



# Prioritise teachers to transform education

**How tackling the global  
teacher shortage can unlock  
the UK's development agenda**



**NEU  
International**





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## Foreword

We share a common humanity. We also share a common profession with educators around the world.

From low pay and sky-high workload to attempts to use AI to undermine the status of teachers and educators, the core challenges faced by teachers worldwide are remarkably consistent, and the quality of children's education is suffering as a result.

We face dramatic shortages of qualified teachers, and a workforce that has suffered from chronic underinvestment and has been deprived of the training, support and continuous professional development needed to meet the demands of rapidly changing education systems.

Just as thousands of additional teachers are required in the UK, millions more teachers are needed globally. Some 44 million additional teachers are now required by 2030 to meet the Sustainable Development Goals for education.

Shortages of qualified teachers are exacerbated by the enormous hardships faced by teachers working in crisis contexts, where the basic rights, remuneration and protection that should be afforded to teachers everywhere are most neglected.

Addressing teacher shortages requires a holistic approach and a global response. Education International was an integral part of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, that was convened by the United Nations Secretary-General, to set out a road map for every child to access a professionally trained, qualified and well-supported teacher.

The Panel's recommendations are a powerful call to action for the global transformation of the teaching profession to achieve SDG 4. This report shines a spotlight on how the UK can now play its part in making the panel's recommendations a reality at home and internationally.

The NEU welcomes the opportunities afforded by a Labour Government for a new approach. We applaud its manifesto commitment to "rebuild Britain's reputation on international development with a new approach based on genuine respect and partnership with the global South" as part of its essential efforts to decolonise aid.

We believe the development of a global teacher strategy is an early opportunity to operationalise this vision. Partnerships must be central to efforts to address shortages of qualified teachers, with a focus on areas with the highest number of out-of-school children and where shortages of qualified teachers are greatest. While some countries may be able to tackle teacher shortages through their own initiatives, many others need international cooperation and support to guide strategies and actions or access human, technical or financial resources. The Labour Government has a key role to play.

As the largest education union in Europe, the National Education Union is united with Education International, as the global voice of the profession, in building a world in which every educator is safe, valued, and respected; where every child can achieve their potential; and where trade union rights and the right to education are realised for all.

The evidence outlined in this report could not be clearer: education is the best investment any government can make, and teachers are the single most important factor in a child's education outcomes.

Investing in teachers is investing in our common future. Our message to the new UK Government is clear: prioritise teachers to transform education, turbocharge growth, and build a brighter tomorrow.

**Daniel Kebede**

General Secretary, National Education Union

**David Edwards**

General Secretary, Education International



## Executive summary

### **To elevate education, you need to elevate the educator**

Qualified teachers are the foundation for children to achieve both academically and socially. A good teacher can change a child's life trajectory and unlock their pathway to further levels of education, higher salaries and better long-term outcomes for them and their family.

A high-quality education system cannot be achieved without qualified teachers. Yet, the shortage of qualified teachers represents one of the greatest barriers to universal primary and secondary education. Globally 44 million teachers are needed to deliver Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030, including an additional 15 million teachers in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

The reality of the global teacher shortage can be seen in schools across the world. Teachers are burnt out and leaving the profession they love, and classrooms are bursting at the seams. As a result, teaching quality is diminished and learning opportunities limited for a generation of children. In low-income countries, each primary teacher has an average of 52 pupils per class. In emergency and displacement contexts, the figure is considerably higher – qualified teachers are even more thinly stretched, with many teachers holding even less than ten days of training.

### **To reclaim the promise of education, prioritise teachers**

With the number of children out of school around the world rising, and amidst a global learning crisis, addressing the shortages of qualified teachers is the pathway to quality education for all. Efforts to increase school enrollments and improve learning outcomes will fail without bold action to increase the supply of qualified teachers and invest in their safety, working conditions and continuous professional development.

The Labour Government has rightly put education at the heart of its mission to spread and expand opportunity, recognising that the 'ability to deliver a high standard of education for every child is being severely undermined by a crisis in recruitment and retention of school staff'. This is true in the UK and magnified across the globe.

### **The National Education Union calls on the UK Government to stand at the forefront of a global endeavour to get SDG 4 back on track by investing in education at home and abroad and putting the world's teachers at the heart of its education mission.**

A child in Lagos has the same right to access a qualified teacher as a child in Liverpool, and the UK must accept its share of responsibility for the global teacher shortage. Therefore, while the focus of this report is on actions that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office could take to address the global teacher shortage under the new Labour Government, it must be recognised that UK Government policies in recent years – illustrated most notably by the failure to recruit and retain adequate numbers of UK trained teachers – have exacerbated shortages of qualified teachers in the Global South.

This report is a contribution to the growing calls to transform the teaching profession so that every child can access a professionally trained, qualified and well-supported teacher. It builds on the landmark publication earlier this year of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, and the first Global Report on Teachers, to outline the fundamental role that the UK Government must play in addressing the global teacher shortage.

## **Given the stakes, the UK cannot afford to short-change education**

The scale and severity of new and emerging global threats from conflict to climate change underscore more strongly than ever education's importance as an investment in a more peaceful, prosperous, greener and fairer future. It is quality teaching that will equip and empower the world's children with the knowledge, skills and agency to address challenges head on and build a better world.

Investing in qualified teachers is one of the greatest investments we can make in children's futures. To unlock the transformative potential of education, the UK must re-prioritise investment in quality, publicly provided, free education, with a focus on supporting lower-income countries to recruit, train, and retain qualified teachers, and invest in their safety and working conditions.

## **Tackling the global teacher shortage can unlock the UK's development agenda**

From supporting economic transformation and conflict prevention, to empowering women and girls, qualified teachers are imperative to the success of the UK's efforts to tackle global poverty, instability, and the climate and nature crisis. **To realise this vision, the NEU calls for the FCDO to develop a new global teacher strategy as part of an ambitious, coherent and partnership-led approach to supporting the recruitment, retention and training of qualified teachers in the Global South.**

The report also outlines the need to prioritise investment in education in emergencies and education financing to address the most persistent drivers of the global teacher shortage. This includes working with the international community to establish and resource a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries, and progressing wide-ranging reforms to the international finance architecture to unlock financing for public education and quality teaching.

To support all children to access a qualified, well-trained and well-supported teacher and catalyse progress toward SDG 4 and wider development objectives the UK Government should:

- 1. Recognise that the teacher shortage crisis is global:** take action to recruit and retain adequate numbers of UK trained teachers, safeguard the rights of overseas trained teachers and enhance collaboration with teachers' unions, source countries and international bodies.
- 2. Develop a new FCDO global teacher strategy:** as part of an ambitious, coherent and partnership-led approach to supporting the recruitment, retention and training of qualified teachers, that is led by the expertise and experiences of teachers and their unions in the Global South.
- 3. Advance the rights, working conditions and supply of qualified teachers in emergency and crisis-contexts:** work with the international community to establish and resource a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries, and improve policy, planning and financing for teachers in emergencies to unlock education for a generation of children caught in crises.
- 4. Champion and unlock financing for public education and quality teaching:** support international reforms that enable progressive taxation, domestic resource mobilisation and debt relief and cancellation to ensure lower-income countries have the necessary fiscal space to increase financing on education; alongside renewed bilateral and multilateral investments that address gaps in the education workforce.





Students enrolled at the Secondary School in Magwi, South Sudan. © AVSI/Davide Arcuri

## Section 1. Unlocking SDG 4 through qualified teachers

Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 4 is in freefall. Since 2021, the global number of out-of-school children has increased for the first time in decades.

