

# Teacher Status & Career Paths in Asia Pacific

UNESCO Asia-Pacific  
Education Thematic Brief

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## Promoting Teacher Growth in Education Policies and Practice

### Background

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) - Education 2030 agenda, which is notably bolder and more ambitious than Education for All (EFA), raises more hopes and expectations from all levels of stakeholders. As governments continue to improve, reform and expand their education systems, teachers will undoubtedly be central again to the success of any efforts to meet the over-all goal. Past EFA experience suggests that many countries have focused on expanding access to education, which resulted in a trade-off, favouring quantity over quality that led to the recruitment of teachers who are not fully qualified and inadequately trained. In addition, retaining highly trained, well-qualified and competent teachers, remains a challenge due to perceived lesser status, low salaries, poor teaching and learning conditions, lack of career progression and inadequate professional development.

Recognizing the essential role teachers play in educational advancement and the importance of their contribution in building and developing the minds of the learners, UNESCO has continuously been working on various initiatives to address teacher issues and support the profession. Some of these include: 1) monitoring progress towards international benchmarks such as the ILO/UNESCO recommendations and the SDG4; 2) conducting research studies to help member states develop evidence-based teacher policies; 3) providing country with technical assistance to enhance teaching using ICT; and 4) facilitating collaboration, policy dialogues, sharing research findings, and mutual learning.

Based on the findings of two recent UNESCO Bangkok research studies on teachers, namely: *Teachers in Asia Pacific: Status and Rights* (2015)<sup>1</sup> and *Teachers in the Asia-Pacific: Career Progression and Professional Development* (2016)<sup>2</sup>, this brief provides a general picture of the current

situation of teachers in some Asia-Pacific countries, and highlights the importance of advancing teachers' status and providing multiple career progression pathways to motivate them to remain in the profession.

### Teacher shortages at a glance

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2015), the SDG for education cannot advance without sufficient teachers. UIS projected that the world would need to recruit 25.8 million primary teachers to achieve universal primary education by 2030 (see table 1). This includes the creation of about 3.2 million new teaching positions and the replacement of 22.6 million teachers expected to leave the profession. Forty-two per cent, or close to 11 million, of the total 25.8 million teachers globally will come from the Asia-Pacific region. Most countries face a teacher shortage of varying degrees. Out of the 96 countries facing the biggest challenges in achieving universal primary education (UPE), 33 countries will still not have enough teachers to achieve UPE until 2030 if the current trend of the teaching force continues. Furthermore, in 32 of the 94 countries with data, more than 25 per cent of primary teachers were reportedly not trained<sup>3</sup> according to national standards in 2013.

### Why value teachers and improve their status?

The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, adopted in 2015, clearly identifies teachers as the key to achieving all of the Education 2030 agenda. It also highlights the necessary conditions for teachers to help attain an inclusive and quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.



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“Teacher policies and regulations should be in place to ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited and remunerated, well trained, professionally qualified, motivated, equitably and efficiently deployed across the whole education system, and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems.”

Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2015)

The above statement on effective teacher policies is ambitious and challenging, but the goal of achieving the Education 2030 vision will remain just a goal unless urgent action is taken to substantially address the many issues pertaining to the teaching force especially in terms of quality. Looking back at the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, adopted half a century ago, the set of standards for a wide range of issues that relate to teachers remain highly relevant today, such as, initial and continuing training, recruitment, advancement and promotion, supervision and assessment, responsibilities and rights, and participation in educational decision-making. These are the same issues that were looked at by UNESCO Bangkok's recent studies on teachers.

Below are some of the general findings:<sup>4</sup>

### 1. Pre-service education

Countries have made steady progress in the development of their pre-service programmes. However, they also share concerns about the effectiveness, relevance and flexibility of many of the pre-service programmes and the quality of teacher trainers, particularly how well they prepare student teachers for real classroom situations.

### 2. Professional development (PD)

Sending teachers for short courses is a fairly standard practice following changes in the curriculum. However, other PD opportunities provided differ considerably among countries and they have concerns regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the PD courses. In some cases, compulsory PD is provided regularly, but the programmes are often centrally planned and prescribed, which do not necessarily cater to the teachers' interest and preference for developing relevant skills.

