

Addressing the global teacher shortage crisis

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)



Empowering Future Generations: Cultivating Global
Literacy and Enlightenment



Forum: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

Issue: Addressing the global teacher shortage crisis

Student Officer: George Kritharoulas

Position: President

Introduction

The global shortage of teachers is a critical issue impacting education systems around the world. It refers to the gap between the growing demand for educators and the limited supply of teachers worldwide, especially in low-income areas and LEDCs. This shortage is not only about the availability of education — it also affects the quality of education, putting future generations at risk.

Definition of Key Terms

LEDCs: **Less economically developed countries**

Some countries have less developed economies than others. These are sometimes referred to as less economically developed countries (LEDCs). Countries with better economies are called more economically developed countries (MEDCs). Most of the world's LEDCs are in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific region.

SGD: **Sustainable Development Goals**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. This Agenda also includes goals regarding quality education.

MDGs: **Millennium Development Goals**

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are 8 goals that UN Member States agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015.

SSM: **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**

An overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12 has been prepared with the broader goal of improving school effectiveness measured in terms of equal opportunities for schooling and equitable learning outcomes.

PISA: **Programme for International Student Assessment**

Created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), PISA tests the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading and science. Eighty-one countries and economies took part in the 2022 assessment, which focused on mathematics, and the data were released by the OECD on 5 December 2023.



General Overview

The cause

The global teacher shortage crisis is caused by several factors. Population growth and increasing school enrollment, particularly in developing regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, have created an upsurge in demand for teachers that cannot be met in most cases.

Poor recruitment and retention exacerbate the issue, as low salaries, limited career progression, and challenging working conditions make teaching an unattractive profession. Urban-rural disparities further widen the gap, with rural and marginalized communities suffering from severe teacher deficits. Additionally, many teachers lack adequate training and resources, compromising education quality. Crises such as conflicts, displacement, and natural disasters intensify the problem by disrupting education systems and displacing trained educators. These factors collectively contribute to a global shortage that hampers access to quality education for millions of children.



Say teacher/licensed educator shortage is significantly or somewhat worse than previous school years.



Say educator support staff shortage is significantly or somewhat worse than previous school years.



Say sub shortage is significantly or somewhat worse than previous school years.

The impact

The global teacher shortage crisis has profound impacts on education and beyond. It lowers the quality of education, with overcrowded classrooms and untrained teachers leading to poor learning outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The crisis deepens inequities, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as girls, children with disabilities, and those in rural or conflict-affected areas. Economically, it limits workforce productivity and innovation, hindering long-term growth and development. On a broader scale, the shortage undermines progress toward global goals like poverty reduction, gender equality, and sustainable development, perpetuating cycles of inequality and stalling social progress.

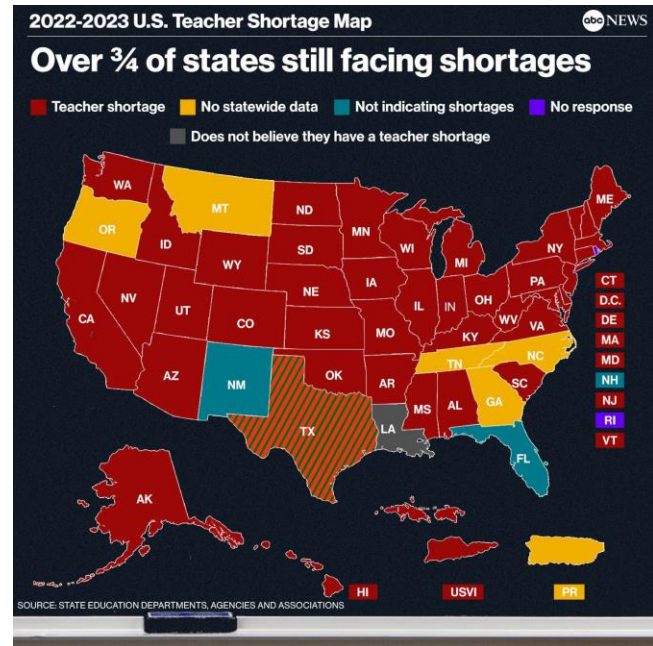
Major Parties Involved

Sub-Saharan Africa

The teacher shortage is impacting sub-Saharan Africa the most, where an estimated 15 million new teachers are needed by 2030. Of the countries in the region, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Niger will need the highest increase in the number of primary teachers in the coming years (6% or more growth annually). In secondary education, even higher annual growth in teacher numbers is needed: a handful of countries need more than 10% annual growth, including Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Mozambique, Niger and the United Republic of Tanzania.

