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REGIONAL REPORT 2018-2022

9TH EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE







Regional Report, 2018–2022

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Regional Conference
18–20 October 2022

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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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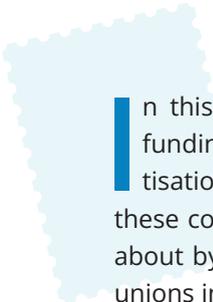
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Introduction



In this reporting period marked by the continuing chronic underfunding of education and expanding commercialisation and privatisation in/of education and public services, and by the impact of these conditions worsened by the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Education International (EI) and its unions in the Asia-Pacific persevered in supporting their members and in upholding the rights and wellbeing of educators and learners. Amid an uncertain time of health and safety restrictions, almost universal school closures, and major shifts in how societies work, educators and their unions adapted and innovated to continue to promote and protect inclusive quality public education for all, advance the status and rights of teachers and education personnel, defend their trade union rights and professional freedoms, and build the collective strength and capacity to combat the persistent neoliberal and anti-union threats to public education.

This 2018–2022 regional report highlights the activities in such different areas of work that the Education International Asia-Pacific (EIAP) Regional Office led, facilitated, and implemented in collaboration with member organisations and like-minded institutions and advocates. Covering the same period that followed the 8th EIAP Regional Confer-

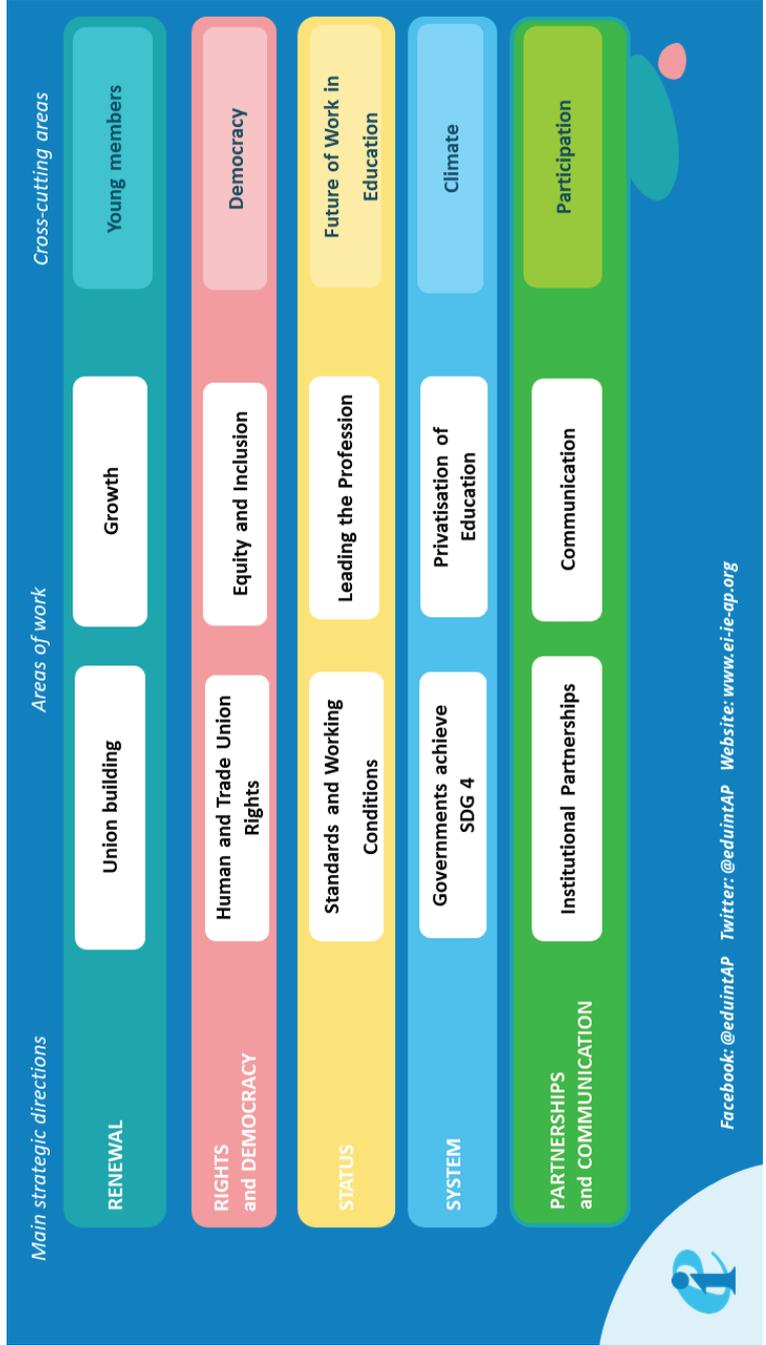
ence held in Kathmandu, Nepal, in October 2017, individual organisational reports submitted by EIAP affiliates are also included in this document (*Annex ## to ##*).

These activities endeavoured to contribute to achieving EI's Principal Aims, first adopted in 2001 and reaffirmed at the 8th EI World Congress in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2019, as follows:

1. The achievement of the right to quality education for all people through publicly funded and publicly regulated systems of education
2. The improvement of the welfare and status of teachers and other education employees through the effective application of their human and trade union rights and professional freedoms
3. The elimination of all forms of discrimination in education, whether based on gender, race, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, political affiliation or opinion, social or economic status, or national or ethnic origin, and the promotion of understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity in communities
4. The promotion of democracy, sustainable development, fair trade, basic social services, and health and safety, through solidarity and cooperation among member organisations, the international trade union movement, and civil society
5. The strengthening of Education International through the participation of all affiliated organisations in the life of EI, and the promotion of unity in the education sector

Aligned with EI's strategic framework, EIAP captures these priorities in the strategic directions of **System, Status, Rights and Democracy**, and **Renewal**, with the additional direction **Partnerships and Communication** particularly for the region. This report is organised based on these directions and their corresponding areas of work and cross-cutting issues (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. EIAP Strategic Framework



Membership

As of 30 September 2022, 64 national organisations from 35 countries in the Asia-Pacific are affiliated with EI, representing 7,632,138 members. Millions more teachers and education support personnel in the region remain unorganised and need to be organised. EI thus urges its affiliates to strengthen their organising and extend affiliation to deserving organisations, especially in the pre-primary or early childhood education and higher education sectors, and among education support personnel throughout the Asia-Pacific.

As new organisations come to the fore, EI must continue growing and diversifying its membership base. More educators at all levels and in all contexts need a voice and protection, and ultimately EI's membership base determines its collective strength.

Dues

The membership dues payment by EI member organisations in the region continues to decline as many member organisations are not able to pay dues or are paying dues for a fraction of their membership. The dues remain low as the member organisations from the region are paying for only 12% of their declared membership on average (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2. Asia-Pacific Paid vs. Unpaid Membership, 2022

As of 30 September 2022, out of the 7,632,138 declared members, dues were paid only for 904,103 members (11.84%) in 2022. For earlier years, payments were for 905,454 members (11.86%) in 2021; 933,610 members (12.3%) in 2020; 990,667 members (13%) in 2019; and 1,019,611 members (13.35%) in 2018.

By sub-region, the 2022 dues payment stood at 103% for the Pacific, 38% for North Asia, 0% for West Asia, 11% for Southeast Asia, and 3% for South Asia (*Figure 3*).

The EI Secretariat has been making efforts to follow up with member organisations on timely dues collections through gentle reminders and support from the Regional Office. EIAP has been in contact with them to find solutions to the late dues payment and arrange where possible different means to collect dues. As stipulated in the EI Constitution and

Figure 2. Asia-Pacific Paid vs. Unpaid Membership, 2022

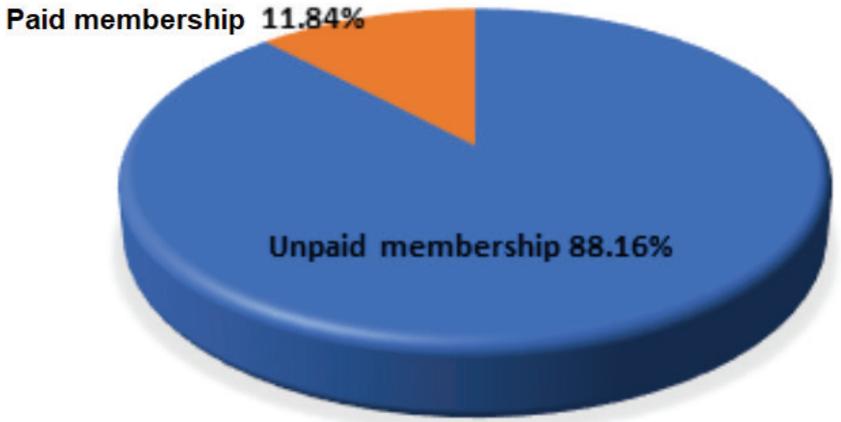


Figure 3. Paid vs. Unpaid Membership by Sub-Region, 2022 (in %)

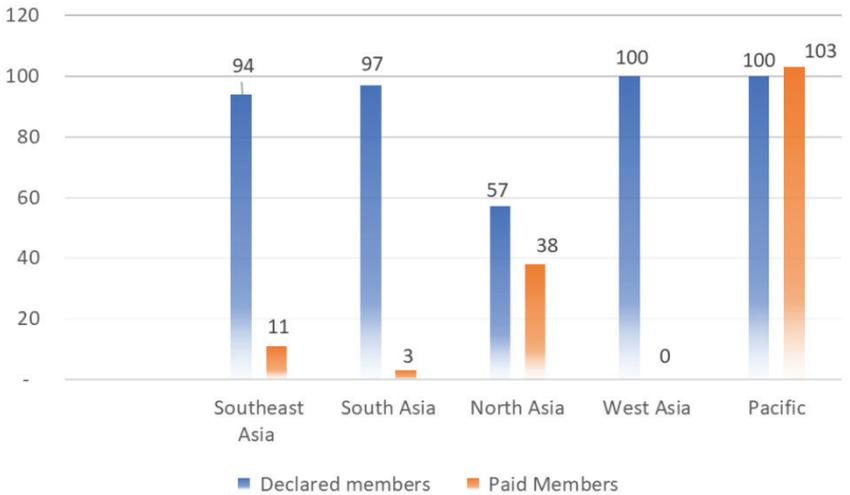
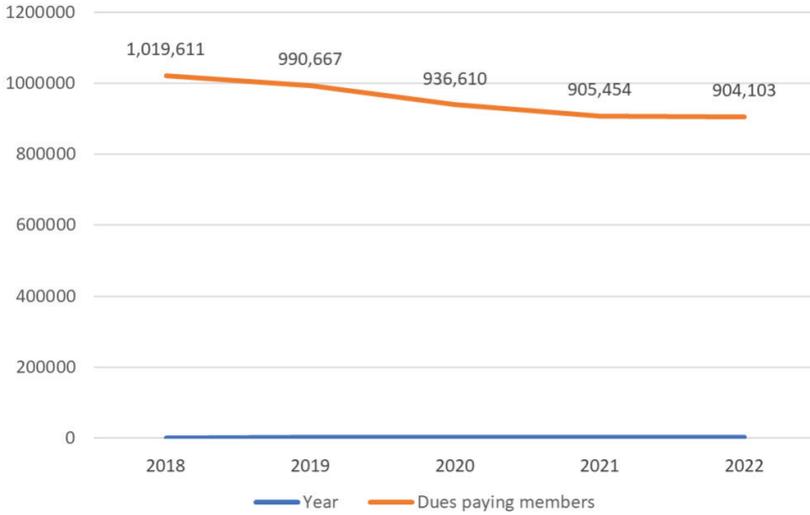


Figure 4. Dues-Paying Membership, 2018–2022



By-Laws, however, organisations that fail to pay dues for three consecutive years are suspended.

Despite the relentless efforts by the regional and head offices, the dues-paying membership has decreased by 115,508 since the Regional Conference in 2017 (*Figure 4*). This decline, in part, can be attributed to the reduction in the dues paid by member organisations, changing political landscapes and operating environments for unions, continuous attacks on them and the security of tenure of their members and their working conditions (i.e., low or no increase in salaries, precarious contracts, and the commercialisation of education), and most importantly the inability of member organisations to collect dues during the COVID-19 pandemic in the last two years.

System

As the challenges brought about by the pandemic only exposed and worsened the long existing inadequacies and inequities in education systems, education unions in the Asia-Pacific were resolute in their calls that they have made over the years to ensure the right to quality education for all: education must be adequately funded, and the privatisation and commercialisation in/of education must be halted and reversed. Through the stories and statistics of the lack of basic health and sanitation infrastructure and personnel in schools, educators lacking the devices and skills in information and communications technology, and wide disparities among learners' access to education and the technologies that mediated their distance learning-teaching, it was clear that the magnitude of the learning crisis during the pandemic would have been mitigated if educators were listened to and education were prioritised by governments.

Education systems and all sectors have been affected in varying degrees, and experts have noted the need to prepare for future pandemics and the intensifying effects of climate change. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, in May 2020, the EIAP Regional Committee issued a statement (*Annex A*) on the situation in the Asia-Pacific and recommended to EI, its member organisations, and governments 'to turn

this global crisis into an opportunity to rethink the existing education policies . . . and to envision how the future of education and the teaching profession should look like after the pandemic'. Drawing from the [EI Guidance to Reopening Schools and Education Institutions](#) and the Regional Committee statement, EIAP released later in July a "Regional Guide to the Post-Pandemic Landscape" (*Annex B*) for education unions' practical, policy, and advocacy work towards a 'holistic, comprehensive, and inclusive' recovery from the pandemic, such that the right to quality public education is protected and promoted in the aftermath of the crisis. Amid the urgent demands on educators to adapt and ensure that learning continued during the pandemic and beyond, EI unions commit to do the work they have always done for the welfare of learners and educators.