### 3. Assessment of teacher performance

Each country has some form of system in place to assess

teacher performance but the frequency, focus, purpose and process of administration of these systems differ. Most countries face issues regarding how best to assess teachers' performance. Of particular concern is that the assessment need not only be fair but must also be perceived as being fair.

### 4. Teachers' pay and working condition

Overall, countries face challenges in trying to ensure more reasonable workloads for their teachers amidst considerations of the necessary administrative and other non-teaching duties. Although teachers' pay has increased in all the countries that participated in the studies, in some cases dramatically over the past decade, some of the country case studies reported that teachers' salaries remain low in comparison with those of other professions of similar qualifications. While it appears that there is a need to increase teachers' salaries, there is no consensus concerning what level that salary should be.

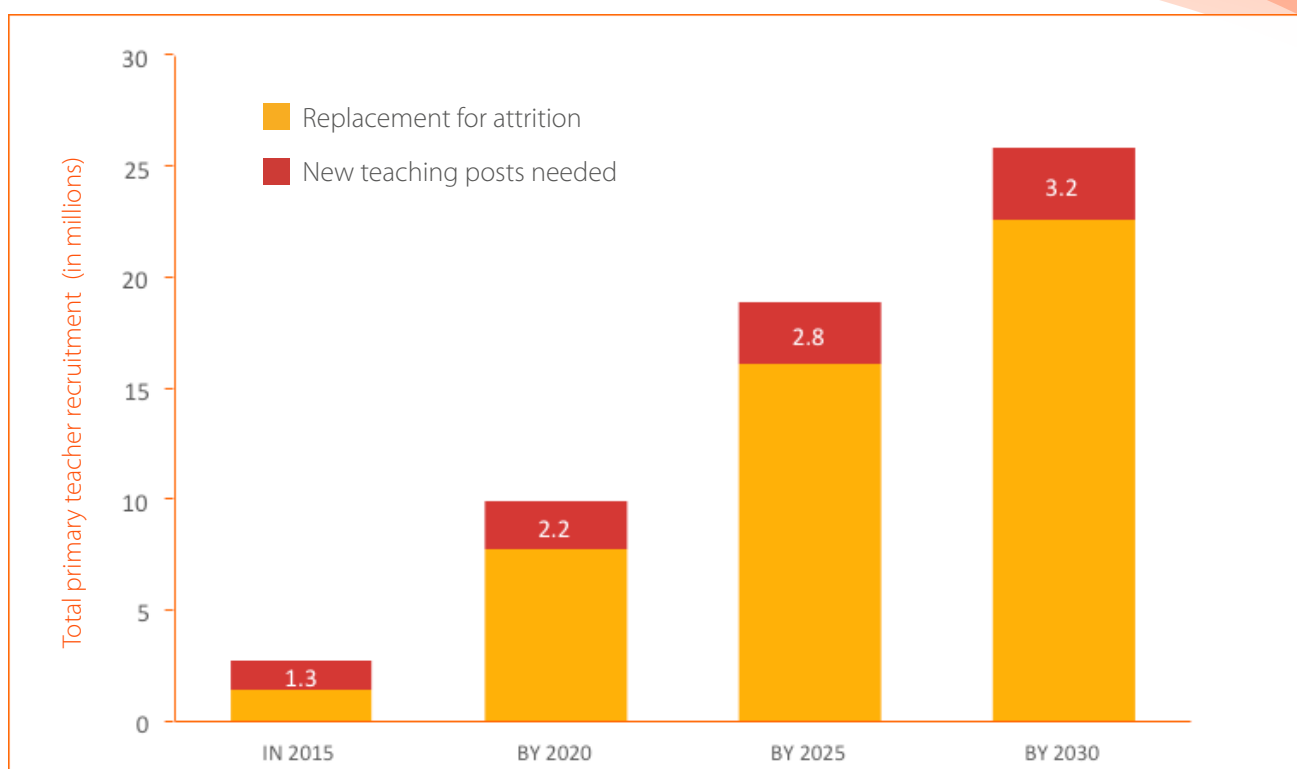
### 5. Involving teachers in decision-making processes

Upholding the rights of teachers to participate in policy-making through their representative organizations, whether in the form of unions or teachers' professional associations, is far from standard. While most countries recognize the importance of giving space to teachers and their representatives, the form and degree of autonomy differ considerably among countries.

