020) [Teachers' wellbeing is essential to children's development](#)

⁸⁰ National Library of Medicine (2021) [Teachers' Mental Health and Self-Reported Coping Strategies During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Ecuador: A Mixed-Methods Study](#)

as a general increasing of stress and demands placed on teachers when normal routines are disrupted.⁸¹ Many teachers struggled to prioritise their own working environments, leading to higher levels of stress, anxiety, isolation and a feeling of a lack of control over the future and their livelihoods as the pandemic continued to unfold.⁸² As we begin to understand the relationship between teachers' own psychosocial wellbeing and that of their students, teachers' wellbeing needs to be supported.

To address these issues, Save the Children adapted our Safe Schools programming to support teachers affected by Covid-19 school closures to better understand, identify and respond to stress, and to examine the relationship between teacher and student wellbeing.

A teacher professional development module on teacher wellbeing has been rolled out in several countries over the past two years to help teachers adapt to their new reality. It provides them with strategies to continue supporting their own and their students' wellbeing, even during school closures.

In South Sudan, together with the Ministry of General Education and Instruction, we conducted an assessment on teachers' wellbeing, motivation, professional needs, and competencies, which revealed that more than 88% teachers felt that they needed support in stress management. Save the Children is now able to provide tailored professional support and development for the many new changes and challenges they face in delivering teaching and learning opportunities for all children.⁸³

Pay and conditions are also a huge challenge for teachers to navigate, particularly in crisis contexts. Insufficient and unpredictable pay is a primary cause of teaching being considered an unattractive profession.⁸⁴ Evidence suggests that teacher wages in many low- and lower-middle income countries, including in sub-Saharan Africa, are even below the poverty line or cost of living.⁸⁵ Teachers receiving low pay and experiencing poor working conditions has been linked to increased stress and ill-health, increases in absenteeism, negative impacts on education quality, and teacher attrition.⁸⁶



In many areas of Yemen, it has now been two years since public workers such as teachers and health-workers have been paid.

©Ali Ashwal / Save the Children

The war has affected us as individuals, teachers and society. Teachers go to work now without any motivation, as they haven't been paid in two years and struggle to feed their families. Personally, I can no longer afford to buy my three school-aged children school uniforms, bags and supplies for my children.

A teacher in Yemen

Colleagues working in Lebanon with teachers also described the impact the last few years of instability in the country has had on the profession.

Schools are witnessing a migration wave of teacher and educational competencies. The teachers (are) facing all difficulties and challenges on their own, as some private schools reduced their salaries, suspended them completely, or dismissed some of them. As for the public sector teachers, even though their wages were not deducted, their value has deteriorated due to the economic and financial crisis. Furthermore, they were asked to acquire the certain skills as imposed by this new stage, without effective support.

Nagham Baydoun, a teacher in Lebanon.

⁸¹ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce](#)

⁸² UNESCO (2021) [Global education monitoring report, 2021/2: non-state actors in education: who chooses? who loses?](#)

⁸³ Save the Children (2020) [Teachers' wellbeing is essential to children's development](#)

⁸⁴ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce](#)

⁸⁵ Teacher Task Force (2021) [Closing the gap – Ensuring there are enough qualified and supported teachers in sub-Saharan Africa](#)

⁸⁶ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce](#)

HOW CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT TEACHERS?

We are at a key turning point in our pursuit of education for all children, but one thing is clear, we cannot achieve this without investing in teachers. As we have seen, when teachers are supported, they are the most natural innovators and advocates for education,⁸⁷ having impacts on children and communities far beyond what we can easily measure.

To properly support teachers, we need to consider the intersection of systemic barriers they face, outlined above. We call on decision makers to look closely at their policies and budgets. Teachers need to be an active part of scoping a new landscape for themselves where they are supported to reach their potential. Save the Children has created the Enabling Teachers Common Approach,⁸⁸ which seeks to underpin and inform all our programmatic and advocacy work on teachers.

