

# The Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021

## Summary of research findings

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### *The Status of Teachers*

The status of teachers remains a concern in many jurisdictions. Teachers are aware that holding the same qualifications or levels of training as other professions does not bring the same status, despite teaching and facilitating learning being complex work that requires significant expertise. The mandate for this Report was to consider the status of the teaching profession in the three years since the 2018 Report. Rather than simply covering the same ground as the previous Report, the survey was encouraged to maintain its strong focus on status, pay, and conditions while responding to pressing contemporary issues. In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, with concern around the impact that this was having on school communities in general, and the teacher workforce in particular, a focus of this survey concerns the perspectives of unions across the world regarding the impact of COVID-19.

The third report on The Global Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession conducted by Education International should be read in conjunction with the first two as building a nuanced and insightful understanding of the status of teachers across the globe. The survey consisted of 69 questions which included a mix of open-ended, short answer, and





Likert scale responses. The survey was made available via a web link to the 384 members of Education International in 2020. Overall, 128 participants - 33.3 per cent of the total Education International membership - made substantive attempts to answer the questions.

It is important to note that the data collected in this survey are the perceptions and insights of union/association leaders and, as such, should not be seen as emanating from teachers themselves. However, there is much value in gathering the insights of those most intimately connected with issues such as teachers' pay, conditions, and work at the national level in gaining insight into the status of teachers in given societies. Union leaders are elected by their members to represent their views and advocate for the profession in a given jurisdiction. Their insights remain extremely valuable and informative.

Teacher unions report the following, impacting the status of teachers since 2018 (when the last report was compiled).

- Most unions perceive that the media portrayal of teachers is not positive. There is also a belief that governments could do more to represent teachers in positive ways.
- There is ongoing concern regarding more and more precarious employment for teachers in many jurisdictions. This impacts on teaching being seen as an attractive career choice for young people.
- The majority of unions are concerned about the generational renewal of teachers, which has become an issue in some jurisdictions because of high levels of attrition of practicing teachers. This attrition is related to workplace factors such as lack of support, lack of career progression, unsustainable workloads, and poor pay

in comparison to other professions.

- There is a concern that attrition and fewer young people wanting to become teachers is leading to the hiring of unqualified teachers.
- The majority of unions report concerns that pay is too low, conditions are deteriorating, infrastructure to support teaching and learning is not a priority for government investment and that, overall, teachers' work conditions have declined over the last three years. A key factor is increased workload for principals, teachers, and education support personnel.
- The deterioration of conditions has many unions concerned for their members' wellbeing due to the stress of a more complex job being compounded by increasing expectations of teachers.
- Meaningful continuous professional development that is easy to access, is responsive to current needs, is able to be undertaken during work hours, and is provided free of charge remains a priority for many unions.
- Privatisation continues to be a concern, particularly in jurisdictions where governments have outsourced the running of public schools to corporate entities.

## **The Impact of COVID-19**

- UNESCO's *Report on the Adverse Consequences of School Closures* (2020) suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic was causing stress among the teacher workforce as lessons moved online requiring many extra hours of teacher work. This online work could be impacted by infrastructure problems such as student and teacher access to computers, access to software programmes, access to

the internet, and so on. Participating unions' responses support UNESCO's findings, reporting their members had experienced significant work stress during lockdown periods due to the work needed to shift to online teaching, dealing with inequitable access to online learning, and fears for their health and safety where schools were required to deliver face-to-face lessons. Stress and wellbeing issues amongst education professionals continued after lockdowns ended because the ongoing increased workload that principals, teachers, and education support personnel faced had become the 'new normal'. In particular, being responsible for making up for lost learning, catering for more students due to workforce and staffing changes, and the personal cost of COVID-19 were significant.