### 6. Career pathways

Findings suggest that there is a lack of alternative professional pathways for teachers' career progression. Promotion opportunities tend to be hierarchical and linear, often leading to effective teachers being moved from the classroom to become a vice-principal or to take on administrative roles. The lack of career opportunities affects teacher morale and impact on their retention in some of the countries.

**Table 1: Total Number of Teachers (in millions) needed to Achieve Universal Primary Education, 2015-2030**



Source: UNESCO, 2015

## 7. Career guidance

Some of the countries provide career progression guidance with the support of their supervisors but its effectiveness is questionable. In other countries, however, guidance concerning a teacher's career is often sporadic or non-existent.

## 8. Promotion

Promotion opportunities are made available to teachers, and in most cases the process is perceived to be transparent. However, in some countries, they are a little more than grade increments in tandem with the length of service in education or are limited by a fixed number of positions within a school or a job grade.

## 9. School leadership

Countries have clearly defined roles for principals and other senior administrative staff. In most cases, the principals' tasks include managerial and administrative duties, teacher evaluation and staff appraisals. Overall, when school leaders play an active role in supporting and encouraging staff to develop their skills and abilities, this has a motivational effect that encourages teachers to perform well.

## 10. Gender

In many countries, schools are predominantly staffed by

female, particularly at the primary level. Most countries have more male than female in leadership positions, or equal in numbers.

## Notes

1 Participated in by Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan.

2 Participated in by Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan, Fiji and the Philippines.

3 Training standards and qualifications vary across countries.

4 The results herein are based on limited sample size from country case studies, therefore, it cannot claim to reflect regional trends or be fully representative of the population of the countries or of the entire region.

## References

1 UNESCO and ILO. 2008. The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966) and The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997). <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/imag-es/0016/001604/160495e.pdf> (Accessed 23 August 2016)

2 UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2015. Sustainable Development Goal for Education Cannot Advance Without More Teachers. UIS Fact Sheet, No. 33. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/fs33-2015-teachers.pdf> (Accessed 23 August 2016)

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## What can stakeholders and policy makers do to address the challenges?

The following are suggestions that countries can adapt to suit their particular situations, in advancing the status of the teaching profession and retaining the best educators in the classrooms.

Ensure the **pre-service curriculum is relevant**, such that it prepares teaching candidates for the type of schools they will teach in. Courses should retain academic rigor but also incorporate ample opportunities for candidates to put what they learn into pedagogical and classroom practices.

Carry out **teacher evaluation in a deliberate and fair way** that also diagnoses teachers' PD needs. The results of evaluation should be shared with teachers as a form of formative feedback and should be linked to PD programmes and career development.

Provide **salaries that are commensurate to what the job scope requires** and are comparable with other professions that require similar qualifications. Provide incentives to teachers by ensuring that good teachers are rewarded for their effective practice, and according to their locally relevant contribution and impact on students' quality learning.

Provide teachers with a **channel, such as national professional association**, that is able to raise educational concerns and contribute to the policy making process.

Develop **policies that encourage women to take management positions** in schools and remove obstacles to women's participation in senior management.

Establish **viable, multiple career paths** that enable excellent teachers to remain in touch with classroom practices, yet also allow them to assume leadership roles directly related to their areas of expertise. They should be provided with career opportunities that promote diversification of roles to reflect the increasing complexity of education in the 21st century.

**Accredit professional development providers and courses**, and align the course content to specific roles and responsibilities in teaching, while supporting teachers to develop annual PD plans that reflect their changing needs.

Enforce **clear and transparent guidelines** concerning qualification accreditation, selection and promotion criteria which are linked to specific roles and responsibilities.

Ensure **fair and open systems of teacher recruitment and deployment**, which better matches teacher skills and aptitudes to school needs. Any endeavour to improve the systems and processes that support teachers' working conditions should benefit all teachers regardless of their teaching status.

Provide **regular career guidance** to teachers and principals, and ensure that those tasked with career guidance are also accorded the appropriate training and development support they need.

\*Taken from policy recommendations of two UNESCO Bangkok regional studies on teachers:

Download the publication *Teachers in Asia Pacific: Status and Rights* [here](#) »

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