

Virtual International Summit  
on the Teaching Profession  
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# Education & Covid-19

A Briefing by  
Education International

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International Summit on the Teaching Profession



Education International  
Internationale de l'Éducation  
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# Welcome and Introduction

by David Edwards,  
General Secretary of Education International

**2020**

In the vast majority of countries Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on community life. Mortality has spiralled, many more people are now experiencing debilitating long-term health conditions, economies are in danger and the very nature of how people live their day to day lives has been changed fundamentally.

Countries are experiencing different stages of the pandemic. Some are still entering an upward curve of infection, some have managed to secure a decline, while others continue to experience a high rate of infection. Countries' strategies for containing Covid-19 have principally focused on social distancing and isolation-or 'lockdown' as these strategies have come to be called. Lockdown has affected education systems profoundly. The majority of countries across the world have had to close their schools for many months.

Yet people across the world understand, and governments need to remember, that education represents humanity's guarantee for a better future. Schools provide students with a love of learning and their optimism for the future. They are at the heart of their communities.

It is inconceivable, therefore, that we could allow the pandemic to inject pessimism into the heart of education. Society needs quality education for all if it is to survive and recover. All our efforts in Education International have been focussed on creating the conditions for a safe return for students, teachers and support staff to their schools.

We have sent our five criteria for return, or 'pillars', to our member organisations to support them in their negotiations about how to achieve a safe reopening of schools. They are set out in the annex below and have been welcomed by other global organisations including the OECD and UNESCO. The results of our recent survey of member organisations provide a picture

of a profession determined to protect education in a time of lockdown. (<https://go.ei-ie.org/EICovidSurveyEN>)

While the pillars set out the criteria which should be adopted before schools re-open they also provide something more. We believe that they are an initial road map for approaching education policy making post Covid. Learning the lessons of the pandemic and creating a road map for the future of education is exactly the focus of our Virtual Summit. It could not have come at a better time.

The ISTPs have made a vital and unique contribution to the creation of teacher policy over the last ten years. We are looking forward to returning to the postponed ISTP in Valencia. We are very grateful to the Spanish Government and our Spanish member organisations for hosting next year's Summit despite the enormous pressures they have been experiencing. I would also like to thank the OECD for all the work it has carried out in making sure that this Virtual Summit takes place.

Our briefing seeks to highlight some of the opportunities, as well as the challenges, our education systems now face and offers for discussion proposals on how we keep education front and centre of our public services. I look forward to this Summit making a major contribution to a better future. We need to reaffirm and reset education for an optimistic future: one where the transformative power of education is enhanced.

David Edwards  
General Secretary,  
Education International

# Taking Education Forward

The purpose of this Briefing is to provide ideas and contribute to the discussion about how education jurisdictions can take education forward after the pandemic. EI considers the areas in this briefing to be of critical importance but obviously there are many more that need addressing. As ever, teachers and support staff, their organisations and EI recognise that the recovery and promotion of education will be an evolving discussion over time.

## **Equity- At the heart of successful education.**

While school closures triggered by the pandemic were necessary, they will have had the effect of widening the achievement gap between students from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. In a number of countries, including OECD countries, a significant minority of families still have no access to the internet and many students will have had no quiet areas to study at home. Even where there is sufficient IT equipment for children, distance learning has necessarily relied on parents and guardians encouraging their children to take part in virtual activities with varying degrees of success and sustainability.

In many countries there are now large groups of newly unemployed people and many who are ill or who have lost family members to Covid-19. The additional costs to families of lockdown are likely to have been enormous. In many countries the evidence has yet to be quantified on the extent of students' learning loss and psychological preparedness to return to school. The closure of a great deal of early childhood education provision has meant that young children have not had the early boost to their learning and social skills that ECE provides prior to entering school.

Key issues around the impact of school closure on achievement in the context of students' gender and their social and economic background will need to be investigated

through equity audits. Such audits would need into account the relationship of school closure to the achievement of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and whether their parents are refugees, asylum seekers or immigrants.

