



IRREPLACEABLE TEACHERS: INVESTING IN THOSE WHO UPHOLD THE RIGHT TO EDUCATIONS

OCTOBER 5: WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Education is a deeply **human, emotional, and relational** process. It is part of the social fabric essential to a life of dignity. Without a doubt, teachers are its **backbone**.

Although teachers are essential workers, they often earn low salaries compared with other professions requiring similar qualifications (UNESCO & TTF, 2024). Heavy workloads also place their physical and mental health at serious risk, often without adequate support.

Chronic underinvestment in education systems and the **undervaluing of education** and the teaching profession are major drivers of the global shortage of 44 million teachers. Moreover, **one in three additional teachers needed worldwide is needed in sub-Saharan Africa**. Without them, we cannot make meaningful progress toward providing education to the 250 million children and young people who remain out of school worldwide (UNESCO & TTF, 2024).

WE NEED MORE TEACHERS WORKING IN DECENT CONDITIONS

Any policy aimed at improving educational quality must prioritize investment in the teaching workforce. **Teachers have two to three times more impact** on reading and mathematics outcomes **than any other school-level factor** (Oppen, 2019). Yet education systems are facing widespread teacher shortages, rising attrition rates, and growing challenges in recruiting talent from an increasingly shrinking pool (Schweickert & Torres, 2026).

Teacher shortages have harmful effects across the entire education system: they increase workloads, undermine teaching quality, and discourage people from entering the profession. In turn, these pressures weaken the quality of education, deepen inequalities, and undermine the resilience of education systems (Schweickert & Torres, 2026; UNESCO, 2025).

PRECARIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS SHOULD HAVE NO PLACE IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION OR IN EDUCATION

In a survey of teacher unions, **low salaries** were identified as the most influential factor contributing to teacher shortages, followed by excessive workloads, low professional status, and limited opportunities for professional development. Together, these factors create persistent employment precarity that profoundly affects teachers' physical and mental health (Arnold & Rahimi, 2024).

Frustration and disillusionment with the profession are driving a mass exodus of teachers: **the global primary-school teacher attrition rate has doubled in recent years, rising from 4.6% to 9.1%**. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 8.7 out of every 10 new teachers are hired to fill positions left vacant by voluntary attrition (UNESCO & TTF, 2024).

It is also worth remembering that **teaching has historically been a female-dominated profession, closely tied to the devaluation of care work** (Arnold & Rahimi, 2024). **This gender bias persists in public policy, perpetuating precarious working conditions in a profession where women make up 68% of the workforce** (UNESCO & TTF, 2024).

TEACHERS ON THE FRONT LINES OF CRISES AND EMERGENCIES

Today, complex crises, climate-related disasters, and conflicts are disrupting the education of 258 million children and adolescents across 90 countries, including Sudan, Venezuela, and Yemen (ECW, 2026).

Despite significant data gaps on education in emergencies, evidence shows that teachers are on the front lines: they protect children from violence and recruitment, identify trauma and malnutrition, and keep the routines of school life going (UNESCO, 2025).

Education in emergencies is vital and saves lives, yet it receives less than 4% of global humanitarian aid funding (Educo, 2025).

If inadequate support, training, and decent pay are widespread problems in the teaching profession, these conditions become even more acute in crisis settings. Amid teacher shortages, education falls to substitute, community, and refugee teachers working in makeshift classrooms and under the threat of armed groups, without regulated salaries, adequate resources, ongoing training, or psychosocial support. They, too, face the trauma and stress of the circumstances in which they work (EiE Hub, 2024).

THE DIGITAL CHALLENGE GOES BEYOND THE CLICK

Classrooms in Oslo schools equipped with digital boards and boilers bear little resemblance to rural schools in Nepal without basic services, where students enter the classroom barefoot. Any discussion of technology's impact on education must acknowledge that **these differences are not merely cultural or climatic; they reflect the North-South divide**,

external debt, insufficient public investment, and the allocation of official development assistance.

While debates in some regions focus on artificial intelligence (AI), **millions of classrooms**, particularly in emergency and vulnerable settings, **still lack basic infrastructure like internet or electricity**. Yet we cannot ignore the profound impact that educational technologies and AI are already having on classrooms and the future of education.

Technology is often presented as a way to streamline teachers' growing bureaucratic and administrative workloads. However, without adequate pedagogical training, teachers cannot fully benefit from these tools, and their use can ultimately add to workload pressures and socio-emotional strain (UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO & TTF, 2024).

This challenge is compounded by the fact that **only 51% of countries have a regulatory framework or digital competency plan for teachers** (UNESCO, 2023).

The **PISA** report has once again highlighted the harmful effects of inappropriate screen and AI use for learning. Indeed, such use can undermine students' sustained attention, reading comprehension, and tolerance for difficulty. When tasks are delegated to machines, it can also become harder to assess what students have actually learned.

As traditional assessments increasingly fail to capture learning, teachers need to return to observation, classroom conversation, and tracing students' thinking processes. These practices require autonomy, pedagogical discretion, and flexibility. Yet **the bottleneck is often the system itself**, which continues to demand standardized outcomes and rely on rigid frameworks that are difficult to change (Doucet, 2026).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education must undergo reform to respond to a geopolitical landscape shaped by instability and the challenges of technological transformation. At the heart of this reform, we reaffirm teaching as a profoundly human process, one that requires presence, empathy, and human connection. Teachers' work cannot be replaced by machines. This requires restoring the value and status of the teaching profession, guaranteeing teachers' rights, and finally delivering on long-deferred commitments to global education.

Recognizing that **without teachers there is no right to education**, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE Spain) calls on public authorities, international cooperation actors, civil society organizations, and the wider education community to defend the teaching profession and advocate for:

- 1 **Increased domestic public investment** in education in line with international commitments, allocating at least 4-6% of GDP or 15-20% of public expenditure to public education, with sufficient resources to guarantee decent salaries and working conditions for teachers.
- 2 **Fulfillment of the commitment to allocate 0.7%** of Gross National Income (GNI) to Official Development Assistance (ODA), and ensure that education remains a priority within international cooperation.
- 3 **Allocation of at least 10% of humanitarian aid funding** to education in contexts of crisis and conflict, promoting adherence to the Safe Schools Declaration and ensuring dedicated resources for the protection, formalization of employment, decent remuneration, and psychosocial support of community, substitute, and refugee teachers who keep classrooms functioning on the front lines of emergencies.
- 4 **Implementation of free, publicly funded induction, mentoring, and continuous professional development programmes** and pathways that support both early-career and experienced teachers and help prevent early attrition.
- 5 **Investment in teachers' well-being and mental health** through publicly funded psychosocial support services, measures to address excessive workloads, the simplification and reduction of non-pedagogical bureaucratic tasks that overwhelm the working day, and the creation of peer-support networks.
- 6 **Campaigns to raise the social status of teaching**, alongside scholarships and attractive, stable career pathways that encourage young people to join an intergenerational alliance to achieve SDG 4 in full.
- 7 **Guaranteed social dialogue and active participation:** Ensuring the meaningful and binding participation of teacher unions and teachers not only in evaluation, but also in the design and planning of education policies, digital transformation, and emergency response plans.

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