



## Towards a new social contract for education

### Concept note

Across the globe, in various high- and low-income countries alike, the value conferred on the teaching profession is commonly perceived to be low and even in decline ([Varkey Foundation, 2018](#); [IIEP, 2019](#); [OECD, 2020](#); [UNESCO & TTF, 2024](#)). UNESCO and the International Teacher Task Force's recently published Global Report on Teachers (2024) rang the alarm on a global shortage of teachers and massive growth in teacher attrition rates. These findings are somewhat unsurprising given the breath and multidimensionality of the challenges facing the profession. Among other factors, poor working conditions ([UNESCO and TTF, 2020](#); [Toropova et al, 2020](#); [Podolsky et al, 2016](#)), uncompetitive remuneration ([Bennell, 2023](#); [Evans et al., 2022](#)), and heavy workloads deter teachers from entering or staying in the profession ([Creagh, 2023](#); [Connolly, 2023](#); [Green, 2021](#)). Beyond the material conditions of teaching, there are also symbolic factors adding to the plight of teachers such as a lack of social recognition ([Varkey Foundation, 2018](#)), low professional autonomy ([Smith and Ulvik, 2017](#); [Worth and Van den Brande, 2020](#)), and little influence in decision-making. Ignoring the voice of teachers has negative effects on both teacher status and motivation, and on the effectiveness of teacher programmes and overall education policy.

Recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, that disrupted education and caused schools to close confirmed that, if given the space and autonomy necessary, teachers can actually make educational decisions and even develop innovations that ensure learning and student wellbeing ([OECD, UNESCO & TTF, 2021](#)).

Teachers carry out research, adapt pedagogies, prioritize curricular content, assess progress and contextualize, personalize education in the classroom, and engage in decision-making in their classrooms. Yet, despite the central role of teachers and the potential of their participation in the improvement of education, few countries engage in genuine teacher consultations and social dialogue processes with social partners in significant ways.

The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) states that there should be close cooperation between governments, teacher organizations, cultural, learning and research institutions to define education policy and its precise objectives. For instance, evidence shows that high unionization levels are associated with positive outcomes across multiple indicators of economic, personal, and democratic well-being (Banerjee et al., 2021; Education International, 2021), as well as for teacher professionalization and policy advocacy (Gindin and Finger, 2013). For this to happen, mechanisms for dialogue and teacher participation are needed.

Allowing teachers' voices to be heard requires, among other things, developing a culture of trust and collaboration and fostering autonomy and academic freedom, a culture where teachers are respected and valued both inside and outside the classroom. As stated in the Report of the International Commission on the Futures of Education, for the transformation of education teachers must be at the centre, and their profession revalued and reimagined as a collaborative endeavour, sparking new knowledge to bring about educational and social transformation (UNESCO, 2021). This requires a new social contract with teachers, whereby national governments, trade unions, development

Programme