Sustainable Development Goal 4

Even prior to the pandemic, the progress towards achieving the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 4 had been severely off-track. As teachers and education support personnel assessed in EI's report titled [Off Track: Educators Assess Progress Towards SDG 4](#) (2019), not enough governments had taken the necessary steps for SDG 4, and some had taken reverse actions and implemented policies that undermined the agenda goals. Specifically in the Asia-Pacific, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (ESCAP) [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2020](#) found that the region needed to accelerate its progress in the targets to meet SDG 4, including the related target under SDG 1 (No Poverty) on government spending on the essential services of education, health, and social protection.

There had been progress in the region, but as the [5-Year Progress Review of SDG 4 - Education 2030 in Asia-Pacific](#) (2021) by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlighted, a broader and far-reaching learning crisis had been affecting learners long before the pandemic hit, evidenced by the limited proficiency in foundational skills among learners. More importantly, the *Progress Review* pointed to the impact of inequalities and the pandemic on the efforts to ensure education for all in the region:

- The Asia-Pacific region is off-track in achieving SDG 4 and its targets; where progress has been significant, such as in attracting more learners to go to school than ever before, the gains have not been equitably distributed throughout the region.
- The pandemic merely sharpened the vulnerabilities of students who were already the most disadvantaged, particularly those long left behind due to disparities in access to schooling, discriminatory institutional practices, and policies that did little to reallocate resources and opportunities to religious, ethnic, linguistic, and gender minorities, including those with disabilities, in child labour, or displaced by conflict.

In fact, according to the report, around 27 million of the region's children and adolescents remain illiterate, up to 95 per cent of them in South Asia. Given the significant digital divide, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, access to remote learning has always been inequitable. Over 30 per cent of students worldwide – or at least 463 million, most of whom came from marginalised sectors – fell even further behind in their classes during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, education financing continues to be inadequate. As various unions from the region note when presenting their education sector situation and their calls to the government, many countries do not meet the recommended public expenditure on education of 4 to 6 per cent of gross domestic product or at least 15 per cent of total public expenditure. Parallel to this underfunding of the entire education sector, early childhood education (ECE) is severely neglected, with many countries not meeting the recommended 10 per cent share of the pre-primary level in the total education budget. Teacher shortage also remains acute in the region, which in 2016 was estimated to need 32 million additional teachers to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030.

In 2018–2022, EIAP supported its member organisations not only in their advocacy efforts to advance the *Education 2030 Agenda* but also in assessing, monitoring, and reviewing the implementation of the SDG 4 targets and proactively engaging in SDG-related processes at the national and local levels. In this work, EIAP regularly represented educators and their unions at various forums on the SDGs, most notably those led by UNESCO, and collaborated with civil society organ-

isations (see the section “Partnerships” for more information). Through capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives, the Regional Office urged unions to also emphasise the intersection of SDG 4 with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work). During the pandemic, EIAP’s and unions’ actions turned to addressing the challenges to both learners and educators such that learning could continue and teachers would be supported in their work to still deliver quality education. The key activities and actions included:

Awareness-raising and capacity-building on the SDGs. The Regional Office and unions led activities responding to the 8th EIAP Regional Conference’s call for attention of member organisations to the significance of the *2030 Agenda* and for their active participation in the policy processes at various levels of governance. In 2018, EIAP organised a capacity-building workshop for top leaders of EI affiliates in Malaysia, during which participants asserted education unions’ proactive role in tracking the progress towards achieving the SDGs. They also committed to pressing the government to take the necessary steps in realising not only the education goals but also all the other factors needed to create an enabling environment for quality education.

Under the banner of the SAARC Teachers’ Federation, EI affiliates in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka led awareness-raising and lobbying campaigns with the slogan “Quality Teachers for Quality Education”. In India, the All India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF), All India Secondary Teachers’ Federation, and All India Federation of Teachers’ Organisations held a country-level consultation on the theme while lobbying efforts were underway with 53 members of Parliament and members of Legislative Assemblies in five states. The Ministry of Human Resource Development received a memorandum demanding the appropriate execution of the *Education 2030 Agenda*, alongside the provision of adequate budgetary support and the hiring of permanent, qualified, and trained teachers. EI unions in Sri Lanka and Nepal led a provincial-level awareness campaign and an interaction program, respectively, that engaged union members and officials of the Ministry of Education, while the Afghanistan Teachers Support Association (ATSA) focused on raising the awareness among teachers, parents, and community members, noting the roles of educators and their unions in ensuring quality education. Workshops and campaign activities were similarly organised in the Pacific by unions in Tonga, Kiribati, Vanuatu,

and the Solomon Islands.

Consultation on inputs to the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030. With 30 representatives from 13 EI member organisations in the region, the Asia-Pacific regional consultative meeting *Where are we? Progress towards Education 2030 Agenda* held in 2019 came out with a list of recommendations that formed EI's inputs to the 5th APMED2030 organised by UNESCO Bangkok later in the year. The participants called on governments to: address the major obstacles to progress towards the SDG; meet the internationally agreed education financing benchmarks; expand and ensure the public provision of early childhood education for all; regulate private education providers and ensure decent working conditions for teachers; and adequately provide infrastructure and resources, especially in rural and marginalised areas.

Union representatives also shared at the meeting their strategies to deepen their members' understanding of the framework of action to achieve SDG 4, including the AIPTF working with the National Coalition for Education in preparing the *India Spotlight Report on SDG 4* for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the Philippines' Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) pushing for greater state subsidy to education and better working conditions through campaigns and legislative activities, and the Federation of Mongolian Education and Science Unions (FMESU) engaging its members, government, youth, and the media in discussions on the SDGs.

Information and solidarity meetings during the pandemic. In June 2020, as governments in the region were planning to reopen or had reopened schools, the EIAP Regional Office gathered EI affiliates and non-government organisations in the webinar *Reopening of Schools and Education Institutions in Asia-Pacific* to discuss the experiences of different sub-regions in the planning and implementation of school reopening policies. Representatives from the unions also shared some of their responses to the crisis, including continuing engagement with the government to secure pay parity for ECE teachers and safety measures in schools (New Zealand Educational Institute); fight for the jobs of some education support personnel during the school closures (Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union); research on pedagogy at the time of social distancing (National Union of the Teaching Profession, Malaysia); pushing for health and safety measures in schools and related policies and curricular adjustments (Bahrain Teachers' Associa-

tion); and finding ways to continue teaching and learning where access to necessary technologies are lacking and teachers are not adequately prepared for distance education (South Asia). *(For more education unions' responses during the pandemic, please refer to Annex C)*

At the webinar *Education Unions' Response to COVID-19 in the South Asia* organised by the Regional Office in June 2020, union leaders from Afghanistan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka shared on the impact of the pandemic on teachers and students in their countries and how their organisations had responded. The countries represented were seeing huge numbers of students out of schools and widening gaps in the access to education, as exacerbated by the emphasis on digital modes of learning.

Among the union responses include: continuing opposition to the growing privatisation in education (unions from India and the Nepal National Teachers Association); advocating the welfare of marginalised groups severely affected, including migrant and daily wage workers, students especially those in rural areas, and girls (AIPTF); reaching out to students amid the school closures and training teachers on ICT (Nepal Teachers Association); raising community awareness, training teachers, and lobbying for their welfare (Institutional School Teachers' Union [ISTU], Nepal); communicating with other EI affiliates in the country on their experiences and responses (All Ceylon Union of Teachers [Government], Sri Lanka); pushing for reopening of schools where the number of cases is low (ATSA, Afghanistan); engaging with affected communities (All India Association for Christian Higher Education); and requesting the government to provide financial support to the mostly private sector-employed ECE teachers (All Ceylon Union of Teachers).

Advocacy alliance to increase domestic financing of public education systems. EI asserts that all pandemic recovery initiatives would require a renewed commitment to increasing domestic funding for education, in addition to debt reduction, progressive taxation, and increased unconditional foreign aid. Towards a more effective campaign, EI, through its affiliates in Nepal in the Asia-Pacific and Senegal and Zambia in Africa, ActionAid International, the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development, and Tax and Fiscal Justice Asia and the Global Alliance for Tax Justice work together as the TaxEd Alliance under an ongoing project from 2021 to 2023. As part of the project, the EI unions in Nepal have organised and participated in

workshops on the country's education and fiscal situation and the need for just taxation, and capacity-building activities to lead advocacy and campaigns.

In a related work to counter austerity measures, EIAP in collaboration with the EI affiliates in Nepal published the study [Teacher Wage Bill Constraints: The Impact on the Frontlines](#) (2021) by Prabin Kumar Acharya and Mohit Acharya, which looked into how teachers in the country had been affected by wage bill constraints, usually imposed through conditionalities and the influence of lending advice of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. The study reported that the low and stagnant compensation for teachers, as well as their lack of adequate benefits and protections, not only contributes to the teacher shortage and attrition rates in the profession but has also taken a toll on the country's ability to meet SDG 4.

Education sector landscape studies. A collaboration between EIAP and Union of Education Norway, context analyses of the education sector in Cambodia and Fiji were conducted to understand the structural, political, and socioeconomic structures that determine the education unions' possibilities to engage in both social dialogue and policy dialogue, which in turn allow them to influence education policies and advance workers' rights. The analyses and the recommendations based on them now provide the unions in the two countries guidance in navigating the spaces for engagement with government and other education actors.

Global Response to the Commercialisation and Privatisation in/of Education

Since the initiation in 2015 of EI's flagship campaign *Global Response to the Commercialisation and Privatisation in/of Education*, education unions in the Asia-Pacific have worked toward building an evidence-based political platform to strengthen public education systems, expose and reverse the encroachment of commercial interests on education, and promote better terms and working conditions for educators. Under this campaign, EIAP unions have formed partnerships locally and globally to push back against the growing influence of private actors and their practices in the education sector, engaging union members,

policymakers, and the wider public through various capacity-building, advocacy, research, and communication activities.

The pandemic has made the campaign's call 'students before profit' even more urgent, as learners and educators alike have had to adopt to the urgent shift to distance modes of teaching and learning that allowed for further entry of private actors in education and worsened the precarious conditions of private education workers. Among other reports commissioned by EI during the pandemic, [Commercialisation and Privatisation in/of Education in the Context of Covid-19](#) by Ben Williamson and Anna Hogan released in 2020 found that private and commercial organisations had played a significant role in setting the agenda for governments and had capitalised on the crisis. Their positioning of educational technology as a long-term solution has raised the prospect of long-term dependencies on private technology infrastructures and concerns about digital and data risks, including data protection, privacy, consent, and exploitation. During the pandemic, EIAP unions thus sustained the *Global Response* campaign through research and dissemination activities focused on documenting and exposing the adverse impacts of the involvement of corporate and private actors in the design and delivery of distance education.

The pandemic has also heightened the need to confer stronger social protections on educators in private education institutions, amid unfavourable working conditions and the sharpened precarity of their terms of employment. In many countries in the region, temporary or permanent closure of private schools affected teachers' employment. In Nepal, from 2020, hundreds of private school workers faced non-payment of salaries if not layoff from their jobs. The federal government left to the local governments the power to oversee fees and workers' salaries in private schools. The EI affiliate ISTU campaigned for the payment of salaries and reinstatement of education workers, and EI wrote to the government to immediately address the problem.

By target countries or sub-regions, the other key developments and activities under the campaign during this reporting period include:

Nepal. In line with the Global Response's strategy of conducting national level research, garnering media and public attention to the issue, and informing the campaign goals and objectives with the findings, the commissioned research reports [Nepal: Patterns of Privatisation in Education, A Case Study of Low-Fee Private Schools and](#)

[Private Chain Schools](#) (2017) by Pramod Bhatta and Tejendra Pherali and [Privatisation of Education: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nepal](#) (2021) by Raj Kumar Baral and Richard Calayeg Cornelio, both with translations into or excerpts in Nepali, have served as important bases for the work of EI unions in Nepal. Following the public launch of these reports, usually with parliamentarians and government officials, union members, parents, and civil society organisations in attendance, the unions took to the provincial level the dissemination and sensitisation of union members to the findings and calls on the government.

In 2018, the unions organised a National Convention on Right to Education and Privatisation of Education in Nepal, which emphasised the need for adequate education financing to strengthen the public education system and for strict regulation of private schools. They also started their Knock the Door Campaign, where union leaders met parliamentarians and shared their calls. These efforts led to the first time that the unions participated in discussions on education legislation with the parliamentary committee on education. In 2021, with EIAP, ISTU worked on documenting the issues that private sector teachers and education support personnel in Nepal face as reference for their policy proposals and training of branch leaders on campaigning for solutions.

Ongoing activities of the Nepali unions now involve holding planning and training meetings at the provincial level to define campaign targets and strategies, conducted with the support of the Australian Education Union (AEU) and German foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Nepal, with whom EIAP and the unions have collaborated since 2021 to produce the report and reactivate the campaign through a national meeting of union representatives.

Philippines. Through advocacy, lobbying with parliamentarians, public hearings, discussions with union members, and social media actions, EI affiliates in the country had exposed and mobilised supporting public opinion against the violation of constitutional and regulatory provisions and profiteering by the Affordable Private Education Center (APEEC) Schools, a joint venture of international education company Pearson and Philippine business giant Ayala Corporation. The chain sought to provide for-profit secondary education through an edu-business model approved by the Department of Education (DepEd) that raised questions about quality and teachers' rights.