The United States of America

The United States is lacking teaching staff, mostly in STEM subjects as well as special education. Efforts have been made to improve the situation such as federal and state programs that focus on loan forgiveness and alternative certification pathways to attract teachers.



Singapore and Finland

These countries have the highest PISA scores worldwide and are often seen as models for their education systems and teacher recruitment/ training systems alike. They provide their expertise and partnership to support education development in other nations.

India

Despite significant improvements in recent years such as *Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan*, that aims to recruit teachers and improve professional development. Many schools, colleges, and universities still lack adequate infrastructure, qualified teachers, and an updated curriculum. Many schools in rural areas lack basic facilities such as electricity, water supply, and toilets, which can harm the quality of education.

UNESCO

UNESCO plays a central role in addressing the global teacher shortage as part of its mission to promote quality education for all under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). UNESCO has significantly influenced global education systems by improving teacher training, promoting equity, and integrating technology. However, challenges like funding gaps and regional disparities persist, requiring increased investment and collaboration to achieve SDG 4.

UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a leading international organization focused on promoting the rights and well-being of children worldwide, including ensuring access to quality education. Its involvement in addressing the global teacher shortage stems from its mission to reduce barriers to education, especially for the most vulnerable children. It supported millions of teachers with training, resources, and tools worldwide, played a critical role in ensuring education continuity during emergencies, such as COVID-19 and conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and helped improve teaching quality through the promotion of innovative technologies and inclusive teaching practices.



Global education coalition

A multi-sector Coalition to protect the right to education during unprecedented disruption from response to recovery. Spearheaded by UNESCO it brings together governments, NGOs, and private sectors to address urgent educational challenges.

Save the children

The Save the Children Fund,[2] commonly known as Save the Children, is an international non-governmental organization. It was founded in the UK in 1919, the goal being to improve the lives of children worldwide. The organization raises money to improve children's lives by creating better educational opportunities, better health care, and improved economic opportunities. It achieves this through several methods, including health, education, and protection programs.

Teach for all

Teach For All is a global network of 61 independent, locally led and funded partner organizations whose stated shared mission is to "expand educational opportunity around the world by increasing and accelerating the impact of social enterprises that are cultivating the leadership necessary for change."

Timeline of Events

1940s–1970s: Post-War Educational Expansion

- Many countries, especially in Europe and the Americas, expanded public education systems post-World War II, creating a surge in teacher demand. With rapid urbanization and population growth in developing countries began straining education systems. Governments invested in teacher training colleges, but rural areas faced persistent shortages.

1980s–1990s: Universal Education Push

- **UNESCO Campaigns:** Global focus on achieving universal primary education highlighted teacher shortages as a barrier.
- **Structural Adjustments:** Economic crises and austerity measures in developing countries led to cuts in education budgets, worsening shortages.
- **Notable Impact:** Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia saw stark disparities in teacher availability.

2000: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- **Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education by 2015.
- **Outcome:** Increased enrollment worldwide, but the teacher supply lagged significantly.
- **Shortage Data:** UNESCO estimated that by 2010, over 1.7 million additional teachers were needed annually to meet MDG targets.



2010s: Escalation of the Crisis

- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**
 - **SDG 4 (2015):** Commitment to inclusive, equitable quality education by 2030. UNESCO reported a need for 69 million new teachers to achieve SDG 4.
- **Emerging Issues:**
 - Rural-urban teacher imbalances persisted.
 - Teacher attrition rates rose globally due to poor working conditions.
 - Conflict and displacement in regions like the Middle East created additional barriers to teacher deployment.

2020s: Exacerbation by the COVID-19 Pandemic

- **Immediate Impact:**
 - School closures disrupted teacher training and professional development.
 - Many teachers left the profession due to increased workload and health concerns.
- **Digital Divide:** The shift to online education revealed gaps in teacher digital skills, especially in low-resource settings.
- **Global Forecast:** By 2022, UNESCO reiterated the urgent need for investment to meet a 24.4 million teacher shortfall in primary and secondary education.