### *Policy implications.*

- *The circumstances in which students are returning to school are unprecedented. In many countries there will be little quantifiable evidence yet on the amount of learning loss students have experienced. Equity audits should be carried out at a national level in order to analyse the impact of school closures on students and provide evidence for comprehensive action plans.*
- *Where equity audits are adopted they should focus on institutional self-evaluation and be agreed with education unions and other stakeholders. They could be carried out by bodies whose membership include education unions and have the power to recommend to governments strategies for providing additional support to schools including specific measures to support vulnerable groups.*
- *A number of countries have system wide evaluation systems which operate at the student, teacher, principal, institutional and system level. There is a very strong case for institutional evaluation systems, which often include the outcomes of student evaluations, to be suspended while any audit of learning loss takes place. Decisions on how external public examinations can proceed should be taken in partnership with the teaching profession and their organisations.*

## **Restoring and Resetting Education**

At the heart of successful education systems are effective teacher policies. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal for Education and OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) confirm that qualified teachers are fundamental to the success of education. While technology in schools has been a feature of classroom teaching for a relatively long time, until the pandemic, distance learning has generally been a minor feature of

teachers' pedagogy. Nevertheless over seventy percent of teacher unions in Education International's recent survey report that, through distance learning, teachers have done their best in difficult circumstances to keep their students' learning going despite less than a third reporting that teachers had been provided with sufficient technological support and professional development.

Nevertheless, distance learning can only be emergency teaching. Teachers themselves and evidence from the OECD emphasise that schools provide the social aspect of learning and are essential to students' social development. Indeed, schools are vital centres of their local communities.

During the crisis, distance learning will have led to innovations but they will have not replicated schools' unique ability to develop the social and collaborative aspects of learning. There may be some in the world of policy and the private sector, particularly those who wish to reduce costs, who will argue that digital innovations and distance learning can provide a substitute for schools. Nothing could be further from the truth. Such moves would not only undermine student learning but the social fabric of society.

Indeed, the effect on students of distance learning, and its impact on students, who may have had little or no access to it, needs to be quantified. Where schools have been forced to close, it is becoming increasingly clear that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will have suffered the greatest learning loss.

The evidence globally from EI's survey is that the closure of schools has undermined the employment conditions of teachers and support staff on precarious contracts. These staff include those on fixed term and daily contracts in schools and early childhood education settings in the public sector and those teaching in private education. EI's member organisations have worked hard to protect them. Far from being expendable, they are essential to education now and in the future.

Teacher well-being is vital to high quality education. TALIS 2018 found that the majority of teachers suffered stress, with eighteen per cent experiencing severe stress, despite previous OECD studies finding a correlation between teachers' self-confidence and student achievement. During

lockdown, many teachers may have lacked IT equipment and physical space for distance teaching. Where they have families, teachers have had to educate their own children as well. During lockdown teacher stress will have not gone away but its sources will have changed. So far OECD countries have refused to fund further OECD research on the links between teacher well-being, stress, student achievement. The impact of the pandemic and the new conditions it has created for teachers should give countries cause to reflect on and re-evaluate this decision.

The pandemic has highlighted the fact that in many countries the relationship between the teaching profession and their unions and governments needs resetting. Just as teachers and support staff have sought to provide emergency distance education during lockdown, their unions are now integral to the success of any phased reopening of schools. From EI's evidence it is in countries where unions and governments have agreed the conditions for phased reopening that there is the greatest chance of successful return.