The unions' efforts culminated in a public hearing held by the Committee on Basic Education and Culture of the Lower House of Congress in 2018. Through the interpellation of DepEd and APEC representatives by legislators, including from the ACT Teachers Partylist, it came to light how the APEC Schools had been evading the more specific and higher standards for other private schools in the country. Thus, in 2019, DepEd had been pushed to not renew its agreement with APEC that had allowed it to operate under the lower standards that the school itself set. With this development, the APEC Schools were expected to be subject to proper government regulation.

The campaign by the EI affiliates then focused on publicly funded vouchers, which qualified students receive and afford them discounts on or full coverage of fees in private schools, thus channelling public funds to private and not public institutions. The present activities of the unions include policy and advocacy work on the rights of private school workers, which were initiated by a review of the rights of educators in policy and practice in the Philippines and Nepal.

Pacific. To consider the commercialisation and privatisation of education in the sub-region, leaders of EI member organisations in the Pacific met in 2018 in Fiji. Representatives from the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu and the University of the South Pacific Staff Union shared their related experiences from their respective countries and gained understanding of EI's *Global Response*.

The campaign had been extended to the Pacific with the launch of the EI-led scoping research [Commercial Activity in Pacific Education](#) (2019) by Anna Hogan, Greg Thompson, Bob Lingard, and Mesake Dakuidreketi, which examined education reforms in eight countries, namely, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The report found that New Public Management reforms were impacting schooling across each country. It suggested further research on specific aspects of school provision in the Pacific, such as funding, access, teaching, and educators' participation in policy processes.

Climate Action and Disaster Preparedness

Climate change continues to be the greatest threat facing humanity, and it has been affecting most especially countries in the Asia-Pacific, such as India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, which are among the identified most vulnerable countries. The [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021](#) noted that the region is not moving in the right direction on climate action unless significant efforts are undertaken to increase disaster preparedness and lower the region's greenhouse gas emissions. Education unions have the responsibility to urgently act on the climate emergency, and EI and EIAP have responded by launching campaigns pushing for quality climate education for all.

Following the devastating bushfires in Australia in 2019–2020, students and teachers took to the streets to call for climate justice and action, criticising government officials for denying the link between the fires and climate change and for their refusal to enact adequate policy responses to the crisis. EI called for solidarity with Australia in an urgent action appeal, as hundreds of education institutions were forced to temporarily close as precaution while others worked to alleviate the hazardous levels of air pollution caused by the fires.

Typhoons, cyclones, and hurricanes have also increased in number and intensity, in 2020 alone displacing millions of people in Vanuatu, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and the Philippines. Education unions in these countries raised funds and provided relief to thousands of affected peoples. The EI affiliates similarly organised assistance to their members and communities when volcanic eruptions hit Vanuatu and the Philippines in 2020. Following a devastating volcanic eruption in Tonga in 2022 triggering a tsunami that reached many areas in the Pacific, EI called for contributions to the Solidarity Fund in an urgent action appeal, as the situation in the country continued to be difficult months after the disaster and the Friendly Islands Teachers' Association in Tonga and its members needed support.

More recently, the pressure from Asia-Pacific education unions on governments to prioritise effective climate change education (CCE) has gained steam. A counterpart to EI's global campaign *Teach for the Planet*, EIAP formally launched its *E4SD: Educators for Sustainable Development* campaign at the two-day virtual conference with the theme *Mobilising Educators for Climate Change Education* held in 2021. Around 200 repre-

representatives of EIAP member organisations, guests, and keynote speakers from the education sector and beyond attended the conference, which reaffirmed the value of education as a long-term investment in creating a global citizenry with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to tackle the climate crisis.

At the conference, EIAP introduced [Teach for Climate Action: An Advocacy Toolkit on Climate Change Education for Educators and Their Unions](#). Largely based on EI's [Manifesto on Quality Climate Change Education for All](#), the toolkit intends to familiarise educators with some of the curricular and pedagogical approaches to delivering CCE and provide education unionists with advice on how to advocate for the inclusion of CCE in their countries' climate action plans. It also outlines education unions' demands to ensure quality CCE for all:

- clear climate action plans from governments;
- greater domestic investment in education;
- multi-stakeholder, inclusive social dialogue on climate education;
- compulsory integration of CCE into curricula in primary and secondary education;
- climate-proofing of schools;
- initial teacher education and continuing professional development for CCE; and
- teaching and learning resources for CCE.

At the end of the conference, the participants also adopted a statement (*Annex D*) calling on governments, EI member organisations, and delegations to the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) to put CCE on their policy and advocacy agendas and 'to recognise its role in a just transition to a more sustainable world'.

Status

Examining the state of the profession in the three years since the previous report, EI's *Global Report on the Status of Teachers 2021* underlined teachers' and their unions' growing concerns about low compensation, poor working conditions, governments' inadequate investment in teaching and learning infrastructure, and increased demands on teachers and education support personnel. In the first year covered by the survey, and as EIAP also noted in its 2018 annual report, these issues were largely responsible for the severely acute teacher shortage in the Asia-Pacific region, where, according to UN projections, close to 26 million primary school teachers would be needed to achieve universal primary education by 2030.

This severe crisis is bound to reach alarming proportions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers across the region have expressed displeasure with the conditions and quality of their work. As many lost their jobs or saw their pay cut, stress and anxiety levels rose, even threatening burnout, especially among education workers with precarious terms of employment. Even when there was wide recognition and commendation of their contributions on the front lines, their corresponding terms and conditions have not improved. Overworked and underpaid, teachers are doubly frustrated with policymakers who are

unwilling to engage them on their concerns and the general lack of preparedness of education systems for external shocks of the same magnitude as the pandemic.

For educators, inequalities already entrenched in the sector, particularly the lack of appropriate technical infrastructure, made it unnecessarily challenging to migrate to remote or online settings when schools shuttered. Under this setup, where most of them had yet to be trained on or acquire digital tools and resources, teachers were left to their own devices, often with no coherent guidelines or material support from school administrators or governments. This rather abrupt shift opened up a niche for tech businesses and investors who had long sought to wield greater influence in the education market and shape the future of work. In this changed and changing landscape, forecasts of the nearing end of the pandemic and the progressively relaxing restrictions in the Asia-Pacific region are unfortunately not doing much to diminish the pandemic's persistent impacts and to assuage most educators' uncertainties about their prospects in the profession.

Decent Work

The issues that educators and their unions have been raising for decades – safety and wellbeing at work, compensation and job security, and rights – have been even more pressing during the pandemic. Many unions have continued to voice the same concerns, only this time, however, the toll of the crisis has thrown into sharper relief the urgency of upholding a decent work agenda as the bedrock of the education sector's post-pandemic recovery.

Educators in different countries across the Asia-Pacific region have indeed experienced the knock-on effects of the pandemic differently. Yet many of their struggles illustrate the aggravated inequities and inadequacies common to all education systems suffering from chronic underfunding, privatisation and commercialisation, and lack of institutional support, robust social protection, and rights safeguards for education workers. The findings of a 2021 study commissioned by the New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF), a branch of the AEU Australia, point to these problems with working conditions that are all too familiar to teachers from the rest of the region: intensified

and increasing workload due largely to policy changes that have not kept up with students' evolving needs and the ever-higher expectations of schools' and teachers' responsibilities. Despite such mounting pressures, salaries and opportunities for career advancement have lagged since 2004, according to the NSWTF's independent inquiry. For most teachers and education support personnel in the region, these deteriorating working conditions came to a head when the pandemic hit and left education workers struggling to keep the schools open, remotely or online, with delayed or wanting support.

In some Asia-Pacific countries, such as India and Nepal, teachers were called on to assist in contact tracing, managing urgent care programmes, and sanitising classrooms that had been turned into makeshift relief and quarantine centres, which put them at greater risk of COVID-19 infection. In the remote or virtual classroom, teachers had to not only quickly devise new ways to reach out to students but also contend with logistical and digital barriers. Immense pandemic-induced stress and anxieties at work and at home overwhelmed millions of teachers. With the greater demands on them during this period, education unions called for reduced class sizes and working hours, adjustments in curricula and academic calendars, additional personnel and resources for teachers and learners, and psychosocial support. When COVID-19 vaccines became available, EIAP supported its affiliates' calls for the prioritisation of educators in the immunisation programme to head off any more future disruptions in teaching-learning amid new COVID-19 variants and surges in infection.

Furthermore, delivering emergency education during this period perhaps proved the most challenging for vulnerable educators hired on casual or short-term contracts, as is often the case in private institutions at ECE and in higher education. With no social safety nets to fall back on, these precarious workers suffered pay cuts, delayed or forfeited salaries, and, in worst cases, layoffs or dismissals, leaving their prospects in education ever more uncertain.

A collaboration between EIAP and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), the study *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Education and Teaching in Asia-Pacific* (2021) by Meera Chandran, Poonam Sharma, and Emaya Kannamma corroborated many of the findings of EI's 2021 Status of Teachers report. Drawing from a survey of educators from 22 countries

and interviews with teachers and union staff, their study documented the extent of the challenges educators endured during the pandemic. They found that, although teachers and education support personnel in the region had been persevering in their work during the pandemic, several limitations, such as low access to digital technologies and limited professional development on their use, led to a general sense of frustration with the conditions and quality of their work conducted online or remotely. Those who stayed on struggled with unmanageable workloads. Amid staff layoffs, budget constraints, or the need to make up for lost instructional time and failed assessments, teaching or administrative duties continued to rise, and the workload persisted even after lockdowns ended in some jurisdictions.

Following the study's regional validation workshop in 2021, which gathered around 160 EI and ILO ROAP representatives, and education union leaders and members, EI affiliates in Nepal also convened a national validation workshop. The participants concurred that the study findings accurately captured the challenges teachers in Nepal had been facing during the pandemic. The affiliates have also since formulated action plans in response and submitted related resolutions to their respective conferences for adoption, urging the government to increase public school funding, enhance digital infrastructures, and protect private-school teachers who are mostly hired on short-term contracts.

Many of these calls of education unions in Nepal resonate with teachers' experiences in the rest of the region. In a book chapter that EIAP contributed to a forthcoming publication of FES Asia (*Annex E*), along with other Asia-Pacific units of global union federations, the Regional Office asserted that the education sector can achieve a holistic, comprehensive, and inclusive recovery post-pandemic only if efforts at 'building back better' are premised on fulfilling educators' and education unions' longstanding demands. Towards decent work for all in education, EIAP puts forward the following policy recommendations, some of which are explained in more detail in other sections of the report:

- Adequately fund all levels of public education.
- Protect the terms, working conditions and rights of all education workers at all times.

- End the precarious employment of teachers and education support personnel at all levels and sectors and provide all workers with social protection and proper remuneration.
- Tighten the regulation of private education providers.
- Conduct inquiries on the nature and conditions of work of teachers and perform equity audits of institutional practices and working conditions.
- Make every school a health-promoting school.
- Provide adequate resources and professional support to teachers and education support personnel.
- Engage in social and policy dialogue with educators and their unions.

Education unions in the region are also recommended to:

- Continue to stand for the rights of all educators.
- Systematically and comprehensively document rights violations.
- Engage with the trade union movement and the broader public in advancing decent work for all workers.

Educators' experiences demonstrate how the rights, resources, and respect they have been fighting for and defending remain crucial to maintaining the standards and status of the profession. Ultimately, the governments' investment in the wellbeing and professional development of teachers and education support personnel is a testament to their sincere willingness to provide quality education for all.

Standards and Professional Leadership

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened prevailing challenges and presented new ones, educators have demonstrated professionalism and tireless dedication in going above and beyond to keep classes going for millions of learners around the world. They have strained to bear on standards of practice to enhance equitable and inclusive quality education. Indeed, staggering setbacks and learning losses were suffered not for want of teachers' commitment and leadership, because the education sector, including EI affiliates in the Asia-Pacific

region, has persevered to hold itself to professional teaching standards and continue pushing for the unions' calls in various advocacy and policy venues.

Leading the Profession. As the global voice of educators, EI developed, together with UNESCO, the *Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards* in 2019. It complements existing UN normative instruments and seeks to guide unions in formulating or reviewing their national teaching standards around three domains: teaching knowledge and understanding, teaching practice, and teaching relations.

With the adoption of the framework at EI's 8th World Congress in 2019, EIAP vowed to support its member organisations' review of and raise their countries' teaching standards and related policies. At a regional consultative meeting, *Where are we? Progress towards Education 2030 Agenda*, EI affiliates from Australia, India, Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan presented briefers on the status of teachers in their countries and the repercussions of deprofessionalisation at different levels of education. Their concerns extended to issues of academic freedom, professional autonomy, and social and policy dialogue on teaching standards and programmes. This consultative meeting was followed by a country-level capacity-building workshop in Mongolia, centred on lobbying for opportunities for teachers' continuing professional development, and a sub-regional forum on teaching standards and decent work, where the Pacific countries Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Tonga participated.

More than a couple years hence, the pandemic has sharpened the global focus back on upholding professional teaching standards in the face of harsh cuts to public education and the lingering impacts of lockdowns and school closures on teaching and learning.

World Teachers' Day. More than a celebration of teachers' valuable role in society, every October 5th is an opportunity for EIAP to amplify the calls of education unions in the region, being home to some of the world's largest teaching workforce, and to forge ever stronger alliances with other key stakeholders.

In 2019, a two-day Asia-Pacific Regional Forum organised by UNESCO capped off the World Teachers' Day celebration, which carried the theme "Young Teachers: The Future of the Profession". EIAP joined the forum to present the *EI/UNESCO Global Framework of Professional Teaching Standards*. It was also an opportunity to share EI's efforts to

attract and retain young education professionals in the region and engage them in working with and within unions, in which their skills development and advancement to leadership positions remain some of the trade union movement's top priorities.

