

Joint Message from
Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO,
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Ms Catherine Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF,
Mr David Edwards, General Secretary, Education International
for World Teachers' Day

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The transformation of education begins with teachers

*“You cannot teach today the same way you did yesterday
to prepare students for tomorrow”
John Dewey*

The world has committed to transform education and to address the main obstacles that prevent teachers from leading this transformation.

The recent report from the International Commission on the Futures of Education, *Reimagining our futures together*, calls for a new social contract for education, one in which teachers are at the centre and their profession revalued and reimagined.

The COVID-19 crisis revealed that teachers are the engines at the heart of our education systems. Without their work, it is impossible to provide inclusive, equitable and quality education to every learner. They are also essential to pandemic recovery and preparing learners for the future. Yet unless we transform conditions for teachers, the promise of that education will remain out of reach for those who need it most.

As reaffirmed at the recent Transforming Education Summit, this requires the right number of empowered, motivated and qualified teachers and education personnel in the right place with the right skills. However, in many parts of the world, classrooms are overcrowded, and teachers are too few, on top of being overworked, demotivated and unsupported. As a result, we are seeing an unprecedented number of teachers leaving the profession and a significant drop in those studying to become teachers. If these issues are not addressed, the loss of a professional teaching corps could be a fatal blow to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Alongside the educational disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher loss disproportionately affects learners in remote or poor areas, as well as women and girls and vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Therefore, bringing qualified, supported and motivated teachers into classrooms – and keeping them there – is the single most important thing we can do to improve the learning and wellbeing of students and communities. The valuable work that teachers do must also be translated into better working conditions and pay.

Recent estimates point to the need for an additional 24.4 million teachers in primary education and some 44.4 million teachers for secondary education if we are to achieve universal basic education by 2030. In sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia alone, an additional 24 million teachers are required, accounting for about half of the need for new teachers in developing countries.

With some of the most overcrowded classrooms in the world, sub-Saharan Africa is also home to the most overburdened teachers and understaffed systems, with 90% of secondary schools facing serious teaching shortages. Globally, 81% of primary school instructors and 78% of secondary school instructors are trained teachers. Yet in sub-Saharan Africa – with few country exceptions – these figures are 65% and 51% respectively.

Today, on World Teachers' Day, we celebrate the critical role of teachers in transforming learners' potential by ensuring they have the tools they need to take responsibility for themselves, for others and for the planet. We call on countries to ensure that teachers are trusted and recognized as knowledge producers, reflective practitioners, and policy partners.