Quality teaching is the single most important factor in achieving quality education. Yet chronic and persistent shortages of qualified teachers are hampering efforts to combat the global education crisis

Unlocking education for all requires a step change in the recruitment, retention and training of teachers globally. **The National Education Union calls on the UK Government to stand at the forefront of a global endeavour to get SDG 4 back on track by investing in education at home and abroad and putting the world's teachers at the heart of its education mission.**

### Decades of progress on global education are in reverse

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was seriously behind in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong opportunities for all.

Today, progress towards all global education targets is woefully off track. **A quarter of a billion children are out of school, and millions more are in school and not even acquiring the basics.** Despite education for all being the basis for the achievement of the SDGs, SDG 4 is among the furthest behind of the global goals. At current rates of progress only **1 in 6 countries** will achieve universal access to quality education by 2030.

As acknowledged by the United Nations Secretary-General 'contemporary education systems are no longer fit for purpose, severely underfunded and beset by twin crises of equity and relevance.' A dramatic shift is required to transform education systems and build a more peaceful, sustainable and just world.



## Teachers are the single most important factor in a child's learning outcomes

The transformation of education begins with teachers. **The NEU believes that progressing SDG Target 4.c, which seeks to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, holds the key to advancing SDG 4.** There is a clear body of evidence that teachers are the single most important determinant of student learning. Alongside education support personnel, teachers are vital to realising the right to education and delivering a safe and positive learning environment which meets the academic, socio-emotional and practical needs of the individual student.

The pandemic underscored the importance of the human teacher-learner relationship more than ever. At great detriment to their mental and physical wellbeing, teachers went to extraordinary lengths to keep learning alive and support children during the crisis and beyond. This was despite being left ill equipped to protect their own health and under-resourced to provide remote learning when schools closed.

As crises have surged and demands on the profession increased, there has not been sufficient support or investment in the world's teachers. **Investing in qualified teachers is one of the greatest investments we can make in children's futures.** Yet, the lack of qualified teachers represents one of the greatest barriers to universal primary and secondary education.

## SDG 4 will remain out of reach without action to tackle the global teacher shortage

Globally, record numbers of teachers are leaving the profession they love, while fewer are joining the profession. **Between 2015 and 2022, attrition rates of primary education teachers doubled around the world from 4.6 to 9 per cent.**

From Angola to the United Kingdom, there is a global teacher recruitment and retention crisis. **Globally 44 million additional teachers are needed to deliver universal primary and secondary education by 2030.** While this is a global phenomenon, affecting developing and developed countries alike, teacher shortages are largest in the areas where needs are greatest.

**The world requires an additional 13 million primary teachers and an extra 31 million secondary teachers.** The demand is greatest in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia where many new secondary-level teacher posts are needed to meet the requirements of expanding education systems. 15 million new teachers – 1 in 3 of the additional teachers that must be recruited by 2030 – are needed in sub-Saharan African alone.

Teacher shortages are not experienced equally by all children: girls, children with disabilities and children who have been forcibly displaced are amongst those most likely to be missing out on a qualified teacher. Shortages are most acute in displacement and refugee contexts, where the average teacher to student ratio is estimated to be above 1:70.

### Teacher recruitment and retention has not kept pace with enrollment

The growing divergence between pupil numbers and the supply of teachers means that children around the world are in classrooms that far exceed recommended benchmarks – which are themselves high: 40:1 in primary; and 25:1 in secondary education.

Yet that doesn't show the true picture – the pupil to trained teacher ratio (PTTR) which measures the average number of pupils to trained teachers, as per the minimum required national qualification, is substantially higher in many countries.



In 2022, the PTTR in primary education for low-income countries was 52.5 pupils per trained teacher – more than three times the ratio in high-income countries (15:1). Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest average pupil to trained teacher ratio at 56:1, followed by Central and Southern Asia at 35:1. In many countries, including Bangladesh, Chad, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Pakistan the PTTR exceeds 60:1. Significant disparities in pupil-teacher ratios also exist within regions, with shortages greatest in rural and remote areas.

### Inclusive teachers for inclusive education

Qualified teachers, who are trained and supported to identify and empower the experiences and abilities of every student are crucial to fostering an inclusive education system. Inclusive teaching helps to ensure that the needs of all learners are met, regardless of their background or identity, fostering a culture and environment of diversity and participation that benefits all.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states the need to train all teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms. This is reinforced by the UN's Framework for Disability-Inclusive Education which outlines that teachers require both comprehensive pre-service and in-service training.

**However, analysis of PASEC data (which compares the performance of member countries' education systems) for 10 mostly low-income sub-Saharan African countries indicates that fewer than one in ten teachers had received in-service training on disability inclusion.<sup>14</sup>** These estimates are symptomatic of a much larger challenge related to the lack of comprehensive programmes and policies towards inclusive teaching in sub-Saharan Africa and worldwide.

## Teachers' working conditions are children's learning conditions

Secure employment and decent working conditions are key for recruitment and retention in the profession. **However, only half of all countries pay primary teachers more than other professions requiring similar qualifications.<sup>15</sup>** In addition to uncompetitive salaries, the attractiveness of the profession has been further eroded by the growth of precarious work and contract employment, poor professional and working conditions, declining professional autonomy, the absence of teacher voice in decisions impacting the profession, and declining public investments in education.<sup>16</sup>

**The quality of teaching and learning is determined not just by the quality of teachers, but also by the environment in which teachers work.** Overcrowded classrooms mean teachers cannot deliver the education children need and deserve. When schools lack basic hygiene facilities or are inaccessible, children and teachers alike are impacted, particularly those from marginalised groups, with additional barriers to entering the classroom or workforce erected. Furthermore, poor quality buildings, insufficient teaching supplies, high workload, stress, suppression of education unions, and the low status of the teaching profession, all contribute to poor teaching and learning conditions.<sup>17</sup>

Facing pressure to reduce their public budgets and, at the same time, respond to rising student enrolments, many countries have turned to contract teachers, who are recruited through alternative pathways and agree to work outside traditional employment arrangements. **In some sub-Saharan African countries, contract teachers account for up to 65 per cent of teachers at primary level.** This has resulted in large variations in qualifications, training and professionalisation across the education workforce.<sup>18</sup> The salaries, rights and conditions of contract teachers are typically far inferior to permanently contracted teachers, and children's education suffers as a result.

## Promoting equity, diversity and inclusion in the teaching workforce

Diverse workforces, that include teachers with disabilities, teachers from minority and migrant background and female leaders, help to ensure that schools reflect the communities that they serve and enhance the relevance of education and children's learning experience.<sup>19</sup>

**Yet, amongst the global education workforce, there is a dearth of male teachers, especially at early levels, and an under-representation of female teachers, especially at higher education levels and in technical and vocational education (TVET) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, and in leadership positions.<sup>20</sup>**

Barriers to females entering and staying in the teaching profession are worsening in many countries as the increasing demands of the profession and caring responsibilities combine to create impossible strains on work-life balance. Moreover, when gender intersects with other characteristics including race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religious identity and citizenship, inequalities and barriers to the profession can be compounded.<sup>21</sup>

Insufficient, gender-balanced numbers of qualified teachers and female leaders – has a negative impact on the engagement and achievements of girls' and boys' alike. This hampers efforts to address the severe disadvantages and inequalities that girls' experience in education, including lower school completion rates, and the risks to boys of repeating grades or experiencing lower learning outcomes.<sup>22</sup>

**Policies and strategies aimed at recruiting gender-balanced numbers of qualified teachers, ensuring equity in pay and treatment, and promoting**

**women leaders and individuals from marginalised groups must be central to efforts to achieving gender equality in education and wider society.**

### Addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession

The first **International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 and UNESCO Global Report on Teachers** was published in 2024, with a focus on the global teacher shortage. It is the first dedicated global report that aims to systematically capture and reproduce global, regional and national data and analysis on the progress towards SDG goal 4.c.