Understandably, the following year, several months into the pandemic, educators worldwide marked World Teachers' Day on a rather sombre note. Yet it was no less than a momentous occasion to laud their efforts in meeting the challenges of the crisis on the front lines. EI then hosted the largest online gathering of teachers in history. Over 500,000 people around the world watched the event across virtual platforms and joined educators, including education unionists from EI's affiliates, state leaders, partner organisations, activists, parents, and children's rights advocates in celebration.

The Asia-Pacific region's four-hour segment [\(video link\)](#) during the 24-hour live event featured stories, reflections, and messages of solidarity from across the region, in line with the theme "Teachers: Leading in Crisis, Reimagining the Future". Several union leaders engaged in live discussions on various issues faced by teachers and education support personnel and the strides the sector had taken to help and struggle alongside the communities that had borne the pandemic's heaviest brunt. EIAP affiliates shared story videos showcasing how their members responded during this period, amid the growing crisis of democracy and the persistence of trade union and human rights violations in many Asia-Pacific countries. More than half of EIAP's member organisations at the time, or about 6 million or 75% of the educators that EI represented in the Asia-Pacific region, directly contributed to the event planning and production. Such was the extent of their support that, although the EIAP Regional Office had received over five hours' worth of video submissions, not all of them could be shown during the live event due to the limited broadcast time. Some videos were instead shared on EIAP's social media channels (videos accessible [here](#)).

For the 2021 World Teachers' Day, EIAP affiliates joined other EI member organisations in paying tribute to and remembering teachers that they had lost during the pandemic. EI created a dedicated website where their stories could be shared and read widely, their memories honoured, and their legacy and commitment to education celebrated, continuously carried forward by their colleagues and the future generation of teachers. After three years, 2022 marked the resumption of

in-person celebrations of World Teachers' Day, with EI affiliates National Teachers Elected Council (Afghanistan), Cambodia Independent Teachers' Association, National Educators' Association for Development (Cambodia), NUTP Malaysia, AIPTF India, FMESU Mongolia, and many other education unions organising activities highlighting the role of teachers in transforming education.

Future of Work

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred a rapid change in the education landscape, with a shift to online or remote learning becoming necessary for many classes. However, this change has not come without drawbacks. The increasing reliance on ed-tech, such as digital tools and platforms often peddled by corporate players, has also led to the development of new experimental pedagogies. It has implications for the teaching profession, including the need for teachers and education support personnel to be properly trained on how to use these new technologies, and for data privacy, of which most students and teachers have yet to be properly informed in relation to their rights and responsibilities online.

Amid schools' abrupt shift to online or remote modes of education delivery, EI conducted a *Future of Work in Education Global Survey* among its member organisations on the use of ed-tech and its impact on learners and their access to education, educators' involvement in assessing the tools, and the teaching profession. The survey findings in the report *Teaching with Tech: The Role of Education Unions in Shaping the Future* by Christina Colclough showed that, in most countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, teacher unions were not consulted in the adoption of the digital technologies, disregarding educators' professionalism, experiential knowledge, and autonomy on pedagogical practices. It also showed that gaping digital divides exist within countries and among countries, calling more urgent attention to the need for students from disadvantaged, under-resourced backgrounds to access and succeed in education. Many teachers were similarly not sufficiently familiar with or trained on these technologies. They faced increased workload and burn-out borne of technostress, screen time, and anxieties about the quality and conditions of their work.

EI urged education unions to continue demanding from their governments increased financing of educators' continuing professional development, including digital literacy training, to ensure that technology benefits students and teachers and that the future of work in education is still 'human first'. They must resist for-profit education models or pedagogically dubious methods, and instead counter them with robust and research-based alternative imaginaries, as argued in the EI research report *Pandemic Privatisation in Higher Education: Edtech and University Reform* (2021) by Ben Williamson and Anna Hogan.

For their part, Asia-Pacific education unions reaffirmed the importance of a learner-centred perspective on learning and due consideration of learners' and educators' wellbeing, during the validation workshop for the EIAP-ILO study in 2021 (see "*Decent work*" section on p. X). The study reported several constraints on the current online learning landscape, such as the low access to digital infrastructure for teachers and students alike, and underscored the educators' central role in the future of work in the sector even and especially despite the proliferation of ed-tech products. More importantly, however, the study participants believe that the widespread use of digital technologies during the pandemic will continue into the future, while the study found that reported lower levels of competence in digital technologies corresponded with fears about being prepared for future work.

Rights and Democracy

The pandemic has had a detrimental effect on workers' rights and their participation in democratic processes. Governments in the Asia-Pacific region have, to various degrees, disregarded or broken laws and run roughshod over workers' trade union and human rights. During this period, there is compelling evidence that the official suite of policy responses generally violated otherwise constitutionally enshrined rights and civil liberties and ignored democratic norms and values, such as the rule of law, mechanisms for transparency and accountability, and the principle, in line with equity and inclusion, of leaving no one behind. These violations were frequently disguised as COVID-19 outbreak prevention measures, while in reality supporting several political and economic vested interests. Most of these responses have deepened workers' vulnerability, especially of those already marginalised and precarious.

In response to these harrowing developments, EI held meetings and informative webinars, among other advocacy activities, which EIAP either participated in or organised, to raise awareness of specific issues among its member organisations and express solidarity. Alongside other global union federations, EI maximised its reach and network to garner the support of its affiliates, through various urgent action

appeals (*Annex F*) in sustaining international pressure against contentious policies of anti-democratic governments in the region.

Human and Trade Union Rights

The civic spaces for education unionists and rights advocates in the region have shrunk considerably in the face of many political pushbacks and anti-democratic policies, not least of which is the rise of state violations of civil liberties and fundamental rights, such as the freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. Indeed, many Asia-Pacific countries have consistently ranked as some of the worst places for workers in 2018–2021, according to the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) [Global Rights Index](#), an annual assessment of the state of trade union and human rights worldwide. Especially during the pandemic, many governments cracked down on and delegitimised education unions by limiting workers' participation in decision-making processes or, in more alarming cases, attacking trade unionists and maligning their organisations.

The right to organise and protest. In some countries in Asia-Pacific, education workers are not allowed to form unions, and those who do have their rights systematically eroded. In Cambodia, for example, the government uses the court system to suppress trade unions and political parties, while in India, teachers' unions are not accorded the status of trade unions.

In Korea, the government had been repeatedly urged to take measures to ensure the re-certification of the country's largest teachers' union, ILO affiliate Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU). In September 2020, the Korean Supreme Court, at last, overturned the government's 2013 decision to delegalise KTU on the grounds that it had let nine dismissed teachers maintain their union membership – a move that the lower courts upheld in 2014 and 2016. As a result, around 60,000 teachers represented by the KTU lost their legal status. The KTU's President and Senior Vice President were among 34 union leaders fired by the Ministry of Education, which also cancelled the existing collective bargaining agreements with the union and ordered the latter's 89 full-time union employees to report back to their respective schools. At

the time, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association Mania Kiai expressed concerns with what then appeared to be a politically motivated decision and claimed that the KTU's actions 'do not match the high threshold that should be set for delegatising unions'.

Pandemic restrictions have also given cover to governments citing so-called emergency laws to quell protests or criminalise what should have been constitutionally protected trade union activities, such as organising efforts and demonstrations. In Jordan, authorities did so to arbitrarily dissolve the Jordan Teachers' Association (JTA). Although the Amman Court of Appeals eventually overturned the administrative decision on the JTA's legal status in October 2021, the union still could not operate and represent teachers because none of its board members was allowed to resume their roles in the trade union. EI responded to the most recent infringement on educators' trade union rights with an urgent action appeal when, in late March 2022, over 160 JTA unionists and board members were detained and arrested while protesting in front of the Education Ministry. In other countries such as the Philippines, Korea, and Turkey, prominent education union leaders were arrested on trumped-up charges and subjected to intense judicial harassment, if not sentenced to heavy prison terms.

In Cambodia, the government's intimidation and judicial harassment against independent union leaders and labour advocates proved relentless even during the pandemic. The recent release of Rong Chhun, President of the Cambodian Confederation of Unions and former president of EI-affiliate CITA, might not have happened without the international trade union movement rallying against his warrantless arrest. Together with a few other fellow union leaders, he had been charged with 'incitement to commit a felony' for his earlier comments defending the land rights of villagers living near a Cambodian province's contested border with Vietnam. EI, the Council of Global Unions (CGU), and the ITUC [sent a letter](#) to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training demanding the activists' immediate release and the unconditional dropping of charges against them. EI and the ITUC also launched a LabourStart campaign denouncing the unhygienic conditions in the prison cells where the union leaders were being held during their pre-trial and, above all, asserting their right to free expression and to freedom of association in Cambodia.

In their systematic smear campaign against educators, autocratic governments usually employ strategic lawsuits against public participation, sending a signal that they will not tolerate dissent on issues that are otherwise of public interest. In Japan, public employees have the right to organise and negotiate, but not to strike. In Iran, many teachers' rights advocates were detained in December 2021 after they had staged sit-ins in 100 cities across the country to demand fair compensation and the immediate and unconditional release of their imprisoned colleagues, including Esmail Abdi, a long-time trade union leader and the former president of the Tehran Teacher Association. EI and its member organisations called on the government of Iran to uphold the 'rights of teachers and education professionals to organise, to freedom of association, and freedom of speech, including the right to peaceful assembly, without fear of interference by the authorities'.

Repressive labour legislation and violence against unionists.

Repressive labour legislation makes it difficult for education workers to exercise their rights. EI and other global union federations have condemned such draconian anti-worker policies as the Philippines' *Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020*, which gave the president even greater powers to punish critics and attack leftist, progressive organisations. During the pandemic, even more such laws have been formulated, enacted, or amended without proper dialogue with stakeholders. For example, the Fiji government passed legislation that allows employers to dismiss or fire a worker as long as the employer justifies the COVID-19 pandemic as the cause. With support from EI and the Council of Pacific Education (COPE), the Fijian Teachers' Association (FTA) and Fiji Teachers' Union (FTU) held workshops with union branch leaders to strategise on shoring up educators' safeguards against these violations of their human and trade union rights.

At a time when much of the world implemented COVID-19 lockdowns, governments relied heavily on police power to instil mass discipline, constrict or close civic spaces, and rationalise decisions that undermine rights advocates and perpetuate intimidation tactics, anti-union discrimination, and even blatant violence against workers. EIAP condemned the attacks on educators and unions in the Philippines and Yemen, in particular. In the latter's case, the civil war, which still raged on amid the pandemic, led to the murder, kidnapping, and displacement of several Yemeni teachers, while in the Philippines, the govern-

ment has been accused of red-tagging unions and harassing union leaders – a pattern of violence that the disabling environment for civil society during the pandemic only deepened and worsened.

In fact, as early as July 2019, the Council of Global Unions sent a delegation led by the EI and BWI General Secretaries to the Philippines to assess the soaring number of reported violations of trade union and human rights and discuss how to support the local unions. The CGU found these violations to be systematically and strongly linked to the Duterte administration's 'war on drugs', and particularly dangerous to unions in export processing zones and extractive industry areas, as well as those that the government deems to be 'left-leaning', especially following the passage of the *Anti-Terrorism Act*. Following these findings, it was advised that the CGU support the Filipino unions' call for an investigation into the extrajudicial deaths of their members, publicise the human rights crisis at the global stage, and pressure the Philippine government to accept the ILO High-Level Tripartite Mission. Prior to the Global Day of Action on 9 December 2019, EI, Public Services International, and Building and Wood Worker's International organised the webinar *Dying for Labour Rights in the Philippines* to draw attention to the severe abuses occurring there. The following day, in observance of International Human Rights Day, EI held a protest in front of the Philippine Embassy in Brussels, Belgium, denouncing the worsening political persecution of Filipino workers and trade unionists and pressing the Philippine government to institute rights-based mechanisms to defend workers' civil liberties and constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

More recently, in 2022, the celebration of Labour Day in Iran was marked by violence against teachers who have long been voicing their legitimate demands for decent working conditions and the recognition of their fundamental rights and freedoms as workers and as citizens. Since May Day, dozens of them were unjustifiably arrested all over the country for conducting peaceful activities. And, again, in June, the Iranian authorities cracked down on peaceful teachers' gatherings called by the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITTA) in various cities. At least 100 more teachers have been arrested and probably many more as EI keeps receiving more reports of arrests.

EI and its affiliates have been calling on for the release of the CCITTA leaders Jafar Ebrahimi, Mohammad Habibi, and Rasoul Bodaghi. They

had been jailed since April 30 and were transferred to solitary confinement on June 15. The list of arrested teacher unionists also includes educators who have committed to the interests and wellbeing of their students and the future of their country: Eskandar Lotfi, Asghar Amirzadegan, Mohammad Alishvandi, Mohammad Ali Zahmatkesh, Abdolrazaq Amiri, Mehrdad Yaghmaei, Hamid Abbasi, Gholamreza Gholami Kondazi, Hadi Sadeghzadeh, Iraj Rahnama, Majid Karimi, Masoud Farhikhteh, Iraj Ansari, Vahid Goodarzi, Salah Azadi, Shaban Mohamamdi, Mojgan Bagheri, and Masoud Nikkhah. The fate of Esmail Abdi of the Tehran Teacher Association remains particularly concerning. The long imprisonment and ill treatment he suffered in detention have severely affected his health and his family. He has been condemned until 2031 on fake charges. His arrest and detention, along with others', for exercising their union rights are a blatant abuse of power and are in violation of international laws.