### *Policy implications*

- *The evidence from previous International Summits on the Teaching Profession, including from the OECD, is that where unions and governments are engaged as social partners in the initiation and implementation and evaluation of education policies, those policies will be accepted and embedded. The health crisis has emphasised how important this lesson is.*
- *Governments and unions could establish joint partnerships or bodies to agree post pandemic strategies for education which would take into account the impact of school closure on student learning and the actions necessary to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds including those whose parents have suffered emotionally and economically from the crisis.*
- *Joint action would need, to ensure that staff on insecure contracts, whose employment had been reduced or terminated during school closure, return to employment.*
- *Strategies on teacher policies, could be included in the remit of joint bodies or partnerships. Their remit could*



*cover both the curriculum and its assessment, support for teachers in relation to student well-being and behaviour, teacher learning and development in the wider sense, and evaluations of the effectiveness of distance learning during the crisis.*

- *Developing policy on teacher well-being should be a key part of any government teacher policy. Policy and research on teacher well-being can only be developed with the teaching profession and its organisations, and should be a key part of any social partnership approach. OECD countries should now revive the OECD's proposed special project on teacher well-being and student achievement.*

## **Covid-19, Economies and Funding Education.**

Many countries have borrowed huge sums of money in order to sustain workers who have been made unemployed by businesses which were and are closed by lockdown. Once countries open up their economies there will be those in government and political parties who will think that the measures used during the 2008 financial crash, which included major cuts to public services including education, can simply be amplified to start tackling increased government debt. EI believes that would be a major mistake and fundamentally wrong.

Austerity has been proved to have failed. It destroys the capacity of public services to equip populations for the future. In Education, austerity simply undermines the capacity of society to renew itself positively and inclusively and to enable people to lead change rather than be victims of it. It may well be that what is needed is the equivalent of a global plan, of the magnitude of the Bretton Woods settlement agreed after the second world war, to agree a long-term stabilisation of and improvement in public finances.

Whether or not such an approach is adopted, a poisonous mixture of austerity and introverted nationalist populism will make a bad situation immeasurably worse. Education is the best investment for the future. A common approach across the world to sustaining and increasing educational investment, underpinned by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, is the only optimistic strategy available to

countries. The future of education is inextricably linked to the budgetary commitments made by governments in the next two to three years. This Virtual Summit must start exploring strategies to protect and enhance education funding.

### *Policy Implications.*

- *In the short term, as students return to school, a number of approaches will need to be adopted. Enhancing the achievement of students who have suffered serious disadvantage compared to their peers, during school closure, may require targeted grants for schools. Disadvantaged areas, including those in rural areas may also need additional area funding.*
- *Schools will need stable funding to ensure that their staff are not subject to budgetary shocks and cuts. At a system level, governments will need to agree with the teaching profession and their unions policies which secure teacher supply, retention and development. This means that governments should give a high priority to agreeing acceptable pay/compensation and conditions of service packages with teaching and support staff unions.*
- *For the long-term, governments must now commit themselves, with teaching and support staff unions, to give the highest priority to funding education as a public service for all students, on the basis of equity and need, over the long term. As a first step, governments attending the Virtual Summit could make such a commitment and commit themselves also to gathering support for this position within their civil societies.*
- *At a global level, it is vital that global organisations work together to encourage governments to protect and enhance education funding.*

## Conclusion

This Summit is the first time Ministers and Education Unions within the OECD have met to consider the impact of Covid-19 on education provision. Countries' enthusiasm for the Virtual Summit is a heartening sign that many countries are committed to education as a public service and are committed also to engaging in dialogue with education unions about how to protect and enhance it. Education International believes that this Summit could be the start of an ongoing dialogue and that next year's ISTP hosted by the Spanish Government is going to be vital in maintaining the momentum in strengthening education's recovery from the pandemic.

# Annex 1: EI Guidance to Reopening Schools and Education Institutions

With schools and education institutions closed in a majority of countries, there are critical issues for governments to take into consideration, as countries gradually begin to re-open early childhood institutions, schools and higher education institutions. It is imperative that governments communicate transparently and continuously about the plans for reopening onsite education and the extent to which they are informed by the advice of health experts. Continuous social and policy dialogue with educators and their unions is the cornerstone of any successful education strategy.