Aligned with the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession and the outcomes of the Transforming Education Summit, the report outlines six overarching recommendations to address teacher shortages:

- 1. Develop holistic teacher policies** aligned to national priorities and the policy landscape that include all dimensions affecting teachers in an integrated manner, using a collaborative framework and social dialogue.
- 2. Collect more and better data** to systematically report on the indicators agreed in the Education 2030 Framework for Action.
- 3. Transform teacher education and professional development** from course-based, individual endeavours to lifelong, collaborative, and teacher-led processes.
- 4. Improve the working conditions of teachers**, beginning with salaries and incentives to ensure teachers receive competitive compensation and benefits and ensure gender equality in pay and treatment.
- 5. Ensure adequate public, domestic funding** that is consistent with the existing benchmarks of 6 per cent of GDP and 20 per cent of total government expenditure.
- 6. Enhance international cooperation** to engage different constituencies in collaborative efforts to address teacher shortages and amplify the outreach of teacher policies.





## 2. Teacher shortages: a crisis at home and internationally

The UK is experiencing a crisis in the recruitment and retention of teachers that is replicated the world over. This is a crisis that is inextricably linked with some of the UK's efforts to address its own shortages, exacerbating shortages of qualified teachers in other countries.

Enhanced collaboration is the key to addressing structural challenges like the global teacher shortage. **The NEU urges the UK Government – including the Department for Education, Home Office and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – to address its share of responsibility for the global teacher shortage.**

This requires urgent action to recruit and retain adequate numbers of UK trained teachers, safeguard the rights of overseas trained teachers and enhance collaboration with teachers' unions, source countries and international bodies.

## The UK teacher shortage

While the focus of this report is on actions that the FCDO should take to address the global teacher shortage, at home and abroad this is a crisis that is inextricably linked.

**Teacher recruitment has fallen sharply across the UK, while more teachers are leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement than at any other time on record.<sup>23</sup>**

As a result, primary class sizes are the highest in Europe, and secondary class sizes the highest since records began. The ratio of students to teaching staff in primary and lower secondary education is also significantly higher than the OECD average, and only lower than India, Mexico, Colombia and Brazil.<sup>24</sup>

As the recruitment and retention crisis has deepened, so have the efforts of the UK Government, and particularly multi-academy trusts, to recruit overseas trained teachers (OTTs). **Alongside Canada, Germany and the U.S., the UK hosts the largest number of OTTs.<sup>25</sup>** Education systems in the Commonwealth, especially small states in the Caribbean such as Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, have been most affected by the significant rise in teacher migration to the UK.

## The rise in teachers recruited from the Commonwealth

In 2023 alone, 486 teachers from Jamaica were recruited to teach in England.<sup>26</sup> This has had a detrimental impact on Jamaica's education system and far-reaching consequences for children's outcomes and the country's long-term development.

Employer and recruiter exploitation of OTTs is rife. Many UK schools do not recognise overseas teachers' qualifications and they are, as a result, paid on average £10,000 less than their UK-trained colleagues, despite being qualified and doing the work of a qualified teacher. Certificates of sponsorship further keep OTTs tied to bad employers since finding a new sponsor can be very difficult, with some schools, academies and local authorities unwilling to act as sponsors because of the cost and bureaucracy.

Whilst the NEU fully supports the rights of OTTs to move country for work, we are concerned about the impact of the rise of teacher migration on the UK's obligations as a signatory of the **Protocol for the Recruitment of Commonwealth Teachers**, and the rights and terms and conditions OTTs experience.

The Protocol which was launched in 2004 by the UK's Minister for Higher Education, Alan Johnson, aims to balance the rights of teachers to migrate internationally against the need to protect the integrity of national education systems and the human resource investments countries have made in teacher education.

It is vital that the Protocol adapts and responds to the increase in teacher migration across the Commonwealth and safeguards the rights and terms and conditions of migrant and refugee teachers. **The NEU and its counterparts in the Commonwealth Teachers Group (CTG), which represents the Commonwealth teachers' and education unions that are affiliated to Education International, are calling for Commonwealth member states to recommit to the Protocol with a focus on promoting equity and inclusion, supporting mutuality and reciprocity, and ensuring that teachers' rights are defended and monitored.**





## The High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession: an urgent call to action

Convened by the UN Secretary-General in response to the global teacher shortage and the widespread challenges facing the profession, the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession is a clarion call for greater local, regional and international collaboration and action. **It represents a historic moment to transform the teaching profession so that every child can access a professionally trained, qualified and well-supported teacher.**

The Panel brought together a global group of former presidents, ministers, academics, representatives from civil society, student and teachers, and representatives from Education International, the global federation of education unions, to design a plan of action for how the teaching profession can be supported and transformed to play its essential role in creating a better world.

Issues of teacher wages, working conditions, job security, professional autonomy, initial teacher education and CPD all featured heavily. The Panel condemned the use of precarious teaching contracts and austerity policies that undermine teachers' working conditions and the quality of education. The Panel recognised and reaffirmed the need for greater diversity and inclusion in the teaching profession, alongside greater social dialogue, collective bargaining and the right to take industrial action.

The Panel outlined that teachers and education support personnel must be supported, valued, and paid their worth; with workloads and working conditions that support mental and physical well-being; negotiated salaries competitive with those in comparable professions and an end to the hiring of contract or unqualified teachers.<sup>27</sup>

**The Panel concluded that the only way to improve education quality is to continuously invest in teachers and foster their**

**professional autonomy, beginning with initial teacher education and continuing throughout their career.**

### Recommendations of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession

In February 2024 the Panel published its recommendations to ensure that every child has access to a professionally trained, qualified and well-supported teacher.<sup>28</sup>

**The Panel's 59 landmark recommendations call for urgent government action on:**

- ☐ Pay, conditions, and job security
- ☐ Professional practice
- ☐ Gender, equity, and diversity
- ☐ Social dialogue and collective bargaining
- ☐ Technology and the future of work in education
- ☐ Education financing

## Enhanced collaboration is the key to addressing teacher shortages

One of the central recommendations of the Panel is the **creation of national commissions** to bring together education unions and governments to assess and tackle shortages of trained teachers and support the teaching profession. Such commissions would address a variety of issues including labour market analyses, recruitment, teacher migration, attrition and retention, compensation, status and rights, workload and wellbeing, equity (including the ratio of qualified teachers to students), equality and infrastructure.

**The Panel's recommendation echoes the long-standing call of the NEU for the UK Government to establish an independent commission to investigate how unions and government can work together to resolve the teacher recruitment and retention crisis.**

**The Panel also emphasised the need for enhanced international collaboration, with a series of recommendations aimed at donors and the international community.** This includes establishing a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries, providing debt relief and forgiveness, and promoting professional standards for teachers. These recommendations are highly relevant to the UK as a leading multilateral donor and explored further in the subsequent sections.

## Recommendations:

**To end the brain-drain and ensure that the UK's policies do not exacerbate the teacher shortage crisis in the global south, the UK Government should:**

- ☐ Accept responsibility, as an influential international player, for the global teacher shortage and put in place measures to prevent the transfer of the teachers needed in the global south to fix the crisis in the global north.
- ☐ Recommit to the Protocol for the Recruitment of Commonwealth Teachers to safeguard the rights of Commonwealth teachers working in countries to which they move for work and protect the integrity of education systems in source countries.
- ☐ Establish an independent commission to investigate how unions and government can work together to resolve the teacher recruitment and retention crisis in the UK.
- ☐ Implement in full the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession and the Global Report on Teachers.
- ☐ Promote professional standards for teachers, in collaboration with trade unions, the international community, social partners, and other relevant stakeholders.
- ☐ Enhance international collaboration to address teacher shortages, including by becoming a member of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030.