- During the pandemic, there was a view that the status of teachers had stayed the same or slightly improved. This was likely due to government messaging praising teachers for the success in rapidly shifting to online lessons or praising them as heroes keeping schools open. Furthermore, home schooling impressed upon parents how challenging it is to lead children through curricula and to provide learning opportunities and the expertise required to facilitate this daily. However, 32 out of the 113 (28.3 per cent) responses reported a decline in teacher status as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Extended responses suggest this was related to the portrayal of teachers in the media as 'shirkers' or 'lazy' for expressing concern about keeping schools open or reopening schools during the pandemic, particularly when there was no access to appropriate workplace safeguards and protective equipment.
- COVID-19 had a dramatic impact on workload. Workload increased

significantly during the lockdown, most likely due to redesigning curricula and learning to enable online schooling. Of concern was that this increased workload did not change once schools re-opened.

- When lockdowns ended, workload continued at its increased levels, possibly a result of budget cuts, staff layoffs, or the need to try to catch up on missed learning time and missed assessments. The World Bank Group estimated that education budgets have declined by 65 per cent in low- and middle-income countries, and 33 per cent in upper-middle- and high-income countries.
- As a result of COVID-19, many teachers on casual and short-term contracts were not paid over the lockdown. This was particularly evident for teachers working in privatised schools in the Education International region of Africa

Overall, the status of teachers remains in flux. The cautions reported in the 2018 Report, regarding pay, conditions, accountability pressures, and the representations of teachers in the media largely remain issues of concern for unions in 2021. What emerged strongly in the data is that a vital opportunity was missed. Unions perceive that the disastrous impact of COVID-19 can be partly explained as exacerbating inequalities already evident in education systems, caused by lack of funding, the pernicious effects of poorly thought through policy settings, and the lack of meaningful engagement with intelligent professionalism.

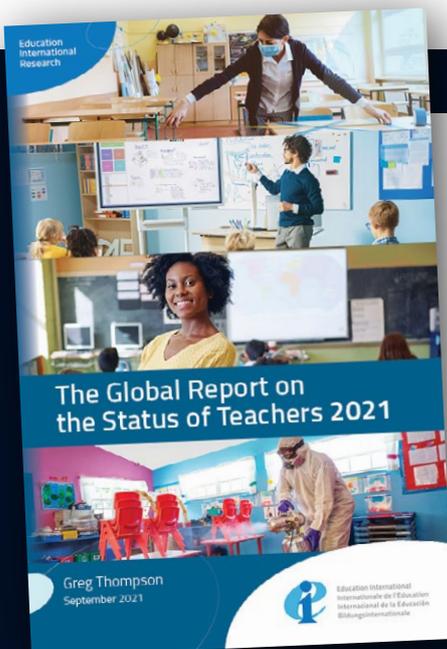
The challenge remains to rethink the issue of the status of teachers so that, in three years' time, the same concerns are not expressed, with little or no improvement. The 2021 Report has found the same challenges for the status of teachers as the 2018 Report. Broadly speaking, 'kicking the status can

down the road' is effectively a lesson in rhetoric, but it is a lesson that governments and global policy actors play very well. With that in mind, it might be useful to leave with some suggestions for Education International and its members rather than policy recommendations. Unions will always advocate for their members regarding pay, conditions, and wellbeing, and they must be encouraged to continue to do so. However, recommendations are difficult to make because the specific needs and structural realities of education systems are different.

In response to the problem of status, one possibility is for unions and their memberships to decide on, and advocate for, a professionalism that recognises the unique skills and expertise that educational professionals have that can be brought to bear within education systems. This has to be a shift away from 'responsibilisation' to more meaningful forms of educational autonomy. This requires time, and for education systems to invest in time for their workforce. Professionalism that delivers forms of autonomy that (a) requires

educators to devote their time to non-educational endeavours (such as those associated with running a business) and/or (b) associated with greater workload, increased stress, and the withdrawal of central resources and support will diminish the quality of education that can be delivered.

Intelligent professionalism posits that teachers, principals, and their elected association/union representatives should always be 'insiders' in the various processes and mechanisms that systems argue are improving education. Education (at all levels) will always be a State-mediated profession, but there are opportunities for more meaningful incorporation of the profession. And this, if taken as the aim of professionalisation, could improve status across all education systems.



The full research paper by Greg Thompson is available here: <https://eiie.io/StatusOfTeachers2021E>



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