Democracy

The rights and welfare of teachers are also usually adversely affected when authoritarian governments are in power. In recent years, some Asia-Pacific countries have often given greater priority to political and military objectives over education and labour, and educators are regarded as potential sources of political opposition. Between 2018 and 2022, several reports also emerged of increased surveillance and interference in teachers' daily lives, especially for union leaders whom the government may actively target or outrightly persecute for their progressive stances on various issues. These conditions could take a devastating toll on the personal life, safety, and security of teachers, and their ability to effectively perform their union responsibilities.

In its recent annual reports and through various urgent action appeals (*Annex F*), EIAP spotlighted the crisis and fragility of democracy in several Asia-Pacific countries and the implications of such democratic backsliding for the education sector. Before the pandemic, the political unrest in Hong Kong was the most prominent such case. As the protests in the city continued, the government increasingly targeted teachers, with Beijing officials accusing them at one point, particularly those who taught 'liberal studies', of instigating students to protest. As part

of this campaign against progressive educators, meaningful pedagogy was under threat of censorship. This illiberal campaign has been met with resistance from both teachers and students. In September 2019, over 100 teachers and education workers protested outside of the Education Bureau against the government's plans to review the liberal studies curriculum. In particular, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, then an EI affiliate, had also been vocal in its opposition to the government's plans, calling them an attack on academic freedom.

In most extreme cases, education workers are also often written off as enemies of the state, the better to legitimise crackdowns on their rights, professional autonomy, and personal safety. EI affiliate Alliance of Concerned Teachers in the Philippines, has been targeted by the government with a campaign of harassment and intimidation, including false accusations and detention, in an attempt to silence the union and its members, according to the findings of the Independent International Commission of Investigation into Violations of Human Rights in the Philippines (INVESTIGATE PH), of which EI General Secretary David Edwards is one of the commissioners. The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association has also raised concerns about the way Filipino trade unions are being linked to the communist insurgency, which puts unionists in extreme danger. EI has taken actions in solidarity with ACT Philippines in response to the murder of educator and human rights advocate Zara Alvarez, the judicial harassment of journalist Maria Ressa, and the threats against and red-tagging of ACT General Secretary and EI Board Member Raymond Basilio. The Duterte administration ramped up this violent campaign and even went on to use COVID-19 measures as an opportunity to further repress educators and union activists.

Two other Asia-Pacific countries recently saw the rise of anti-democratic agenda alongside the violent takeover of their governments. In Myanmar, after the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders were detained and the military seized rule in early February 2021, an estimated 12 million protesters, including students, teachers, and workers, took to the streets. Unions in Myanmar called for international solidarity and pressure on the military. EI and its affiliate, the Myanmar Teachers' Federation, strongly denounced the illegal arrests of parliamentarians, other officials, and civil society leaders. They supported the local unions' call for a nationwide strike for democracy and the rule of law. The Civil Disobedience Movement, a

network of likeminded organisations and tens of thousands of civilians, emerged in retaliation of the military offensives throughout the country. Through a dedicated solidarity fund, EI supported educators, unionists and their families who were killed, arrested or terminated from their jobs.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban's takeover in May 2021 poses a serious threat to the country's decades-long improvements in human rights and education. The group had notoriously been known for restricting women and girls' access to jobs, education, and voting rights between 1996 and 2001. The situation is getting worse, especially for female teachers and students, according to EI affiliates in the country, despite a Taliban guarantee that schools and educational institutions would not be attacked. In addition, NTEC and the Afghanistan Teacher Support Association reported that it had taken more than five months before teachers and other public employees received their salaries.

The strategies most effective in combating authoritarianism will vary from country to country and will depend on the specific context within which each education union is operating. However, EIAP will continue what it has done so far in advancing EI's campaign for rights and democracy in the Asia-Pacific region: encouraging education workers and trade unionists to participate in political and civil society activities to uphold democratic values; urging its member organisations to continue organising and mobilising teachers and education support personnel in taking collective action against authoritarianism, such as through strikes, protests, and other forms of civil disobedience; and working with civic-oriented groups and networks to lobby for a repeal of and push back against authoritarian practices and policies, especially in education.

Equity and Inclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the progress made in recent decades in girls' participation in education at all levels. In particular, the Asia-Pacific region may be in danger of going backwards in terms of women's rights and gender equality. Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against women, children, and LGBTI people, has shown alarming rises, which has grown tenfold during the health crisis,

according to UN Women. In some countries, divorce rates, incidents of child marriage, child abuse, and early weddings have been reported. Against this backdrop, EI's Asia-Pacific women's networks have continued to challenge exclusionary practices and patriarchal beliefs that perpetuate the discrimination against women and other marginalised gender groups in the education sector.

Most of EIAP member organisations' gender-focused activities during this period were undertaken as part of several development cooperation programmes or through sub-regional women's networks. Not only did they effectively kick off much-needed awareness-raising campaigns against school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), but they also served capacity-building purposes by involving more unions from diverse backgrounds and encouraging them to use the lens of equity and inclusion in their internal and external work. Despite challenges in some countries, EI is making progress on this front. As a guiding framework in this area of work, EI's *Gender Equality Action Plan 2020-2023* outlines three main priorities: (1) promoting women's participation and leadership within education unions; (2) taking action to increase intersectional gender equality in and through education; and (3) promoting women's economic empowerment.

Across the region, EI member organisations in the Asia-Pacific have vowed to translate the GEAP into action, primarily by maximising the reach of the various women's networks they have already built to mainstream gender equality in the education sector and address issues related to SRGBV and bullying. These inter-union networks work to provide opportunities and exchange ideas, showcase achievements, and espouse the various concerns relative to the pursuit of gender equality. In 2019, young women union members from the ASEAN and SAARC regions also gathered at a *Young Women Leaders* workshop aimed at building the leadership capacity of the participants and sensitising them on the systemic and organisational issues that limit women's leadership in unions. These two networks also made successful inroads in advocating for stronger and fairer maternity leave provisions.

In addition, the EIAP affiliates comprising these women's networks have been working to increase school attendance, including for girls during their menstrual period who are often banished in line with a traditional practice called 'chhaupadi' in Nepal. Some specific activities that EI affiliates and women's networks in the region have undertaken

include campaigning against cyberbullying (Indonesia) and conducting training sessions and workshops on a variety of youth and gender and development concerns (Fiji, Philippines, Samoa). They have also distributed informational materials as part of EI's campaign to end sexual harassment of girls in schools (Australia, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka), which has resulted in some positive outcomes, including affiliates' increased awareness of the issue and commitments from unions to take action. In collaboration with EI and the AEU, the AIPTF Women's Network continued to empower women leaders among the state affiliates, as a result of which more women are taking leadership positions at various levels of the organisation.

In 2018–2019, EIAP also expanded its work to include the rights of LGBTI people, with a focus on ensuring inclusive education and safe schools for all learners, regardless of sex and gender. Together with UNESCO Bangkok and the AEU, EIAP launched the project called *Teachers Unions for Inclusion: Embracing Diversity and Promoting Safe Schools* with the goal of educating people about the difficulties the LGBTI community faces and the necessity of creating safe and inclusive learning environments. The project also urged education unions to support LGBTI rights, especially the elimination of SRGBV based on SOGIE principles and the gathering of data. EIAP and UNESCO Bangkok collaborated on a *Survey for Teaching Personnel on Inclusion and Diversity* as part of the project. Affiliates in Fiji, India, Nepal, and the Philippines, developed programmes and held workshops, together with EIAP, to combat and raise awareness about discrimination and violence against LGBTI in education.

Amid limitations due to the pandemic, EIAP affiliates kept up their efforts to empower female education unionists and bolster their members' gender and development initiatives, primarily through various ongoing development cooperation programmes: the ASEAN Women's Network (Philippine affiliates), the AIPTF-AEU Women Network Programme, and the COPE Women's Network. To monitor EIAP's gender equality activities and on a mandate from the Regional Committee, EIAP constituted a Steering Committee. The Committee has initiated an external evaluation of the Asia-Pacific Women's Network, with support from the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and the AEU. The [report of the evaluation](#) shall be launched at the Women's Caucus to be held prior to the 9th EIAP Regional Conference.

Besides women and other vulnerable gender identities, EIAP's work in equity and inclusion likewise extends to other disadvantaged and marginalised groups. After all, discrimination and violence against many minorities remain a serious problem in the Asia-Pacific region. Thousands of children are affected by the destruction of schools in conflict zones, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, and many more face discrimination and inequality in access to education. Most Indigenous peoples (IPs), whom SDG 4 identifies as one of the groups for whom equal access to education should be guaranteed, cannot even begin to participate in education as they continue to be displaced, face discrimination, and suffer violations of their economic, social, and cultural rights. Worse still, IP teachers and students often fall victim to gross state violence, as exemplified by the experience of the Lumad in the Philippines. EIAP member organisations are working to combat these issues, but much work remains to be done to push for a genuinely inclusive post-pandemic recovery of the education sector in the region.

Renewal

With the adoption of the resolution “Education Union Renewal: The New Imperative” at the 8th EI Congress and the clear focus set on union renewal as among EI’s strategic directions, EI affiliates have taken on the challenge of transforming EI and their organisations, such that they embody the democratic principles that unions stand for and they establish stronger connection with their members. In the Asia-Pacific, trade unions in different sectors face such issues as aging and declining membership, fragmentation, failure to connect with members and the society, lack of engagement of youth and women in the union structure, and lack of plans for their future. Thus, embarking on a union renewal journey means examining one’s organisation and its relevance, embracing change in its ways, strengthening its capacity to engage in social dialogue, and becoming truly democratic and representative of its membership.

Such project of renewal is only realised through meaningful collaboration between and among organisations and structures throughout EI, thus the processes that the unions undergo, and the solidarity built among them along the way in turn leads to strengthening EI as a whole. Towards these ends, the Regional Office has been assisting unions in the Asia-Pacific in their efforts, providing guidance and learning oppor-

tunities, facilitating and participating in the collaborations, and integrating in various activities the union renewal agenda.

Union Building and Renewal

With the 2021 regional study [Union Renewal in the Education Sector: Prospects for the Asia-Pacific](#) by Michele Ford and Kristy Ward, EIAP took the lead in steering its member organisations toward the crucial work of union renewal. In its analysis of the extent that union renewal is present in ten unions in eight countries (Fiji, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Malaysia, Philippines, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu), the report found that teacher unions are facing these common challenges: (1) developing a clear and consistent narrative about union identity and purpose that is responsive to members, (2) identifying ways to move beyond welfare provision and case-based support for individual workers, and (3) developing more productive ways to engage with often hostile governments while maintaining organisational independence and integrity.

The report recommended that education unions undergo renewal through a structured process of reflection on the union's identity and purpose, and use a specific campaign as a laboratory to identify aspects of the union structure and process that need changes or improvement. In support of these activities, it also suggested that EIAP lead the development of small virtual communities that would allow the sharing of experiences and generate a sense of shared purpose among participating member organisations. The study is currently being cited in union renewal efforts being led and coordinated by the Regional Office, and it is hoped that the fresh ideas that the study has inspired among unions, during the research launch and related activities, would lead to effective interventions to revitalise the unions and their work.

Following the launch of the study, key renewal projects and activities among unions in the Asia-Pacific and the Regional Office include:

Trade union transformation and the digital economy: the case of FMESU, Mongolia. This ongoing project builds upon the recommendations for the FMESU's strategic plan and directions formulated by the then new leaders of the union, representatives of its youth and women committees, and union organisers as part of a two-day workshop facilitated by EIAP in 2019. In this project supported by FES Mongolia, the

FMESU responds to the recommendation then to build the union's capacity in communication and boost its organising using technology and to ensure that young members engage and participate in decision-making and union activities. The activities from 2021 to 2023 aim to contribute to transforming the FMESU into a strong union equipped with the tools, skills, and knowledge to effectively engage in social dialogue mechanisms, organise and retain women and young members in the union, and communicate with its members and relevant education stakeholders. Under this project, the study [Trade Union Transformation and The Digital Economy: The Case of FMESU, Mongolia](#) (2021) by A. Gantuya and G. Uugantsetseg examined key areas for the union's transformation as well as how, through the strategic use of technology, unions could reach out to more members at the grassroots level and establish efficient and transparent communication lines.

Initiation of union renewal project in Fiji unions. Supported by EIAP, COPE, and the AEU and informed by EIAP's 2021 regional research, the FTA and the FTU have started their union renewal process with a strategic planning meeting in 2022. Both unions recognised the need for membership animation and reflected on their strengths and shortcomings, union structures, priorities, and areas for future growth. They hoped to train workplace union representatives and support their members' professional needs through a teacher development programme. Centred on 'change', 'hope', and 'shared commitment', the project could help the FTA and the FTU strengthen their union and political power, build more decisive grassroots leadership, and leverage effective communication and partnerships with ministries and communities to broaden their outreach and secure more policy and advocacy gains.

Trade union transformation through capacity-building and within the digital economy. As part of this project and with the support of EIAP and Lärarförbundet, the AIPTF organised a workshop in 2022 on the use of digital technologies within a project of union renewal. Union members from the states of Uttarakhand and Jharkhand presented ideas for building IT infrastructure (e.g., membership database, website, social media platforms, and apps) and adopting it for better engagement with members and the community at large, recruitment strategies, and collection of membership dues. In one of the workshop sessions, participants discussed ways to guarantee that the software system could be uniquely suited to the unions' needs and maximised

for different practical uses, such as sending invitations for and calling meetings, conducting surveys, and handling membership issues or complaints using a ticketing system.

Young Members

The active participation of young members in union structures and activities at all levels is an essential component of strengthening and growing union membership. To this end, enabling measures directly or indirectly targeting young members are undertaken, as unions such as in Fiji, Malaysia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines have implemented through strategising workshops and reach out activities. Capacity-building and organising activities by the Regional Office and EI affiliates in the Asia-Pacific have visibly incorporated youth engagement in their design, highlighting how it is a cross-cutting concern that could reinforce other efforts towards union renewal. EIAP also works to strengthen the structure and capacity of EI unions, including through leadership-oriented programmes and existing partnerships with other EI member organisations.