“Teacher Kamal was looking for me every day,” says Yasmina, referring to Plan teacher Kamal Hossein, who encouraged Yasmina’s mother to make sure that Yasmina attended the Learning Center in Cox’s Bazar more frequently. Now Yasmina feels very happy in the learning centre, she comes earlier than everyone else because she is so eager for the class to start. ©UNICEF/Sokol

## Section 3: A new FCDO global teacher strategy

While successive UK governments have prioritised global education, supporting and investing in the world’s teachers has historically been a low priority in the UK’s global education policies. This has resulted in a piecemeal approach to supporting access to a qualified teacher for children in low-income countries.

In addition, the UK has historically failed to utilise its multilateral influence as a leading donor to global education and international financial institutions to mobilise the international collaboration and financing that is needed to deliver transformative change for teachers and learners.

Without adequate focus on, and financing for, teachers and teacher policy, global commitments on SDG 4 and other development priorities will not be met. **A focus on quality teaching including through the development of a new FCDO global teacher strategy can turbocharge progress towards the government’s mission to create ‘a world free from poverty on a liveable planet’.**





## 'All My Friends Needs Teachers'

In 2021, FCDO committed to "take a fresh look at how to train, recruit and motivate teachers, and support teaching strategies and policies proven to work well for all poor and marginalised children, but particularly for girls".<sup>29</sup>

In response, the Send My Friend to School (SMF) coalition published a report, 'All My Friends Need Teachers', setting out the centrality of teachers to the UK Government's ability to deliver on its global education agenda, with particular consideration for inclusive education and education in crisis contexts.

**To catalyse progress towards SDG 4, SMF called for a new FCDO strategy on global teacher policy, and for the UK, alongside G7 counterparts and the wider international community, to support the national governments of targeted countries to recruit and train 1.8 million new teachers. Its recommendations remain as relevant today.**

Despite strong cross-party support for the report and unanimous recognition of the need for urgent action to progress SDG 4.c, the UK has done very little to progress the welcome commitment it made in 2021. At the same time, progress towards the G7 Girls' Education Declaration has reversed, with more girls now out of school than in 2021.<sup>30</sup>

## A partnership approach to addressing the global teacher shortage

Supporting countries to recruit, train, and retain qualified teachers, and invest in their safety and working conditions, is one of the most efficient and effective routes to quality, inclusive education for all children.

The NEU therefore warmly welcomes Labour's manifesto commitment to "rebuild Britain's reputation on international development with a new approach based on genuine respect and

partnership with the global South" as parts of its essential efforts to decolonise aid.

The NEU believes the development of a global teacher strategy is an early opportunity to operationalise this vision. Partnerships must be central to efforts to address shortages of qualified teachers, with a focus on areas with the highest number of out-of-school children and where shortages of qualified teachers are greatest. This is because while some countries may be able to largely tackle teacher shortages through their own initiatives, many others could benefit from international cooperation and support to guide strategies and actions or access human, technical or financial resources.<sup>31</sup>

## The role of triangular cooperation

Triangular cooperation, which "involves Southern-driven partnerships between two or more developing countries supported by one or more developed countries or multilateral organisation(s) to implement development cooperation programmes and projects"<sup>32</sup> must be a key pillar of the UK's efforts to support quality teaching in the Global South.

Through the support of partners, triangular and South-South cooperation enables countries to exchange resources, technology, skills and knowledge to deliver inclusive, quality education to all.<sup>33</sup> **Such cooperation initiatives are supporting quality teaching in a variety of ways globally which the UK should look to leverage.** For example, through the Strengthening Teachers in the Sahel Region project, UNESCO and the European Union are providing technical and financial support to five countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.<sup>34</sup> Through this initiative support is provided to countries to improve teacher training and management, resulting in each country drafting frameworks to better identify minimum standards and guide future reforms.



The UK is particularly well-placed to support countries to develop or strengthen teacher management and information systems, and support capacity building on the use of these systems. This is because across many countries and contexts, data on the nature, extent and persistence of teacher shortages and teachers' deployment and CPD needs are inadequate or not used as the basis of education sector planning. Disaggregated data, including on teachers' gender, location, contract status, and socio-economic status is also scarce.

Tracking progress towards SDG 4.c requires more and better disaggregated data to know who and where teachers are, where they are needed, and what support they need in terms of CPD, career mobility and other needs.<sup>35</sup>

**Through its strong reputation for expanding global research on 'what works' in education, the UK should build on evidence on the effectiveness of teaching by supporting countries to strengthen mechanisms to collect, report and use accurate data on teacher recruitment, retention and deployment, especially teachers from minority groups, female teachers and teachers with disabilities.**

### **"Nothing about us without us"**

The development of a global teacher strategy is an opportunity for the new government to take early steps towards building equitable partnerships and decolonising relations between the UK and the Global South. **Any efforts to address the global teacher shortage should be informed and led by the meaningful engagement with, consultation of, and ownership by, the communities most affected by this crisis.** This should include mechanisms for consultation and social dialogue with teachers, their unions and other education stakeholders in the Global South to ensure that lived experiences inform the conception, development and implementation of strategies

and programmes to achieve SDG 4. This will not only increase local ownership, participation and accountability, but also enhance development outcomes.

In addition, concerted efforts are required to restore trust between the UK and development partners, particularly after the harmful nature in which cuts to UK aid took place, with little or no consultation of partners, or the communities affected. It is also clear that not enough funding is going directly to recipient countries and local organisations who implement programmes.

**The FCD0 should consider how it can restructure its funding commitments to enable long-term and flexible funding to foster trust, adaptability and sustainability in partnerships and strengthen locally-led development.**



### **The UK's promotion and financing of low-fee private schools**

The UK's global education policy has increasingly been marked by the promotion and funding of a privatisation agenda, including 'low-fee' private schools, public-private partnerships and private investment in education. This has contributed to the rapid expansion of profit-making schools in the global south, undermining the responsibility of the state to fulfil the right to free public education for all children.

There are particular concerns about education funding provided through British International Investment (BII) – the UK's development finance institution – including through its intermediated investments.<sup>36</sup> This has historically included investments in the controversial for-profit school chain in Africa, Bridge International Academies, also known by the name of its parent company, Newglobe. Civil society organisations have been raising concerns about the company's operations for a number of years.<sup>37</sup> In 2018 all 63 Bridge Schools in Uganda were ordered to be closed by the High Court of Uganda after they failed to comply with requests from the Ministry of Education to meet its legal and educational standards, including on teacher certification.<sup>38</sup>

**As part of a recommitment to free, public education, the UK must end its complicity in the privatisation of education systems by formally committing to cease investments in for-profit schooling including through its intermediated investments and ensuring all investments in education support the right to education.**

### **Trade unions must be partners in efforts to address teacher shortages**

Trade unions are crucial global partners in the recruitment and retention of teachers, policymaking and in enhancing the status of the teaching profession. Fulfilling teachers' right to collective bargaining helps to ensure that teachers have decent working conditions, and in turn contributes to tackling teacher shortages. Safeguarding workers' and trade unions rights is also critical for the health of democratic systems.