## 1. Engage in Social and Policy Dialogue

Public authorities engage in continuous social and policy dialogue with educators and their representative unions and organisations to assess needs and agree on health and safety measures for students and staff as well as the framework and resources for transitioning back to onsite teaching and learning. Consideration is given to the additional workload arising from the parallel requirement of face-to-face and online teaching during the gradual re-opening of schools. The labour rights of teachers and education support personnel are respected and decent working conditions are maintained.

## 2. Ensure the Health and Safety of Education Communities

There is agreement and clarity on the hygiene measures necessary for keeping children, students and staff safe and healthy as well as preventative measures for containing the spread of the virus. All schools and education institutions are equipped to ensure and sustain enhanced hygiene and cleaning practices and all staff is informed and trained to follow new guidelines. Education workers have guaranteed access to Personal Protective Equipment where necessary, and additional funds and staffing are ensured by public

authorities to ensure health and safety requirements. In addition, the situation of at-risk and vulnerable students, staff and their families is taken into consideration.

### **3. Make Equity a Top Priority**

Equity is front and centre of all transition plans, recognising that the impact of the pandemic is not equal and that already vulnerable students and education workers have been and may continue to be the most affected. A support structure is put in place for all vulnerable students and staff, for those who are enduring increased hardship and for students who have not been able to participate in online or home-based learning. A strategy is developed for addressing possible increases in drop-out rates, paying particular attention to girls and women, and those at risk of child labour.

### **4. Support Physical and Emotional Wellbeing and Recovery**

Systems are in place to support the wellbeing and mental health of children, students and education staff, including through dedicated psychosocial support and counselling. In addition to the pandemic causing ongoing stress and anxiety, many children, students and education staff will also find it difficult to return to school and adapt to new routines as well as restrictions to social interaction. Dedicated support is available to those who may have suffered bereavement, abuse, violence, or other emotional trauma.

### **5. Trust the professionalism of educators**

Education authorities engage with educators and their unions to determine and assess the impact of the school closures on teaching, learning and student wellbeing. Any framework for transitioning back to onsite education is built on trust in the professionalism and pedagogical practice of the education workforce. Clarity on any assessment requirements is reached in dialogue with educators and their unions to ensure fair and equal treatment of all students and the continued professional autonomy of educators.

These guidance points were issued by Education International on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 with a reminder of six WHO prerequisite conditions as following:

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has highlighted six conditions that should be met before governments start to lift current restrictions on social and physical movement related to the spread of COVID-19:

1. Disease transmission is under control.
2. Health systems are able to “detect, test, isolate and treat every case and trace every contact”.
3. Hot spot risks are minimized in vulnerable places, such as nursing homes.
4. Schools, workplaces and other essential places have established preventive measures.
5. The risk of importing new cases “can be managed”.
6. Communities are fully educated, engaged, and empowered to live under a new normal.

## Annex 2: Other EI resources related to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Education unions are mobilising globally to support their members and their students during this critical time. Education International has been building solidarity with its members, facilitating experience and knowledge sharing, mapping needs and providing targeted support. In addition, Education International continues to organise global and regional responses to the crisis, defending rights, offering guidance and support towards a more just, safe, equitable and healthy post-pandemic world.

- [EI Information Hub](#)
- [EI Message to Ministers of Education](#)
- [EI Guiding Principles on the Covid-19 pandemic](#)
- [EI Executive Board Resolution](#)
- [Covid-19 and Education: How Education Unions Are Responding | Survey Report](#)
- [EI Global Guidance on Re-opening Schools and Education Institutions](#)
- [EI African Region Statement](#)
- [EI Asia-Pacific Region Statement](#)
- [European Trade Union Committee for Education Statement](#)
- [EI Latin American Region Statement](#)

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Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing thirty million education employees in about four hundred organisations in one hundred and seventy countries and territories, across the globe. Education International unites teachers and education employees.



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