John Thompson Fellowship programme. Among such integrated activities, the JTF programme has among its underlying functions the preparation of a second line of education union leaders. Since 1999, the JTF programme has sought to address common problems faced by unions, share best practices and lessons learned, foster collaboration among education unions, and set up or improve sub-regional structures. As a potential hub for broader union cooperation, supported by AEU Australia, CTF Canada, Lärarförbundet Sweden, and Syndicat national des enseignements de second degré (SNES France), the programme aims to enhance union capacity through focused engagement, leader development, and the implementation of new ways of work to advocate and defend members' rights and interests in various professional and political fora.

Over the years, the JTF program has helped participants build the skills and competencies to support unions' growth in areas such as good governance, financial practices, and service delivery to their membership. Participants have also taken part in and led training sessions, having gained more knowledge of and appreciation for the functions

of education unions and the wider trade union movement. They have developed narratives to communicate to their stakeholders the continuing and even more profound relevance of education unions in advocating much-needed change in the entire profession. For instance, various policy discussions and consultations at the national, regional, and global levels have provided the John Thompson fellows opportunities to actively push for the advancement of women to leadership roles.

In 2018, the programme centred on the training of union leaders from Nepal, covering a range of topics related to union leadership, negotiation, union building, and communication. The following year, the programmatic focus was expanded for a new four-year cycle to be piloted in the Pacific sub-region. In November 2019, union delegates from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Tonga joined as fellows to learn practical skills in developing a sound strategic plan, becoming a good leader and a unionist, using conflict resolution and effective negotiation techniques, maintaining appropriate communication channels, and building strong union structures – areas of work that the participants had identified as needs and gaps in the pre-fellowship evaluation. The 2015 fellows from the AIPTF also joined the revised programme for a refresher course in light of the political and policy developments in India and the new tools at unionists' disposal that could help them further understand and plan their roles as new union leaders with a mandate to uphold good governance and transparency in the education sector.

The new batch of John Thompson fellows has since continued building their capacity for unionism, leadership, and the defence of educators' rights and professional freedoms. Due to the pandemic, however, the 2020 JTF, which was planned for the North Asia sub-region, had to be postponed and was instead held in 2021 in a blended format. The first phase of the 2021 JTF programme consisted of virtual needs assessment meetings with young leaders from the Japan Teachers' Union, FMESU Mongolia, KTU Korea, and National Teachers' Association from Taiwan, followed by a series of planning meetings and ten training sessions. The participants decided to design the JTF North Asia training programme around skills enhancement for specific imperatives: handling and addressing member grievances, advocating fair working conditions, influencing decisions on matters of education, supporting members' professional development, involving more youth

and women in union work, and communicating more effectively with their members and the public. The participating unions in the JTF North Asia offered several webinars on the thematic issues they had identified, either independently or in partnership with another union, until relaxed travel restrictions made in-person training feasible. In August 2022, the young leaders met in person for their continuing training on the skills and knowledge necessary to lead the transformation of their unions, framed around the recommendations of the 2021 study *Union Renewal in the Education Sector*.

Development Cooperation

EIAP is committed to strengthening solidarity among EI affiliates, including between organisations in the Global South and the Global North, as well as South-South cooperation. Under this umbrella, EIAP supports several development cooperation programmes, with targeted activities promoting equality and the right of every person to quality public education and empowering education unions toward unity and transformation.

The EIAP Regional Committee has recently decided to continue and strengthen development cooperation activities aimed at attaining SDGs, enhancing the professional status of teachers, challenging privatisation and commercialisation, promoting youth and women in unions, upholding unity and collective strength, and fostering knowledge- and experience-sharing between education unions. Some development cooperation programmes in which EIAP affiliates participate are mentioned or discussed in the section “Equity and Inclusion” (p. X) as many of them, such as the AIFTO-CTF-Läraryörbundet Women’s Network Programme and the AIPTF-AEU Women’s Network Programme, are targeted at increasing women and youth representation within trade unions. Key developments under some of the other DC programmes in which EI member organisations in the Asia-Pacific are involved are as follows:

ACT-Läraryörbundet. Läraryörbundet has partnered with ACT for more than seven years to support the latter’s advocacy and lobbying efforts and deepen its union leaders’ and members’ gender awareness. The pandemic may have hampered the union’s activities, but ACT

continued to campaign primarily for the safe reopening of classes, beginning with a pilot test of targeted and limited face-to-face classes and calling on education authorities to provide teachers with digital resources for online teaching. Owing to pressure from the campaign, the government agreed to give laptops to over 120,000 teachers and a monthly communication allowance (although this policy was not widely adopted due to insufficient funding). ACT, through the ACT Teachers Partylist, also filed in Congress a bill seeking to increase the entry salary grade level of teachers, who, in the Philippines, are the only professionals still stuck, upon joining the workforce, at the Salary Grade 11, receiving roughly USD410 per month.

AIPTF-Canadian Teachers' Federation. This programme has helped increase the recruitment of new and young teachers in India, who are then given opportunities for on-going and continuous refinement of their educational competencies and skills.

SMP-Natow-Läraryförbundet. Since its inception, the partnership between the SMP-NATOW, an EIAP affiliate in the Philippines, and Läraryförbundet has focused on sustainable, democratic, and independent organising in all the country's regions. However, localised COVID-19 alert levels required NATOW organisers to adapt their activities to the different health protocols and travel restrictions in the cities and municipalities of the teachers they had targeted for affiliation. NATOW also continued to campaign against precarious employment, especially in the private sector, where most Filipino teachers and other education workers had come under threat of retrenchment during the pandemic. Amid worries that some of their collectively bargained benefits might be unduly revoked, the country's Labor Department failed to mobilise its tripartite education councils to monitor educators' status. NATOW then advised its affiliates to use school-level grievance mechanisms to seek dialogue with school management to bring to administrators' attention their demands and settle workplace disputes. Meanwhile, NATOW's higher-level lobbying efforts led, for one thing, to several tripartite consultations and social dialogues on the prioritisation of teachers in the government's COVID-19 vaccination drive.

SASK-OAJ Finland-EIAP Cooperation in Nepal and the Philippines. EI member organisations in Nepal began a campaign, "Unions' Initiatives for Trade Union and Education Rights" (UNITE) in cooperation with Opetusalan Ammattijärjestö (OAJ) – Trade Union of Education in Finland.

The collaboration aims to uphold decent work, social dialogue, and human and trade union rights, and advance Agenda 2030 and equality in all facets of Nepali education. From May to July 2022, EIAP affiliates in Nepal established the project's strategies. They prepared a brochure about the campaign that they later distributed to their union members across Nepal's 753 local governments. They invited representatives from the unions, the Ministry of Education, several UN agencies, and EIAP to a national forum in July 2022 to formally launch the campaign, in line with which a couple of national leadership training workshops were later held in August, followed by local leadership training and legislature forums in seven provinces throughout September. In the Philippines, Suomen Ammattiliittojen Solidaarisuuskeskus (SASK), the development cooperation organisation of the Finnish trade union movement, also initiated a project with EI member organisations in the Philippines.

AIPTF-Läraryförbundet Membership Education Programme. It runs in 11 states, aimed at building the capacity of women and young education unionists in unionism and recruitment by tapping into the expertise of the AIPTF's elected leaders. The activities under this programme included study-circles, awareness-raising initiatives, and leadership training sessions.

PGRI-EI Consortium Project. The consortium consisted of the Australian Education Union, the Japan Teachers Union, the Union of Education Norway, and Läraryförbundet of Sweden. Their cooperation aimed to develop the PGRI into a strong, independent, democratic, and sustainable trade union with increased membership, functional gender task forces, and thousands of fully trained union leaders.

AIPTF-AEU EFAIDS Project. It has helped successfully increase the number of learners completing basic education, prevent new HIV infections among teachers and students, eliminate discriminatory practices against girls, through continuous active engagement and community participation in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh.

AIPTF-Australian Education Union. This gender equality and leadership skills development programme has mainly trained women leaders on conducting membership drives, asserting the legal rights of women unionists, and combatting sexual harassment in the workplace.

Council of Pacific Education (COPE)-led Development Cooperation. With its partners, the NZEI, the NZPPTA, the AEU, and the IEUA, the

network provided support for union building activities to Friendly Island Teachers Union, the Kiribati Union of Teachers, and the Vanuatu Teachers Women's Network. The unions targeted trade union training for national executive leadership, including increasing youth and women representations. It has created scope for better union representation in meetings with government and other non-state actors and centred their inventions around SDGs 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality) and 8 (decent work and economic growth).

To promote its affiliates' further engagement with DC, EI published a handbook based on the global union federation's rich experience in implementing cooperation projects and intended for the use of all members, even those who have yet to get started in this area of work. EI regional offices, including EIAP, contributed insights to the DC Handbook, which was crafted around three key ideas: (1) recognise the value of collaboration among EI member organisations; (2) surmount cultural barriers and competing goals; and (3) broaden the network of cooperation partners.

In October 2021, EIAP hosted a webinar for its member organisations participating in EI DC programmes to discuss how relevant and practical the DC handbook would be in providing programmatic structure and identifying their needs. The 24 representatives agreed that the handbook offered step-by-step guidance for navigating the project cycle. It could assist partners in collaborating successfully and provide strategies for ensuring they have an equal voice in addressing any thorny issues regarding implementation or decision-making. EIAP noted the representatives' suggestions for the handbook's improvement and put them forward during a workshop with the EI Secretariat and other regional offices in March 2022.

In collaboration with Lärarförbundet and a chartered accountant, EIAP is also developing financial guidelines for EIAP programmes. The guidelines offer practical advice on managing funds, record-keeping, and reporting to streamline these processes for all DC programmes. Not only do these activities frequently require a lot of time and effort from the organisations involved, but some union leaders and managers, especially freshly elected treasurers with no prior experience, may also be unfamiliar with organising receipts, vouchers, and accounting approvals. The first draft of these guidelines has been completed and is undergoing revisions.

Growth

The cooperation between Lärarförbundet Sweden and ACT and NATOW in the Philippines has contributed to increased membership in ACT and NATOW. The ACT membership grew as activities on gender issues attracted more women to the union. During the pandemic, ACT's campaign for reduction of workload and for additional pay for teachers pressured the government to take action, making ACT popular among potential members. Meanwhile, NATOW's activities on sustainable organising, collective bargaining, and women's rights attracted three big organisations into its fore, thus increasing its membership significantly. Specifically during the pandemic, NATOW local union officers were deeply engaged in securing tenure and the protection of negotiated benefits and were able to reduce the probationary period for private teachers to two years, gaining them support from many private school teachers.

The PGRI-EI Consortium Project between the PGRI in Indonesia, AEU Australia, JTU Japan, UEN Norway, and Lärarförbundet Sweden has trained thousands of leaders on union skills, formed gender task forces, and contributed to increased PGRI membership.

The Membership Education Program implemented by All India Primary Teachers' Federation with the support of Lärarförbundet focussed on organizational development through capacity building of the organisation's leaders, recruitment of more members; improving internal communication and increasing participation of women and youth in the union's activities. Since 2018, the AIPTF trained more than 4000 leaders and members of AIPTF through more than 300 activities at state, district and block levels during the project cycle

The Canadian Teachers' Federation and AIPTF came together for a Professional Development Project which aims at improving the knowledge and skills of teachers by providing them experiences in innovative instructional strategies but also to improve their proficiency in professional duties in the school by transfer of learning directly to the school situation. This program has received recognition by many state governments for its content as well as innovative pedagogical approaches.

As a strategy to grow, the EI member organisations in the Pacific continue to work on the SDGs, equality, rights and democracy, increased

public funding, inclusive climate change mitigation strategy, reversing privatisation in education, and strengthening EI by promoting unity in education sector.

Partnerships and Communication



Towards achieving the goals represented by the strategic directions through the activities in this report, partnerships and communication have become valued tools in the work of EIAP, alongside capacity building, research, campaigns, dialogue, and engagement in the policy process. Working with partners within and outside EI, building alliances with them, and amplifying our common agenda on education and rights, the EIAP Regional Office and member organisations gained further visibility and recognition as actors in the education sector in the region, advancing the causes of learners, education workers, and the international trade union movement.

In its actions and statements, specifically during the pandemic, EIAP has also pushed the collaboration and solidarity with allies, aiming to gain more support for a comprehensive, holistic, and inclusive recovery from the pandemic and to secure decent work in education and beyond.

Partnerships

The EIAP Regional Office continued to forge alliances with and support other organisations it had long worked with on various programmes

to promote the welfare of learners, teachers, and education support personnel, protect trade union and human rights, and uphold democracy. It collaborated closely with the International Trade Union Confederation and global union federations, United Nations organisations, likeminded civil society organisations, and with union partners, networks, and sub-regional structures within EI. At specific events, such as the virtual celebration of World Teachers' Day in 2020, state leaders, trade union leaders, education and rights advocates, parents, students, and members of the academe also joined EIAP and EI affiliates in the region, lending their expertise as resource speakers or expressing solidarity with educators.

With the UN at the regional level, EIAP engaged specifically with the ILO, UNESCO, and UNICEF, with their representatives participating in events organised by the EIAP Regional Office and with the Regional Office and/or EIAP union leaders representing educators and presenting their concerns at the UN events, contributing to discussions on education such as through webinars for the public or for delegations of UN member states on wellbeing and school reopening during the pandemic, and providing feedback to draft reports on the education sector in the region. As a member of the UNESCO and UNICEF-led Regional Thematic Working Group on Education 2030+, which supports the work of Asia-Pacific UN member states towards SDG4, EIAP regularly participates in its meetings.