Trade unions are key development cooperation partners. This is reflected in the long-term funding partnerships many donor countries have to support trade union development cooperation projects. This includes projects funded by the Governments of the US, Japan, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland as part of their respective ODA spend. The Australian Labour Government has also recently agreed a multi-million partnership with Union Aid Abroad, the non-governmental organisation of the Australian union movement.

As part of a more equitable relationship with stakeholders in the Global South, the NEU urges the UK to strengthen its engagement with trade unions, including through its embassies. This would follow the instruction by the Biden administration to US embassies to work with trade unions as part of their stakeholder engagement. **The trade union movement across the UK also calls on the UK to re-establish development cooperation partnerships with trade unions in the UK to advance shared objectives and to protect and uphold human rights.**



## The pressing need for an FCDO global teacher strategy

The persistence of the global shortage of qualified teachers, alongside the landmark adoption of the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, makes clear that a new FCDO global teacher strategy is more necessary, relevant and critical than ever before.

By leading and championing investment in good teaching, including through supporting low- and lower-middle income countries to recruit, train, and retain qualified teachers, the UK can turbocharge progress towards its global education and development ambitions.

From supporting economic transformation and conflict prevention, to empowering women and girls, qualified teachers are essential to the UK's efforts to tackle global poverty, instability, and the climate and nature crisis and progress its vision to 'create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet'.<sup>39</sup> A new FCDO Strategy on global teacher policy would put this alignment into practice as part of an ambitious, coherent and transformative approach to supporting access to a qualified teacher for children in low-income countries.

## Recommendations

**The UK Government should develop a new FCDO global teacher strategy, which incorporates the recommendations of this report. This should include commitments to:**

- ☐ Support the recruitment, retention and training of gender-balanced numbers of qualified teachers, prioritising countries with the highest number of out-of-school children and where shortages of qualified teachers are greatest; and additionally support leadership progression for female teachers and teachers from minority groups.
- ☐ Ensure all UK-funded programmes on education incorporate teacher recruitment, retention and inclusive training and CPD, with teachers included in programme design, implementation and decision-making bodies.
- ☐ Strengthen publicly provided education systems and cease all investments in for-profit schooling including through its intermediated investments, recognising this as the only equitable and sustainable route to strengthen the teacher workforce and realise education for all.
- ☐ Support triangular and South-South cooperation initiatives to address shortages of qualified teachers and deliver quality education, through long-term and flexible funding partnerships.
- ☐ Build evidence of the effectiveness of teaching by supporting countries to strengthen teacher management and information systems and improve data collection and analysis on the recruitment and retention of teachers.
- ☐ Be led by the expertise and experiences of teachers and their unions, and the communities most affected by the shortage of qualified teachers.
- ☐ Recognise teacher trade unions as development partners and global partners in the recruitment and retention of teachers, in policymaking and in enhancing the status of the teaching profession.





Changkuoth, Ter, 26, is a grade 4 science teacher in Ethiopia. He joined Tierkidi School No. 3, Refugee Camp in 2014  
©UNICEF Ethiopia/2018/Mersha

## Section 4: Supporting teachers in emergencies



In the face of conflict and chaos, teachers are going to extraordinary lengths to keep learning alive in emergency contexts. Yet they are too frequently left to find ways of continuing children's learning without adequate support, training, or infrastructure, and at risk to their own safety and wellbeing.

Whether it is the payment of regular salaries, protection from attacks or access to other basic entitlements, teachers in crisis contexts are a forgotten factor in the right to quality education. This is reflective in the UK's historic approach to financing and delivering education in emergencies and that of the wider international community.

**To deliver the right to education for all the UK must prioritise action to advance the rights, working conditions and supply of qualified teachers in emergency and crisis-contexts, with a focus on working with the international community to establish a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries.**



## The shortage of qualified teachers is greatest in emergency contexts

The dearth of qualified teachers is most acute in crisis contexts, with heightened shortages of female teachers. In crisis-contexts, where girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than their male peers<sup>40</sup>, the lack of female teachers prevents many parents from sending their daughters to school.<sup>41</sup> The latest Mind the Gap report shows that across 32 crisis-affected countries, female teachers made up just 38 per cent of secondary teachers. However, in some contexts, particularly those affected by displacement, the situation is much more extreme – across refugee camps in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and Tigray in Ethiopia, 90 per cent of teachers at all levels are male.<sup>42</sup>

**As emergencies become more frequent and protracted, the quality of education that children receive is increasingly compromised by the lack of adequately qualified and supported teachers.** 224 million school-aged children are affected by emergencies and protracted crises globally and require urgent educational support.<sup>43</sup> This includes 72 million crisis-impacted children who are not in school. Those that are in school are in class sizes with an average of 70 pupils per teacher, and often taught by underqualified and unregulated teachers.<sup>44</sup> In displacement contexts many teachers lack even the minimum 10 days of training required by UNHCR.

## Teachers working in emergency settings are paid little, late, or not at all

While ensuring teachers receive adequate and regular salaries is a challenge facing education systems in many low- and middle-income countries<sup>45</sup>, it is undoubtedly compounded in crisis contexts. National budgets are hugely stretched and often don't reach schools and teachers, while the recurring costs of teacher salaries are often incompatible with donor funding and the short-term emergency funding cycles of humanitarian partners.<sup>46</sup> This results in significant disparities in pay across education authorities, humanitarian partners and development agencies.

The absence of bridge-funding, lengthy payroll preparation, weak auditing mechanisms, destruction of payroll systems, and poorly maintained teacher management systems all further contribute to irregular teacher pay.<sup>47</sup>

### Six-month delays in the payment of salaries are commonplace

In **South Sudan**, salaries are extremely low, ranging from US\$9 per month for high school graduates in primary education, to US\$90 per month for teachers with over 20 years of experience. Yet teachers are not even receiving this level of meagre remuneration. The National Teachers' Union South Sudan reports that teachers have not received regular payments since August 2023, except for payments for July 2023 that were eventually disbursed in January 2024.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile in **Lebanon**, teachers have experienced delays of up to six-month in the payment of their salaries. As the Lebanese lira has been rapidly depreciating, some banks have blocked teachers' access to their salaries in full, disbursing only small amounts at a time.<sup>49</sup>

**More sustainable solutions and a coordinated international effort are urgently needed to ensure that teachers in crisis-contexts receive the recognition, support, and compensation they need and deserve.** The establishment of a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries, as recommended in the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, is a unique opportunity to unlock this breakthrough.

The Fund would help ensure time-bound support for the sufficient, timely and regular payment of salaries for teachers working in crisis-affected contexts or similar situations of threat or vulnerability. This would not only help protect the labour rights and wellbeing of teachers but also increase teacher motivation, retention and the attractiveness of the profession. **As a leading donor to EiE with significant technical leadership and institutional capacity, the UK must work with the international community to operationalise the Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries.**



### **Support for Palestinian educators**

Palestinian educators have felt the full effect of Israel's war on Gaza. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, as of July 2024, the Israeli military had killed at least 400 teachers.<sup>50</sup> Thousands more are injured and have lost their homes and loved ones.

Schools have been shut for 625,000 students and almost 23,000 teachers amidst an unprecedented wave of attacks that has damaged or destroyed over 90 per cent of school buildings in Gaza.

Wages to teachers in the West Bank have also been withheld due to the interruption of the payment of tax revenues to the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israeli authorities. Palestinian teachers in Gaza and the West Bank have now gone many months without pay and lack basic life necessities including shelter, food, water, electricity, sanitation and health.

The NEU is supporting Education International to mobilise support for teachers and students in Gaza and the West Bank. This includes direct financial assistance to teachers affected by the war in Gaza as well as psychological support, such as workshops and counselling sessions, for teachers with mental health professionals.

