

International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030

Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Call for Action on Teachers

27 March 2020

As of 25 March, [165 countries have closed all their schools because of the COVID-19 virus](#), affecting nearly 1.5 billion students and 63 million primary and secondary school teachers. This number is predicted to rise. The closures pose unprecedented challenges for education systems throughout the world. This global health crisis threatens to significantly slow progress towards many of the global goals, in particular, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”). It is also likely to exacerbate the global learning crisis and global education inequalities as the impacts will fall disproportionately on the poorest.

Teachers are the backbone of education systems and the key to reaching learning goals, regardless of context and situation. Within the COVID-19 crisis, they are on the front line in ensuring that learning continues. Around the world, teachers and school leaders have been rapidly mobilising and innovating to facilitate quality distance learning for students in confinement, with or without the use of digital technologies. They have also been participating in and delivering other forms of education. In addition, teachers are essential for communicating measures that prevent the spread of the virus, ensuring that children are safe and supported.

While the top priority for the global community right now is to guarantee sufficient resources for health services, we must also ensure that funding and support continue for education systems. Leadership, financial and material resources for teachers are necessary to make sure that quality teaching and learning can continue at a distance during the crisis and that recovery is rapid. It is also vital that schools be able to reopen in the best conditions once the crisis is over. We cannot allow millions of children to miss out on learning, in particular those in the poorest countries and from marginalised communities, who are likely to be hit the hardest.

In the light of the above, the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 calls on all governments, education providers and funders – public and private – to recognise the critical roles that teachers play in the COVID-19 response and recovery. In particular, the Teacher Task Force calls on all relevant partners to:

- 1) **Preserve employment and wages.** The COVID-19 crisis is putting public budgets under added strain, as governments scramble to help public health systems to save lives. At the same time, the global economic downturn is already damaging the well-being of businesses and families. In many countries, contract teachers, substitute teachers and education support personnel risk seeing their contracts broken and their livelihoods disappear. Tertiary education institutions that depend on income from foreign students could face closure, with devastating consequences for their staff. This crisis cannot be a pretext to lower standards and norms, or push aside labour rights. Governments and all public and private education providers should work to preserve the entire teaching and education support staff, and their salaries and benefits. They will be essential for a rapid and effective recovery when schools re-open.
- 2) **Prioritise teachers’ and learners’ health, safety and well-being.** [Teachers, students and families are under stress](#). In some cases, teachers who may already be exposed to the virus themselves are trying to manage the anxiety of being [told to work in situations where the COVID-19 risk is growing](#). Others are dealing with the stress of having to deliver quality learning with tools for which they have received little or no training. Teachers need socio-emotional support to face the extra pressure being put on

them to deliver learning in a time of crisis. They also need the tools to adequately communicate health risks and preventive measures to children, without burdening them with anxiety.

- 3) **Include teachers in developing COVID-19 education responses.** Teachers have taken the lead in preparing and implementing rapid and innovative responses to the current situation. To be successful, COVID-19 responses need to be developed with the full involvement of teachers and their representative organisations, taking into account teachers' experience, skills and needs. The Teacher Task Force encourages countries and institutions to include teachers and their representative organisations at all steps of education policy-making and planning. Teachers' voices will be critical as countries and institutions plan short-term approaches to assessment, curriculum and calendars, and long-term solutions such as e-learning platforms, and radio- and television-assisted instruction. Teachers will have a crucial role in the recovery phase when schools reopen, assessing students' progress and making sure that learning gaps are addressed quickly.
- 4) **Provide adequate professional support and training.** School closures due to COVID-19 have been sudden. Little attention has been given to providing teachers with adequate training on how to ensure that learning continues, or how to develop relevant, high-quality distance education packages. Teachers whose digital technology skills vary now have to adapt to new learning platforms and develop new strategies to engage children, while maintaining high standards of teaching and learning. To meet these challenges, governments and other providers must move swiftly to ensure that teachers receive the necessary training. Education systems will have to be flexible to take into account the needs of learners and teachers in this global crisis. They also need to document and share experiences to ensure that, in the future, systems are better able to respond if crises re-occur.
- 5) **Put equity at the heart of education responses.** Technological solutions to ensure continuity of learning often exacerbate inequalities. Distance and e-learning are only effective for teachers, students and families with adequate electricity, Internet connectivity, computers and tablets, and physical spaces to work. More traditional media-based learning, via print, television, phone and radio, often offers more viable ways of helping teachers to continue to provide lessons, especially in the poorest countries. Greater support and flexibility will be needed for teachers who work in remote areas or with low-income or minority communities, to ensure that disadvantaged children do not miss out. Governments can harness public-private partnerships to supply needed technology. Such partnerships should be carefully regulated and monitored. Governments should also take into account the social and psychological strains of distance learning on parents and families, especially those who are most disadvantaged and are struggling with the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 6) **Include teachers in aid responses.** International financial institutions are releasing the first wave of [financial support for health systems](#). The Teacher Task Force urges financing institutions to also help governments support education systems, particularly the teaching workforce's professional development. Such support is particularly urgent in some of the world's poorest countries, which are already struggling to meet education needs because of critical shortages of trained teachers. These countries cannot afford to see their education systems weakened further.

The [International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030](#) is a global network of over 90 governments and some 50 international and regional organisations (including UN organisations, civil society organisations, the teaching profession and foundations) working to promote teachers and teaching issues. Its Secretariat is hosted by UNESCO at its headquarters in Paris.