Present (2024): Increasing Awareness and Renewed Calls for Action

- **Current Status:**
 - Some countries have adopted innovative recruitment methods (e.g., fast-tracking teacher training or offering incentives for rural placements).
 - Global funding initiatives, like the Global Partnership for Education, aim to address the shortage.
- **Ongoing Issues:**
 - Persistent regional disparities, with Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia requiring the most urgent interventions.
 - Calls for better integration of technology to support under-resourced schools and enhance teaching efficiency.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Increasing Teacher Training and Certification

Many countries have worked to expand teacher training programs to improve the quality of the teaching workforce. However, these efforts often fall short in terms of capacity, especially in rural and underserved areas.

Teacher Education Partnerships: International organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF have partnered with governments to enhance teacher training curricula, focusing on practical, context-specific skills.



Financial Incentives and Salary Increases

Some countries have attempted to attract and retain teachers by offering higher salaries, housing allowances, or bonuses, particularly in rural or underserved regions.

However, these efforts are often insufficient, as salaries remain low compared to other professions, and in some regions, the cost of living is still too high for teachers to live comfortably on their income.

Use of Technology in Education

Online learning platforms, digital tools, and virtual classrooms have been promoted as a way to reduce the pressure on physical classrooms and supplement teacher shortages. In some cases, these tools help provide additional resources and training for teachers, but they cannot replace the need for qualified human teachers, especially in remote areas with limited internet access.

Possible solutions

Addressing teacher shortages requires a holistic approach. Beyond recruitment, factors such as teacher motivation, well-being, retention, training, working conditions, and social status need attention. Creating attractive career pathways with equitable access to professional development, autonomy, and purpose is crucial in sustaining teachers' motivation.

Recognizing the multi-faceted nature of this issue and proposing comprehensive strategies is crucial to finding lasting solutions. Enhancing wages, working conditions, and investing in education significantly impact a teacher's well-being and motivation. Involving teachers in decision-making and fostering a collaborative school culture can attract and retain quality educators. Adequate investment in novice teachers can reduce attrition and address shortages sustainably. Exploring the nuanced details of these measures and their potential impact on the teaching landscape is vital to implement effective reforms.

- **Enabling teaching environments:** Teachers require supportive environments to do their job effectively. This is underpinned by adequate resources, trust, respect and societal recognition.
- **Safeguarding rights and freedoms:** We need to uphold teachers' rights in line with international standards, ensuring that freedom of expression, freedom of association and academic freedom are guaranteed. A protected teacher is an empowered teacher. Safeguarding their rights is non-negotiable.
- **Flexible learning paths:** We should encourage cooperative learning pathways, moving away from rigid, narrow assessment metrics. A one-size-fits-all approach doesn't cut it—education should cater to diverse needs.
- **Tailored policies:** Countries should follow comprehensive, holistic, national education policies crafted in consultation with teachers and their unions. A road map for hiring, training and supporting teachers is crucial.



- Equity, diversity and inclusion: We need to foster a diverse teaching workforce, providing pathways, protection and training for marginalized and vulnerable groups.
- Support in crisis zones: We must ensure tangible support for teachers in crisis-affected regions with clear policies, professional development opportunities and hazard pay provisions.

Bibliography

UN, Addressing the Teacher Shortage—a Global Imperative, 4 October 2023, United Nations
<https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/addressing-teacher-shortage—global-imperative>

Vargas, C., Addressing the global teacher shortage: A path to quality education for all, 9 November 2023, GPE
<https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/addressing-global-teacher-shortage-path-quality-education-all>

UN, Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession, 26 February 2024, UNESCO
<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-addressing-teacher-shortages-and-transforming-profession>

UN, THE SDGS IN ACTION., UNDP
<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>

UN, Global report on teachers: What you need to know, 22 February 2024, UNESCO
<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-what-you-need-know>

UN, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 19 February 2018, WHO
[https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/millennium-development-goals-\(mdgs\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/millennium-development-goals-(mdgs))

About Samagra Shiksha, Samagra Shiksha Department of School Education & Literacy Ministry of Education Government of India
<https://samagra.education.gov.in/about.html>

UN, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), OECD
<https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/pisa.html>

UN, Global Education Coalition, UNESCO
<https://globaleducationcoalition.unesco.org/>

Teach For All
<https://teachforall.org/>