EIAP also represented education unions at the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference in 2022 and the annual gatherings of the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED2030) and the UN ESCAP's Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), where EIAP coordinated with GUFs on the labour sector interventions and in 2022 EIAP also organised a side event on supporting and investing in teachers. EIAP also represented educators at panel discussions and World Teachers' Day events organised by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Secretariat.

On various issues and advocacies on workers, trade union and human rights, democracy, fair trade, and public financing of services, among others, EIAP regularly collaborated with the ITUC, ITUC-AP, and regional offices of GUFs through planning meetings on the trade union movement response to pressing human rights concerns in the region, joint statements, informational webinars such as on the urgent rights

situation in Myanmar and the Philippines, networks such as Unions for Trade Justice, social media actions, and mutual participation in events under specific campaigns.

EIAP has become a member of the Asia-Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism (APRCM), a cross-constituency civil society platform established to ensure the inclusion and participation of all sectors and sub-regions in the Asia-Pacific in regional and global intergovernmental processes. At the annual Asia-Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development organised by APRCEM with ESCAP as a preparatory meeting to the APFSD, EIAP also actively participated, contributing to discussions and statements of the labour sector and on education.

As detailed in the different activities under the other strategic directions, EIAP also worked with FES Asia and FES Nepal, ActionAid, the Global Alliance on Tax Justice and the regional Tax and Fiscal Justice Asia, and the Asian People's Movement on Debt and Development in the implementation of projects.

In the Pacific, COPE further strengthened its linkages with a wide range of organisations, including the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, the Forum Education Ministers Meeting, the ILO and the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), UNICEF, the Fiji Trade Union Congress, and other non-government organisations working on education, gender, youth, labour, human rights, inclusiveness, climate justice, and the environment.

Within EI, EIAP worked closely with and promoted the cooperation among EI unions from and outside the Asia-Pacific, facilitated learning opportunities between unions, and contributed in bringing together unions in joint projects within their countries. EIAP also continued to support and work with the sub-regional structures COPE in the Pacific and the SAARC Teachers' Federation in South Asia and with the women's networks.

Communication

EIAP continued to improve its communication strategies on various channels to consolidate its affiliates, disseminate EI and EIAP advocacy messages, and amplify the messages of EI unions and partner organisations. Among EI member organisations in the region, EIAP's commu-

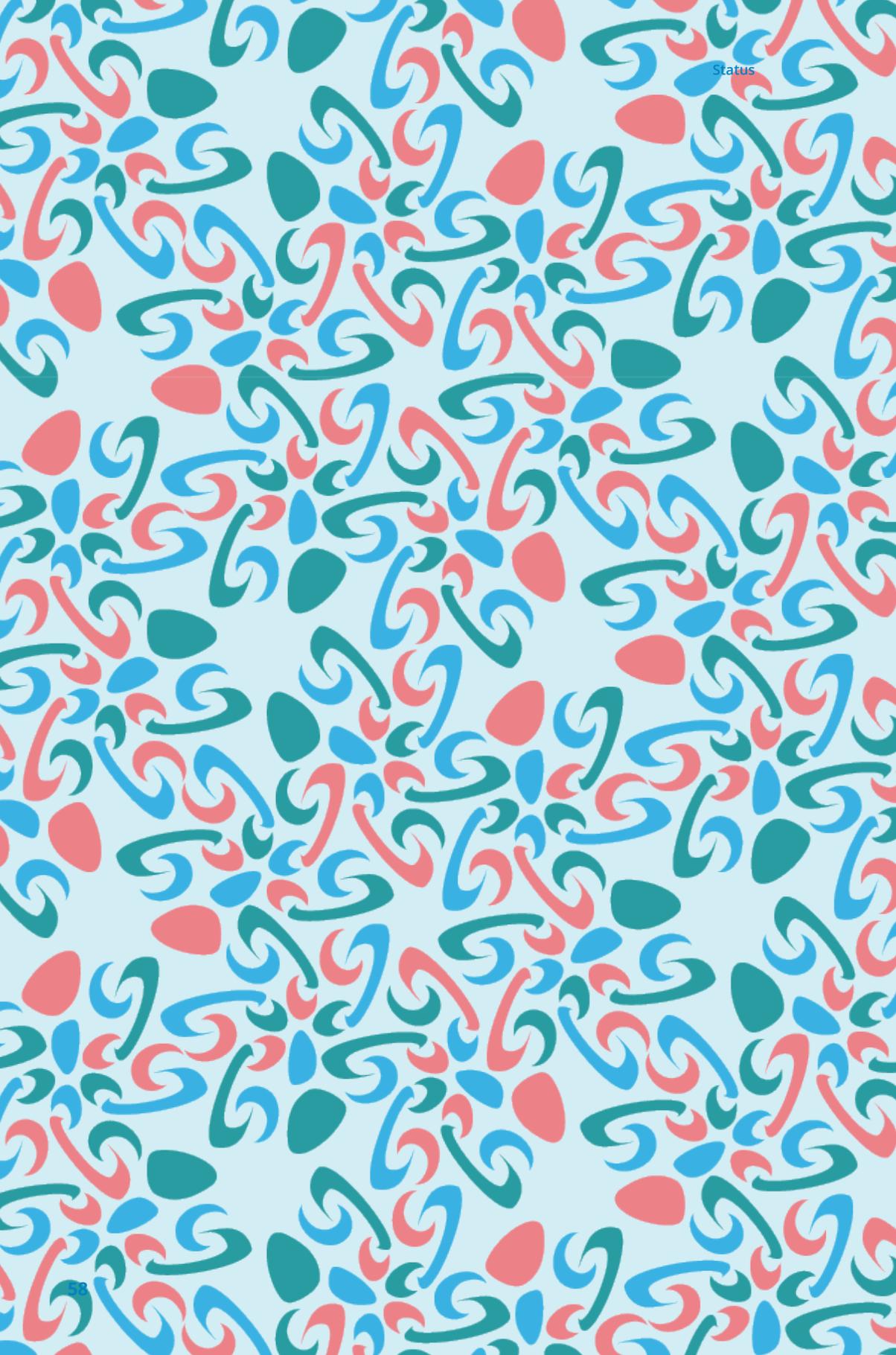
nications were primarily coursed through email, particularly in coordinating ongoing projects and updating on EI and EIAP activities and engagements.

Especially throughout the pandemic, maintaining the EIAP online communication channels became crucial, with the need to better connect with the unions, gather and share information on the situation of educators and students across the region, and engage the wider online public on EI and EIAP's work and gather their support. EIAP's social media presence is currently facilitated by the platforms Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and the regional subsite of the EI website. As of this writing, the Facebook page has 6,801 likes and 6,900 follows, while Twitter has 1,154 followers.

The updates on the social media platforms consist mostly of EI releases, EI and EIAP activity announcements, and shared content from EIAP affiliates, GUFs, UN agencies, and the media on developments in education, teachers' and other workers' rights and concerns, and the trade union movement. In turn, EIAP posts have also been shared by these organisations, often during joint events and projects. The platforms are also used to support EIAP affiliates' and partners' calls-to-action or campaigns, such as during so-called Twitter rallies, and to mark peak events and red-letter days, especially World Teachers' Day and International Workers' Day. Meanwhile, the regional subsite, managed by the EI Head Office, contains Asia-Pacific content published in the EI website. It is set to be replaced by the new EIAP website under development, which is expected to serve information, organising, institutional, and partnership purposes.

In terms of social media post performance and audience engagement (reach, clicks, comments, and shares), content related to three events stood out: (1) EI's 24-hour online World Teachers' Day celebration in 2020, (2) the EIAP climate conference for educators and education unionists in 2021, and (3) the launch of the ILO ROAP-supported study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and teaching in the Asia-Pacific in 2021. EIAP livestreamed the events and encouraged its affiliates and the participants to promote and share the event and publication materials with their own networks. Posts on the video contributions from member organisations for the 2020 World Teachers' Day also boosted the engagement with the EIAP social media in the months following the event.

ANNEXES



Annex A. Education International Asia-Pacific Regional Committee Statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Education International Asia-Pacific Regional Committee

Statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic

The year 2020 will be marked as a year that shook humankind to its core. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic is the most significant crisis the world has experienced since the 1918 Spanish flu that claimed an estimated 50 million lives. As of 4 May 2020, COVID-19 has infected over 3.5 million people and has led to the death of close to 250,000.

To contain COVID-19, governments globally have put in place measures, including amongst others complete lockdowns, closure of borders, restrictions in internal movement, imposition of social distancing, widespread testing for the disease, and isolation and quarantine of infected persons. The impact on the economy is projected to continue to be severe with massive unemployment, which will disproportionately affect marginalised sectors the hardest and will further deepen existing inequalities.

COVID-19 is not just a health or economic crisis but an education crisis as well. Schools in over 190 countries have closed which means 1.7 billion students, equivalent to more than 90% of the world's registered student population, and out of this total more than 1 billion live in the Asia-Pacific region. Over 63 million teachers and education support personnel have also been affected by the pandemic.

As we are grappling with the pandemic in this first phase, in the Asia-Pacific region, every effort is channelled towards the health sector, and the education sector, while significantly impacted, is being sidelined. The situation varies from country to country but three distinct national approaches and results are evident. The first cluster includes countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Taiwan and South Korea and the Pacific Islands, which managed to contain the mass spread of the virus and were able to take preliminary and

immediate measures to protect the population by introducing massive testing, implementing social distancing, promoting hygiene and the use of masks, and limiting non-essential gatherings. These countries were able to curb the virus without imposing strict lockdown measures.

The second cluster includes countries such as India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iraq, Bahrain and Nepal where strict measures of movement control and curfew were imposed, and adequate testing is yet to be conducted.

The third cluster includes countries such as Japan, Cambodia, Vanuatu and the Philippines where, on the pretext of containing the pandemic, states of emergency were declared thereby giving indefinite power and freedom to the Presidents/Prime Ministers to make unilateral decisions without consulting Parliaments or any relevant part of the government.

All these government measures have resulted in the closure of education institutions, disrupting learning and in the immediate term pushing educators to implement distant learning without necessary preparations and consultations, in turn exacerbating digital, rural-urban and gender divides.

While governments claim to encourage the use of digital tools to ensure that teaching-learning is not affected, the public education systems in most of the countries in the region have poor infrastructure for such initiatives. Teachers and students have insufficient access to online platforms, teachers have not been adequately trained in the use of technology, and students particularly from the marginalised groups and in the rural areas do not have access to the internet or to any electronic device in most cases. In addition, the teachers have been subjected to tremendous stress to adapt to new platforms, teaching methods and workload to ensure that students are not lagging behind. Another worrying trend being reported is that the most precarious education workers, contract teachers, teachers in private schools, and the ECE sector in several countries have not been paid their salaries, if they are not out of their jobs.

The educators and education unions across the region have been leading the fight against the pandemic by providing financial support, raising awareness, supporting students and parents, and making efforts to continue the teaching-learning process remotely. However, the majority of governments have failed to engage and consult educators

and their unions on the decisions regarding the pedagogy for distant learning.

For its part, Education International has at the onset of the pandemic provided guiding principles for education unions and governments towards a comprehensive response that takes into account the education sector, followed by a resolution by the Executive Board calling on governments and international institutions for global solidarity and the formulation and implementation of a human-centred response, and most recently a guidance to reopening schools and education institutions.

The deterioration of education quality, widening of inequalities in access to quality education, reduction in education funding and loss of education resources amid the pandemic will result in further slowing down the progress of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and may further encourage the rise of private, for-profit players in education.

While much remains uncertain in terms of the actual impact, duration and lasting effects of the crisis, it is definite that the crisis will drastically affect the low-income countries, in particular the most vulnerable and marginalised populations; increase gender disparities in education, especially disadvantaging girls; and intensify the divides among students.

In response, the Education International Asia-Pacific Regional Committee notes with urgent priority that it is the time to turn this global crisis into an opportunity to rethink the existing education policies, whose inadequacies are now being exposed and worsened, and to envision how the future of education and the teaching profession should look like after the pandemic. The Committee recommends:

Education International:

- to be at the forefront to guide and support member organisations with concrete policy recommendations to minimize the impact of the pandemic on learning;
- to continue facilitating the sharing among member organisations of good practices and knowledge in responding to the present challenges;
- to intensify its advocacy of upholding the rights of educators and all

workers and the protection of fundamental human rights;

- to develop policy guidelines on the use and integration of distance learning, ICTs and alternative delivery modes in teaching and learning during and after the pandemic, and on the importance of incorporating healthcare personnel in education institutions; and
- to closely cooperate with the international community in preparing and planning for the future of education and the profession post-COVID-19.

Member Organisations:

- to continue in leading the fight against the impact of COVID-19 on education and in supporting teachers, students and parents in navigating the present conditions;
- to stand for the protection of the terms, working conditions and rights of educators and education support personnel in all settings;
- to monitor the impact of the pandemic on the access to quality education and the rights of women and members of the LGBTI community, children, and vulnerable and marginalised sectors and to advocate for the protection of their rights and well-being in the relevant forums; and
- to remain vigilant against any funding cuts to education and to push for adequate and increased education funding to address the lost times and to bridge existing gaps among learners.