Save the Children Spotlight: Enabling Teachers; our Common Approach to supporting teachers

The **Enabling Teachers Common Approach** seeks to develop teachers' competencies and ensure they have the enabling environment required for their motivation and success so that children learn from a safe, inclusive, quality education. This approach is centred around two key components: a professional development course, and an enabling environment for teachers.

The **professional development course** emphasis is on helping teachers gain mastery over a realistic number of competencies during an academic year. It is designed to respond to individual needs and context and uses competencies aligned to a recognised framework. The approach promotes multiple learning activities that are structured to support teachers to apply what they have learned, to reflect on their practice, and to get support from peers and experts.

The **enabling environment component** supports teachers to feel motivated, valued, and empowered. This includes a focus on professional development system strengthening, considering support for teacher wellbeing, for school leadership, and improving the policy environment.

Enabling Teachers is designed to be flexible and adaptable for a wide range of contexts – including in crisis and post conflict settings. Our approach also focusses on supporting teachers to understand and deliver gender equitable learning. The approach focuses on five key principles, outlined below:

Save the Children's *Enabling Teachers* programmes are guided by five evidence-based principles to ensure that programmes have the most impact:



These principles helped teachers in the DRC after increasing pressure was felt on the education system due to growing enrollment numbers and a lack of Continuous Professional Development (see REALISE Spotlight below).

⁸⁷ The Education Commission (2019) [Transforming-the-Education-Workforce](#)

⁸⁸ Save the Children (2018) [A Catalogue of Common Approaches: Delivering our best work for children |](#)

Save the Children Spotlight: REALISE in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

From 2017 to 2021, Save the Children implemented the REALISE (Réussite et Epanouissement via l'Apprentissage et L'Insertion au Système Educatif) project in consortium with World Vision, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), FECONDE, ALPKO and ADJEDEC, in the provinces of Tanganyika, Lomami, Kasai Oriental, Ituri, Haut Katanga and Lualaba in the DRC.

REALISE reached over 80,000 girls across 467 schools (262 primary and 205 secondary) and 16 Accelerated Education Programme centres. The project focused on girls' wellbeing, attendance, learning and transition to secondary school.

The Teacher Professional Development approach used by REALISE used elements of Enabling Teachers by building on the National Teacher Competences and supporting teachers to assess themselves against a selection of competences and track improvements in their practice. The approach included termly cycles of school-based support which began with a face-to-face workshop delivered by a trainer/coach.

These workshops were followed by peer learning circles, lesson observations and coaching discussions and self-study/practice throughout the term. They received coaching training in how to build trust, listen and facilitate learning, lesson observations and feedback.



The Covid-19 pandemic led to long-term school closures and presented teachers with a range of challenges. These challenges included issues with their contract conditions and salary payments, their own anxiety and stress due to the pandemic health and economic pressures, and challenges in returning and re-opening schools.

In response to these emerging challenges, REALISE pivoted its approach. New modules and resources were added on how to manage large class sizes, use positive discipline strategies for large size classes, respond to Covid-19 and return to school safely. The new modules and resources included content on Covid-19 prevention and health knowledge, child protection and gender-based violence, distance learning, school re-opening, socio-emotional learning and assessment linked to levelled learning strategies.

REALISE successfully trained 2,804 teachers (423 women) and 149 school inspectors (23 women) on selected national and related competencies in pedagogy, literacy and numeracy, gender sensitivity, and conflict-sensitive education. The Value for Money analysis rated the project as high, due to the high number of teachers enrolled on the programme, and the high number of children that benefitted from improvements in teacher competencies and practices.

The teacher competency survey results also showed substantial improvements in teachers' competencies, and the final evaluation found that students and head teachers agreed that there had been noticeable improvements in teacher practices.

Enabling Teachers is one example of a framework which can best embed the type of support teachers tell us they need. But there are other interventions which policy makers need to deliver to create a positive context for this ongoing work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy brief sets out some of the challenges teachers face in their commitment to reaching every child with a safe, inclusive, and quality education. Save the Children alongside many others are working with teachers to find and scale solutions.