In addition to advocating for an immediate and lasting ceasefire, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and the safeguarding of schools, the UK must ensure that the necessary funds are mobilised to support the immediate education requirements in Gaza, including the payment of teachers' salaries and the activities of UNWRA, alongside the long-term reconstruction of the education infrastructure.





## Refugee teachers face unsurmountable barriers and appalling working conditions

Amidst the global teacher shortage, qualified and experienced refugee teachers are not given an opportunity to practice their profession. Lack of recognition of qualifications across borders and the denial of rights of refugees to work in their host country are just some of the legal, policy and administrative barriers displaced teachers' experience. This leads to a loss of refugee teachers from the education workforce in the contexts where they are needed most. In such circumstances refugees are sometimes employed as volunteer or "incentive" teachers without the status, support, pay and labour standards afforded to national teachers.<sup>51</sup>

Addressing the rights of teachers in forced displacement situations is crucial to ensuring the right to education for refugee, displaced and host community children.<sup>52</sup> This requires a collaborative approach across host governments, donors and partners to identify, support and empower displaced teachers. **The UK should champion initiatives such as the UNESCO and Teacher Taskforce Qualification Passport for Teachers, as part of its efforts to strengthen frameworks to include refugee teachers in the national education workforce and ensure pathways for their professional development and certification.**

### Teachers in Forced Displacement Situations and the 2023 Global Refugee Forum

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), several states and stakeholders supported the multistakeholder pledge on Teachers in Forced Displacement Situations.<sup>53</sup> The pledge, which was developed by the GRF Task Team on Teachers, included a range of measures to meet the needs of teachers working in contexts of displacement and crisis.

While the UK placed a welcome emphasis on refugee education in its engagement at the 2023 GRF, including through its role as co-convenor of the 'education mega-pledge' on Securing Sustainable Futures, its pledges on education did not include specific commitments on teachers.

In line with the commitment in the Global Compact on Refugees for additional support to "expand teaching capacities", the UK should scale up support and financing to the largest and poorest host countries to help address the additional costs related to teacher salaries, particularly where it has not yet been possible to fully cover these costs under national education systems and budgets.

## Teachers are under attack

The capability of teachers to fulfil the diverse functions of their role is significantly compromised by the wide range of risks they face including violence, sexual harassment, and trauma without adequate psychosocial, material and financial support.<sup>54</sup> Teachers can also be the direct target of attacks, for example when 'resisting recruitment of children from schools into armed groups, for teaching girls, or for covering particular topics in their lessons'.<sup>55</sup>

Despite a growing number of states (120) endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration<sup>56</sup>, attacks on education and educators continue to take place with impunity. **In 2022 and 2023, 6,000 attacks on education took place, a near 20 per cent increase on the previous two years.**<sup>57</sup> From Afghanistan to Yemen over 10,000 students, teachers, and academics were harmed, injured, or killed, while schools and universities were bombed and burned down.

**Ukraine and Palestine** experienced the highest number of attacks on education in 2022 and 2023. In Ukraine at least **700 attacks on schools** were reported, many of the attacks involved explosive weapons, including airstrikes and shelling.<sup>58</sup> Educators were also tortured, abducted or detained, including those who reportedly resisted the adoption of a Russian curriculum. As Russia's full-scale illegal invasion stretches into its third year, attacks on education have continued with more than 3,800 education institutions damaged or destroyed since February 2022.<sup>59</sup>

As the new government seeks to restore the UK's reputation as a champion of international law, the UK must lead efforts to uphold international humanitarian law and ensure accountability for those responsible for attacks on education and other grave violations against children. **This should include using its influence in the United Nations, Commonwealth and other international institutions to encourage all countries to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration and its associated guidelines.**

### **Violations of teachers' trade union rights are rampant**

Across the world many education workers are denied their right to join unions, engage in collective bargaining or to protest lawfully. Teacher trade unionists are also subject to violence, arrest, harassment imprisonment, torture or murder for their trade union activity.

The 2024 ITUC Global Rights Index found that nine out of 10 countries worldwide violated the right to strike in 2024, while about 8 in 10 countries denied workers the right to bargain collectively for better terms and conditions.<sup>60</sup> Almost half (49 per cent) of countries arbitrarily arrested or detained trade union members.

Colombia has the unenviable record of the world's most dangerous country for trade unionists. Despite progress following the 2016 peace agreement, the Colombian Federation of Educators (FECODE), the country's main education union, continues to face appalling violence and suppression with close to 40 teachers murdered since 2018.<sup>61</sup>

Trade union rights are human rights. As penholder for the Colombian peace process at the UN Security Council, the UK Government has an important role to play in working with the Colombian government, trade union movement and civil society to advance peace, human rights, security, and social justice in Colombia.



## Prioritise teachers to unlock education in emergencies

**For the government to achieve its ambitions around conflict prevention, advancing the rights, working conditions and supply of qualified teachers in emergencies must be a priority.**<sup>62</sup> Mounting evidence has shown that investing in education is essential for peacebuilding. Inclusive, quality education promotes understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence among individuals and communities. Quality teaching also holds the potential to reduce the likelihood of conflicts by fostering critical thinking, encouraging open dialogue and creating economic growth opportunities.

Teachers are often the only professional educational resource available to children during times of emergency. Yet these educators are left to find ways of continuing children's learning and meeting their physical, emotional and psychological needs without adequate support, training or infrastructure, and at risk to their own safety and wellbeing.

**By prioritising teachers in emergencies, the UK can unlock the breakthroughs that are needed to overcome the most persistent barriers to delivering education in emergencies and turbocharge progress towards wider development priorities.** This must include working with the international community to establish and resource a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries to ensure time-bound support for the sufficient, timely and regular payment of salaries of teachers.

## Recommendations

**To advance the rights, working conditions and supply of qualified teachers in emergency and crisis-contexts, the UK Government should:**

- ☐ Work with the international community to establish and resource a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries.
- ☐ Convene key stakeholders from government, humanitarian and development sectors and teachers' unions to improve policy, planning and financing for teachers in emergencies.
- ☐ Support refugee-hosting countries to expand teaching capacities through the provision of multi-year financial, policy, and technical support.
- ☐ Support UNESCO and the Teacher Taskforce to develop a Qualification Passport for Teachers and promote international collaboration to ensure entry pathways for displaced teachers into the education workforce of host countries in line with national standards.
- ☐ Ensure accountability for attacks on education and educators, including through implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict, and by promoting endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and its associated guidelines.





Nadejda, 16, a Ukrainian refugee at her ECW-supported EDUTech lab in Moldova © UNICEF Moldova/Buga

## Section 5: Investing in quality teaching

Chronic underinvestment in education systems not only impacts the salaries teachers receive, it also restricts investment in their training and professional development, as well as the overall quality of education they can deliver, and the environment in which learning takes place.

The global teacher shortage cannot be addressed without a transformation in the international community's approach to financing public education.

**From supporting countries to increase domestic resource mobilisation, to removing harmful tax incentives and tackling the burden of debt, the UK has an important role to play in unlocking the fiscal space that is required to increase financing on public education and quality teaching.**

### Education systems are chronically underfunded

Quality education is not achievable without sufficient, sustainable and predictable financing for public education and teacher recruitment, retention, remuneration, training and CPD.

**Long-term funding for well-qualified and well-supported teachers is an investment in the quality and sustainability of education systems.**<sup>63</sup> The failure to invest has the opposite effect, leading to teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and poor conditions for teaching and learning.