If global and national policy makers are serious about protecting education systems from the threats of Covid-19, conflict and climate change, then implementing and expanding the types of programmes outlined in this brief and acting on the following recommendations will move us all a step closer to achieving SDG4 and quality, safe and inclusive education for all.

Invest in evidence-based education system strengthening:

- Provide support for low and lower-middle income countries to meet agreed education financing benchmarks: 20% of national budgets and 4-6% of GDP towards free, inclusive, quality education. This should include supporting progressive taxation, amongst other domestic resource mobilisation measures, to expand the size of public purses.
- Signatories of the Kenyatta Declaration should galvanize their commitments and targets to national education spending and set out how teacher recruitment and retention will be prioritised within the education workforce budget and Covid-19 stimulus packages.
- Donors should deliver an ambitious and increased pledge at the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) Replenishment Summit in 2023 and champion support for teachers in ECW's new strategic plan.
- Invest in more research on the type of interventions that successfully support the teacher workforce, particularly in education in emergencies and protracted crisis contexts, to ensure that data and best practice models are widely available. More widely, there should be a baseline commitment to monitor teacher recruitment and retention levels more regularly to understand and respond to trends in the sector.

Support teachers to be the best professionals they can be:

- Develop and implement an integrated preparedness plan for future crises which centres on the unique perspectives and experiences of teachers and sets out clear steps for how teachers will be supported to prepare and continue to deliver education during future challenges.
- Work with national teacher unions and organisations to develop and implement new inclusive and flexible strategies to provide continuous professional development and wellbeing support for teachers so that they can adapt to new circumstances in schools.
- Improve the recruitment, retention and attendance of qualified female and male teachers and ensure teaching is gender-transformative and inclusive.
- Develop or strengthen national frameworks to include refugee teachers in national education workforces and support their professional development and certification. This could include: – fast-tracking training and certification and – progressively aligning refugee teachers' pay and conditions of service with those of host community teachers, in line with experience and qualifications.
- Take an inclusive, all-hazards, risk informed Safe Schools approach to keeping children safe and protected in and around schools through strong integrated policies and systems and through supporting teachers with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours, including climate change adaptation and risk reduction, to keep themselves and their learners protected in and around school.

Engage teachers in policy making:

- Highlight and celebrate teachers as agents of change. Teachers should be supported and developed to be strong advocates for education within the community, working with governments and communities to put in place evidence-based sustainable solutions to build resilient education systems that improve children's learning and wellbeing outcomes.
- Commit to social dialogues and working in a progressive way with teachers and unions to ensure that new policies to improve access and learning outcomes have the best chance of becoming successful and use the best professional expertise on offer.
- Recognise national teacher unions as partners in the recruitment and retention of teachers, policymaking and in enhancing the status of the teaching profession.

- In discussions around education innovations – particularly around EdTech and radical inclusion – ensure teachers are a priority stakeholder and plan interventions which recognise teachers as a key implementing partner, targeting their own training and delivery needs



A teacher helps girls with reading in class at an Accelerated Learning Programme session in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan. The girls being taught, who are all aged over 10, are receiving an education for the first time.,

©Kristiana Marton / Save the Children

Credits

This report was written by Kate Oliver, with inputs from Emma Wagner, James Cox, Anya Cowley, Lauren Harris, Itaf Alawawdeh, Shireen Makarem, Anh Dang Thi Ngoc and Nzila Siabalima. We appreciate the many wider contributions and feedback from colleagues across the Save the Children movement who have improved this briefing immeasurably with their knowledge and experience.

A special thank you goes to the teachers who shared their experiences to help bring this policy brief to life, and to the children who shared their thoughts with us to help us understand the importance of well supported teachers.

Save the Children Fund

1 St John's Lane, London EC1M 4AR

+44 (0)20 7012 6400

savethechildren.org.uk

A company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales
(178159)

A registered charity in England and Wales (213890), Scotland
(SC039570) and Isle of Man (199)

© Save the Children Fund



**Save the
Children**