Nothing is more important for learning than a qualified teacher, and teacher salaries account for at least 70 per cent of the education budget in most countries.<sup>64</sup> Despite being the most significant cost in education sector budgets, many teachers do not receive adequate or regular salaries to support their livelihoods, often earning below the poverty line. Overstretched and under-resourced national education budgets also leave little headroom for investment in teacher training and continuous professional development.



What is needed is not just the fairer and more efficient allocation of existing resources, but increased spending on education and greater investment in teachers. **This requires a paradigm shift towards tax and debt justice and wide-ranging reform of the international finance architecture.**

## Governments are spending too little on education

Government mobilisation of domestic resources is the most important and sustainable source of education financing. As such countries have a responsibility to meet international benchmarks to spend at least 4–6 per cent of GDP or 15–20 per cent of their national budget on education. Data from 178 countries with available data for 2017 to 2022 showed that over a third of countries did not meet either of these benchmarks.<sup>65</sup>

However, many countries that meet these targets still spend very little per school-age child due to their small government budgets and large school-age populations. **The average low-income country has a tax-to-GDP ratio of just 16 per cent, far short of middle-income countries that are nearer to 30 per cent or high-income countries that often exceed 40 per cent.**<sup>66</sup>

The IMF estimates that most countries could raise these ratios by five percentage points by 2030 – which would allow a doubling of spending on education and health and some other services. Analysis by ActionAid indicates that if Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partner countries increased their tax-to-GDP ratios by five percentage points they could raise an additional US\$455 billion for spending on public services.<sup>67</sup> If 20 per cent of this sum was earmarked for education that would raise over \$93 billion for education every year.

Tax justice is a key part of the solution to achieving SDG 4. Yet developing countries struggle to increase tax-to-GDP ratios at the rates needed because of unfair global tax rules, over which they have very little influence despite being most affected by these rules. **The UK must support international efforts and reforms to make the global tax systems more transparent, democratic and inclusive, including through implementation of a UN Convention on Tax.**

## Many countries spend more on debt than education

Worsening debt burdens are preventing many governments from properly funding education and investing in the education workforce. For example, analysis by Save the Children found that interest payments on external debt alone by the low- and middle-income countries in the top 20 refugee-hosting countries totaled more than US\$23 billion in 2020. This is enough to send every refugee child in low- and middle-income countries to school for nearly five years.<sup>68</sup>

**Research by ActionAid further identified that, of the 71 GPE partner countries where data is available, 90 per cent are at significant risk of debt distress, meaning they are unable to fulfil their financial obligations, or at high or moderate risk of distress.**<sup>69</sup> This includes 42 countries that are already spending over 12 per cent of their national budget on debt servicing.

The UK is in a unique position to address this mounting crisis. 90 per cent of the debts owed by lower-income countries to banks, hedge funds and oil traders are overseen by UK law.<sup>70</sup> **The NEU joins the growing calls for the UK Government to introduce a new debt justice law to require private lenders to take part in debt cancellation.** Any country that spends more on debt servicing than on education should be prioritised for debt relief, restructuring and in some cases, debt cancellation. Whilst



long-term structural changes are being made, the UK should champion innovative tools such as debt-for-education swaps as a temporary alleviation.

### **Africa is experiencing the worst debt crisis in a generation**

In 2023, the majority of African countries spent more repaying external debts than on health or education – and in some cases both – according to analysis by Christian Aid<sup>71</sup>:

- In Malawi, where just 15 per cent of children complete secondary school, twice as much is spent on debt than education.
- Zambia's external debt payments totaled almost a quarter of all government revenue in 2019. The government was only able to keep making these payments by cutting public spending, with spending on public education falling by 40 per cent between 2014 and 2020.

## **Public-sector wage bill constraints undermine teachers and public education systems**

The ability of developing countries to invest in the education workforce and increase teacher recruitment is restricted by public-sector wage bill constraints and austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Alongside health workers teachers are the largest group on the public sector wage bills so when these are cut or frozen, this almost always requires cuts to teacher numbers and pay.

Analysis of 15 low-income countries found that all 15 were encouraged by the IMF to cut or freeze the public sector wage bill for three or more years.<sup>72</sup> The recommended IMF cuts totalled nearly \$10 billion – the equivalent of cutting over 3 million primary school teachers.

**Recurrent spending on teacher salaries is not a cost, it is an investment in the future.** The High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession makes clear that public-sector wage-bill constraints and policy guidance from the IMF should not be applied to the education sector as it undermines investment and exacerbates teacher shortages. **As part of its commitment to decolonisation, the UK Government should use its influence on the Boards of International Financial Institutions to stop the practice of imposing damaging conditionalities attached to the provision of overseas development assistance and debt relief to developing countries.**





### **Teacher wage bill constraints: Perspectives from the classroom**

Evidence collated by Education International reveals the impact of public wage constraints on teachers in Malawi, Nepal and Zambia, finding that their salaries are too low to enable them to rent decent housing and that they are forced to take on second jobs.<sup>73</sup>

“I was previously a government appointed teacher but now my salary is paid from the school resources. I do not get any allowances; I do not get a pension after retirement. I am really anxious about what will happen to me after I retire.”

**Mathematics teacher, Nepal**

“In my class I have a total of 100 learners. When I am teaching, it is very difficult for me to deliver the lesson effectively. We are understaffed at our school. There are 2,500 learners and only 23 teachers, including the head teacher.”

**Teacher, Malawi**

“My salary is a slave salary. Our conditions of service are pathetic. I am a special education teacher, but I am not paid any allowance as per conditions of service stipulations”

**Teacher, Zambia**

### **ODA to education and teacher training is too low**

Official Development Assistance (ODA) remains a critical source of financing for SDG 4, accounting for 13 per cent of total education expenditure in low-income countries.<sup>74</sup> Whilst donor funding is typically not available for recurrent costs, like teacher salaries, **ODA can nonetheless play an important role in supporting countries to increase the supply of qualified teachers and fill the gaps in investment in the education workforce.** For example, through supporting improvements in teacher training and management, CPD and working conditions and infrastructure. This is especially important in many low-income countries where the limited size of the education budget, particularly after covering teacher salaries, leaves minimal room for wider spending on improvements to the quality of the education workforce.

Among the bilateral and multilateral donors contributing data to the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS), the World Bank has consistently held the position of the largest donor to teacher training, contributing US\$121 million annually on average.<sup>75</sup> This is more than double the UK's disbursement of ODA towards teacher training which averaged US\$50 million per year between 2013 – 2022.

The share of ODA allocated to education also helps influence other countries to increase education spending, both domestically and internationally. Despite international calls for more education financing, the global proportion of ODA allocated to education has been stagnant in recent years and fell by 7 per cent from 2020 to 2021.<sup>76</sup>

**UK spending on global ODA has also been in decline, dropping from a high of 13.5 per cent in 2013 to just 3.7 per cent of the UK's bilateral ODA in 2022.<sup>77</sup>**

This is far below the international benchmark for countries to allocate at least 15 per cent of ODA to education and puts the UK **25th** against other OECD-Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) countries as a proportion of its overall ODA spending on education. Education has been one of the worst impacted sectors by cuts following the decline in the UK aid budget from 0.7 per cent to 0.5 per cent of GNI and the rise in ODA spending on in-country refugee costs. With an equality impact assessment prepared by FCDO acknowledging that centrally managed programmes on girls' education had lost 54 per cent of their funding during 2022-23.<sup>78</sup>

Multilateral spending for education, including most notably the UK's investment in the two major education funds – the GPE and ECW – has also been affected. Despite the effective performance of both ECW and GPE, the UK has fallen short of expectations in terms of its most recent financial pledges. This has weakened the UK's ability to progress its global education priorities, and the capacity of the funds to reach children and teachers in the areas where resources are needed most.

**The UK Government must urgently protect and prioritise education spending from further cuts and commit to progressively increase education's share of ODA to at least 15 per cent in line with international benchmarks and work with the international community to fully-fund GPE and ECW.**

### **GPE and ECW are at the forefront of efforts to support trained teachers for all children**

Supporting teachers and their professional development is a high priority for GPE.<sup>79</sup> In 2023, GPE had 75 grants allocated to activities related to teachers with a total value of more than US\$490 million.<sup>80</sup> These grants target many activities, including pre-service education, in-service training, teacher mentoring, teacher management and assessment of teaching quality. GPE also champions the improved engagement of teachers in education sector planning and monitoring, including through promoting the inclusion of teacher organisations in local education groups.

Education cannot wait, so teachers must not either. Teachers are a programmatic priority in ECW's Strategic Plan and through its Multi-Year Resilience Programmes, 100 per cent of supported teachers receive training and skills building. This translates to over 140,000 teachers trained since the Fund's inception, including 72,000 teachers in crisis situations in 2022 on topics such as subject knowledge, mental health, gender, inclusion and WASH.<sup>81</sup>

**As a leading donor to, and member of, the Board of Directors of GPE and ECW's ExCom, the UK should advocate for improved planning, policy and financing for teachers across both funds, including in establishing a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries.**



## Financing the recruitment, retention, and training of teachers

Increased spending on education brings lifelong returns. **An additional year of schooling increases future earnings by 10 per cent a year.**<sup>82</sup> At the same time, education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality, as well as for laying the basis for sustained growth. The price of inaction is colossal: the world could face over \$10 trillion in losses by 2030 due to unmet educational needs, ranging from economic costs to broader social implications such as adolescent pregnancies and poor mental health.<sup>83</sup>

**Unlocking the transformative benefits of education requires a step change in how the international community supports countries to finance public education.**

First and foremost, this requires reform of the international finance architecture – a system that currently neither represents the voices and needs of the majority of the world’s population nor responds to today’s major challenges.

This is a question of economic and social justice. It is ethically indefensible and economically ruinous for countries to continue to spend more on debt than education and for austerity measures to cut teacher numbers when they are needed more than ever. **The UK has a moral responsibility to progress the reforms necessary to unlock the fiscal space that is required for countries to invest in public education and quality teaching.**

## Recommendations

**To champion and unlock financing for public education and quality teaching the UK should:**

- ☐ Support developing countries to sustainably raise domestic revenues for education in line with international benchmarks and build comprehensive, progressive tax systems.
- ☐ Support international efforts and reforms to make the global tax systems more transparent, democratic and inclusive, including through implementation of a UN Convention on Tax.
- ☐ Introduce legislation to ensure private lenders take part in debt cancellation and support reforms to the Common Framework for debt treatment beyond the DSSI (Common Framework).
- ☐ Urge the IMF and other international financial institutions to remove loan conditionalities and imposed austerity measures that undermine countries’ ability to fund education and other public services; and make new lines of long-term credit with concessional and sustainable interest rates available to low- and lower-middle-income countries, without austerity conditions attached.
- ☐ Restore UK ODA to 0.7 per cent of GNI and increase education’s share of the ODA budget to at least 15 per cent.
- ☐ Work with the international community to ensure that GPE and ECW are fully-funded and support and lead efforts to improve planning, policy and financing for teachers across both funds.



## Section 6: Recommendations

To support all children to access a qualified, well-trained and well-supported teacher and catalyse progress toward SDG 4 and wider development objectives the UK Government should:

### 1. Recognise that the Teacher Shortage Crisis is Global:

- ☐ Accept responsibility, as an influential international player, for the global teacher shortage and put in place measures to prevent the transfer of the teachers needed in the global south to fix the crisis in the global north.
- ☐ Recommit to the Protocol for the Recruitment of Commonwealth Teachers to safeguard the rights of Commonwealth teachers working in countries to which they move for work and protect the integrity of education systems in source countries.
- ☐ Establish an independent commission to investigate how unions and government can work together to resolve the teacher recruitment and retention crisis in the UK.
- ☐ Implement in full the recommendations of the High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession and the Global Report on Teachers.
- ☐ Promote professional standards for teachers, in collaboration with trade unions, the international community, social partners, and other relevant stakeholders.
- ☐ Enhance international collaboration to address teacher shortages, including by becoming a member of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030.

### 2. Develop a new FCDO global teacher strategy, which incorporates the recommendations of this report. This should include commitments to:

- ☐ Support the recruitment, retention and training of gender-balanced numbers of qualified teachers, prioritising countries with the highest number of out-of-school children and where shortages of qualified teachers are greatest; and additionally support leadership progression for female teachers and teachers from minority groups.
- ☐ Ensure all UK-funded programmes on education incorporate teacher recruitment, retention and inclusive training and CPD, with teachers included in programme design, implementation and decision-making bodies.
- ☐ Strengthen publicly provided education systems and cease all investments in for-profit schooling including through intermediated investments, recognising this as the only equitable and sustainable route to strengthen the teacher workforce and achieve education for all.
- ☐ Support triangular and South-South cooperation initiatives to address shortages of qualified teachers and deliver quality education, through long-term and flexible funding partnerships.
- ☐ Build evidence of the effectiveness of teaching by supporting countries to strengthen teacher management and information systems and improve data collection and analysis on the recruitment and retention of teachers.
- ☐ Be led by the expertise and experiences of teachers and their unions, and the communities most affected by the shortage of qualified teachers.
- ☐ Recognise teacher trade unions as development partners and global partners in



the recruitment and retention of teachers, in policymaking and in enhancing the status of the teaching profession.

### **3. Advance the rights, working conditions and supply of qualified teachers in emergency and crisis-contexts:**

- ☐ Work with the international community to establish and resource a Global Fund for Teachers' Salaries.
- ☐ Convene key stakeholders from government, humanitarian and development sectors and teachers' unions to improve policy, planning and financing for teachers in emergencies.
- ☐ Support refugee-hosting countries to expand teaching capacities through the provision of multi-year financial, policy, and technical support.
- ☐ Support UNESCO and the Teacher Taskforce to develop a Qualification Passport for Teachers and promote international collaboration to ensure entry pathways for displaced teachers into the education workforce of host countries in line with national standards.
- ☐ Ensure accountability for attacks on education and educators, including through implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601 on the protection of schools in armed conflict and promoting endorsement and implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration and its associated guidelines.

### **4. Champion and unlock financing for public education and quality teaching:**

- ☐ Support developing countries to sustainably raise domestic revenues for education in line with international benchmarks and build comprehensive progressive tax systems.
- ☐ Support international efforts and reforms to make the global tax systems more transparent, democratic and inclusive, including through implementation of a UN Convention on Tax.
- ☐ Introduce legislation to ensure private lenders take part in debt cancellation and support reforms to the Common Framework for debt treatment beyond the DSSI (Common Framework).
- ☐ Urge the IMF and other international financial institutions to remove loan conditionalities and imposed austerity measures that undermine countries' ability to fund education and other public services; and make new lines of long-term credit with concessional and sustainable interest rates available to low- and lower-middle-income countries, without austerity.
- ☐ Restore UK ODA to 0.7 per cent of GNI and increase education's share of the ODA budget to at least 15 per cent.
- ☐ Work with the international community to ensure that GPE and ECW are fully-funded and support and lead efforts to improve planning, policy and financing for teachers across both funds.

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