Governments:

- to ensure the safety, health and total well-being of students, teachers and education support personnel during the pandemic and to provide appropriate facilities and infrastructure for this purpose, including mental health support services such as counselling to ease the stress and uneasiness of students, teachers and education support personnel;
- to take effective measures to minimize the impact of school closures by instituting distance or alternative learning modes, in consultation with educators and education unions and with due consideration of

- resource deficiencies and existing inequalities among learners;
- to adequately fund the urgent needs to address the impact of the pandemic on learning and to increase the allocation for the education sector to keep on track in meeting SDG 4;
 - to strongly exercise their regulatory powers to prevent the entry of for-profit actors in education, providing low quality education and gathering data on learners for commercial interests;
 - to guarantee the recognition and protection of the rights and benefits of all education sector workers; and
 - to establish social dialogue with educators and their unions in the implementation of education and teacher policies and to engage all sectors and professions in consultation to ensure that actions during and after the pandemic are holistic, comprehensive and inclusive.

Annex B. Education International Asia-Pacific Regional Guide to the Post-Pandemic Landscape



Education International
Asia-Pacific Region
EIAP

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Education International Asia-Pacific Regional Guide to the Post-Pandemic Landscape

This document aims to assist EI member organisations in the Asia-Pacific region in their actions, practices and advocacy to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to guide their contributions to policy discussions and initiatives to protect and promote the right to quality public education in the aftermath of the present crisis.

Towards a recovery that is holistic, comprehensive and inclusive and that responds to the inadequacies that have been exposed and worsened by the pandemic, educators' unions are enjoined to continue advocating and working to:

- Strengthen public services and end privatisation and austerity measures
- Promote quality public education for all
- Promote equality and defend human rights
- Promote and defend democracy and solidarity

Educators and their unions at the forefront

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of our lives in an unprecedented manner and exposed the weaknesses of our education and healthcare systems and our lack of emergency and disaster preparedness. More than the disruptions it has caused, the pandemic has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives worldwide and has deepened the inequalities and inequities in societies. Amid these tragedies, authoritarian and populist regimes in the region have responded by instituting anti-democratic and nationalist policies, eroding people's rights, disregarding the rule of law and weakening international cooperation.

The pandemic continues to impact education systems, educators, learners and communities around the world. According to UNESCO, nearly 70% of the world's student population currently experiences varying ways of disruption in their learning. At its peak in April-May, the school closures had affected more than 90% of the student population—equivalent to more than 1.5 billion students, of which around 1 billion are from the region—and 63 million teachers. Depending on the magnitude of infections and the availability of infrastructure for alternative modes of teaching,

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countries in the Asia-Pacific have had different responses to adapt the education sector, including their policies in reopening schools and education institutions.

But, while the pandemic has highlighted the policy and resource gaps that have hampered the delivery of public services such as education, although through alternative modes, it has also tapped our readiness and capacity to support each other and fight for a common cause.

Along with the healthcare and essential services workers, educators and their unions have been at the forefront during the pandemic. Educators, education support personnel and their unions have been ensuring the continuity of learning for all learners at all levels. They have been adapting the pedagogy and materials to the new teaching-learning methodologies and environment, working longer hours preparing the lessons and reaching out to the most vulnerable and marginalised learners, and supporting parents and the community to engage in the learning of their children despite the challenges and uncertainties. In most countries in the region, educators and their unions have been performing these tasks even as governments have failed to consult and involve them in education policy decisions.

As countries gradually reopen schools and education institutions, EIAP has prepared a guide for its member organisations in the region to better advocate, support and prepare for the new reality post-pandemic. The following calls for unions to integrate in their advocacy and actions are based on the global [EI Guidance to Reopening Schools and Education Institutions](#) and also derive from the [EIAP Regional Committee Statement on the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

Strengthen public services and end privatisation and austerity measures

The pandemic stressed the importance of and need for strong, adequately funded public services, specifically health, education and social protection. As the disease spread, millions around the world were unable to properly access healthcare. As lockdowns were effected, halting the operations of most enterprises, millions lost their jobs without any recourse to social protection due to policies that have scaled back social welfare provisions, normalized precarious work conditions, and created barriers to public healthcare.

In Nepal, private school teachers who lose employment neither have welfare nor are covered by poverty reduction programmes. Similarly, in precarious arrangements, contract teachers and staff in the early childhood education sector in the Philippines, Nepal and Sri Lanka are facing unfair dismissal or have been left without salaries for months. Meanwhile, in the midst of the pandemic, teachers in India were denied inflation and cost of living allowance—about 17% of their basic salary.



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The lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and mandated health professionals in schools, supposedly basic needs and now crucial during the pandemic, further impedes the safe return of students and education staff to schools. Long-standing problems in developing countries in the region due to poor funding of schools and staff by adequate budgetary allocations, large class sizes must now be reduced for sufficient distancing between students, and previously low-paid and understaffed education support personnel positions—such as cleaning and maintenance staff, school nurses and psychologists, and teaching assistants—urgently need to be augmented and properly compensated. With these interrelations between different public services, government guarantee and provision become even more critical.

To this end, call on your government to:

1. Ensure the health and wellbeing of all, especially vulnerable and marginalised groups, including the poor, elderly, refugees, migrants, persons with disabilities, women, indigenous peoples and other excluded persons;
2. Increase public funding of public services to guarantee their provision to all and to enable them to respond more effectively in times of crisis;
3. End the austerity and privatisation policies that have worsened during the pandemic the living and working conditions of millions of already vulnerable groups; and
4. Universalise the access of workers to social welfare programs to enable them and their families to deal with the social and economic impact of the pandemic.

Promote quality public education for all

Schools and education facilities in many countries in the Asia-Pacific have been facing shortage of physical and digital infrastructures that would have enabled effective and smooth teaching and learning transitions during the crisis. Teachers in countries like South Korea, Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong and New Zealand quickly adapted to the new forms of teaching, using various online educational platforms to reach out to students and deliver learning materials. On the other hand, in countries like India and Nepal and the Pacific Island nations, students have been deeply affected with wide disparities and inequalities in access to education and learning materials and technologies, thus suffering from longer learning disruption. The pandemic has only further exacerbated the existing digital, rural-urban and gender divides among the student population.

The influence and strong push by private enterprises, capitalising on the confusions that have arisen from the sudden school closures and the lack of guidance from education authorities,



increased the provision of online learning and use of digital platforms to replace the real classroom experience and lessons taught by real teachers. In the haste to start online learning, the importance of interactions and relationships in learning was ignored, and children were exposed to digital threats like unwanted surveillance, cyberbullying, child exploitation and intrusion to their privacy.

As teachers in most countries in the region have not had adequate training on alternative modes of facilitating learning, they also now bear the pressure from having to swiftly move their teaching to online platforms and/or prepare paper-based self-learning materials. Teachers in developed and developing countries alike face increased workload and demands, affecting their physical and emotional wellbeing. These teaching conditions build on the reality even prior to the pandemic that there has long been a shortage of trained and qualified teachers, who are now much needed to facilitate learning in alternative ways while also ensuring students' health and safety.

As countries gradually reopen schools and education institutions, there have been governments asserting that there is 'no funding' for the education sector as all the funds have been either diverted to other purposes or already used in the recovery. Educators and their unions must push into the post-pandemic policy agenda the important role in the recovery effort of continuing learning and of rebuilding education systems to be inclusive and more responsive to the circumstances of learners, hence the urgency of ensuring the resources that quality public education requires.

To this end, call on your government to:

1. Ensure the safe and healthy reopening of schools and education institutions, following standards and practices that have been prepared in consultation with the educators and education unions;
2. Uphold the right to quality public education for all and the commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 on education;
3. Provide adequate funding for public education, and end the commercialisation and privatisation in/of education, including public-private partnerships;
4. Invest in the development of quality teaching and learning materials and resources, for both online and offline delivery, and with consideration of the needs of learners from vulnerable and marginalised groups;
5. Engage and collaborate with educators and their representative organisations in implementing initiatives to ensure the access to and quality of education;
6. Trust the professionalism and pedagogical practice of the education workforce; and



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7. Establish adequate professional support mechanisms and training programmes for educators, together with dedicated services for the psychosocial support and wellbeing of all learners and education personnel.

Promote equality and defend human rights

During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions lost their jobs, collective bargaining agreements and rights were revoked and changed without prior consultations with the concerned workers, educators and education support personnel were let go due to the precarious nature of their contracts, thousands of small business went bust, and the plight of millions of stranded migrant workers were ignored.

The deep-rooted discrimination against women, minorities, refugees and migrant workers persisted during the pandemic stronger. The marginalised and children from disadvantaged backgrounds were subjected to deeper inequalities; violence against children, young girls and boys, and women have soared. Reports of domestic violence in Nepal increased threefold. Job losses and economic displacement have also endangered children in the Philippines, potentially driving them to child labour. In some countries, migrant workers have been disproportionately infected by the coronavirus, while they also face discrimination and barriers in the access to public services, including healthcare. These various ways through which the pandemic has worsened the living conditions for the vulnerable and marginalised could also affect children's, especially girls', access to education and performance in school, possibly forcing them to dropout.

The most vulnerable and marginalised groups are the worst affected by the crisis and must be afforded the protections they have needed even before the pandemic, and towards an inclusive post-pandemic world, all fundamental human rights must be respected.

To this end, call on your government to:

1. End all forms of discrimination and formulate and implement policies towards this goal;
2. Promote gender equality and include it as a core principle of public policies;
3. Guarantee the equal and fair treatment of migrant and refugee workers;
4. Protect and ensure the recognition of the terms, working conditions and rights of all workers in the public and private sectors during and after the recovery from the pandemic;



5. Assess and address the impact of the pandemic on the access to quality education by children, women and members of the LGBTI community, persons with disabilities, refugees, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable and marginalised sectors;
6. Ensure adequate occupational safety and health services and equipment for educators and education support personnel who are at the forefront of the pandemic as education systems reopen; and
7. End precarious employment of educators and education support personnel at all levels and settings of education, as in the case of contingent staff, contract teachers, researchers and teaching assistants in higher education, and various positions in early childhood education and among education support personnel.

Promote and defend democracy and solidarity

At the onset of the pandemic, many governments in Asia-Pacific seized 'emergency powers' and took authoritarian measures in the name of containing the virus and responding to the 'emergency' situation. The governments of Japan, Cambodia, Vanuatu and the Philippines passed 'emergency' laws that give indefinite power and freedom to the Presidents/Prime Ministers to make unilateral decisions.

Many countries across the region implemented some form of surveillance or censorship. In Hong Kong and Bahrain, people in quarantine were issued electronic bracelets that track their movements. Drones hovered over some Indian neighbourhoods warning residents that they are being watched. In Malaysia, the government launched a tracker app.

Countries were neither able to coordinate information and actions to contain the spread of the virus nor to develop a global stimulus package for a comprehensive, collective recovery. The World Health Organization and other United Nations agencies have repeatedly called for solidarity and coordinated action among countries whilst recognising the lack of resources and cooperation to fight the pandemic.

All workers' organisations, including education unions, should remain vigilant against infringements of democratic rights and should continue to push for international solidarity as a cornerstone of successful recovery from the impact of the pandemic.



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To this end, call on your government to:

1. Advocate for the mobilisation worldwide of people from different sectors and professions and adequate financial resources to respond to the gaps created by the pandemic;
2. Promote and strengthen cooperation and collaboration among educators and education unions, from the Global North and the Global South, through Education International;
3. Uphold and abide by the international norms, standards and instruments to which they are signatories, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
4. Enforce the respect of human rights, rule of law and the democratic functioning of a society; and
5. Guarantee the respect and recognition of workers' unions, social dialogue and tripartite agreements and their importance in rebuilding a safer, healthier and more inclusive society.

Annex C. Education Unions' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic



EIAP Regional Committee meeting (virtual), 29 – 30 March 2021

Education Unions' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic raged globally and the world reeled from the shock and panic, EI member organisations in the Asia-Pacific wasted no time and got to work to support students, education workers and their communities by taking actions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

At the onset, unions took action to protect students and educators from getting infected and contributed in containing the spread of the virus in their respective countries. It later became evident that basic human and trade union rights also had to be defended, equity issues highlighted and advocated, and public funding of education promoted as privatised institutions lay ill to deal with the crisis. As some countries had successfully contained the pandemic, the need to immediately reopen schools safely became the priority.

Education International called on national governments to protect teachers and students in all countries, put workers and their families first, and safeguard their incomes and social protections. It proposed a global comprehensive response on preventive and remedial actions in consultation with the education unions, emphasising the deficiencies of distance education and the role of teachers and social interaction in schools in students' learning and development.

Protection from Infection

With infections and death rates soaring at the onset of the pandemic, many governments struggled to provide protective equipment and raise awareness on COVID-19. The National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) Malaysia, All-India Primary Teachers Federation (AIPTF), and the National Teachers' Association (NTA) Taiwan called for necessary training and protective equipment for teachers at the frontline.

The Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) Philippines, Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia (PGRI) Indonesia, Sarawak Teachers' Union (STU) Malaysia, Kurdistan Teachers' Union (KTU) Iraq, AIPTF India, Nepal National Teachers' Association (NNTA) and Sansthatag Vidyalaya Schickshak Union (ISTU) Nepal raised funds and helped provide protective equipment and raise awareness of teachers and the general public.



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In many Arab countries, except in Lebanon and Palestine, governments did not provide protective equipment to students and children to ensure safe reopening of schools.

Equity in Digital Education

Governments temporarily closed schools and educational institutions to contain the spread of the virus and started distant education through online or paper-based individual modes. The school closures and shift to online education disproportionately hurt vulnerable and disadvantaged students who relied on schools for a range of social services like health and nutrition and who did not have connectivity and/or devices to access online education.

The Australian Education Union (AEU), STU Malaysia, the NUTP Malaysia, and AIPTF India called on their governments to increase access to internet and equipment in consultation with the teachers' unions, as reports in these countries showed that a significant number of students from poor families in rural areas did not have access. The NUTP and the EIAP regional office provided a few online learning tools to students in Malaysia.

The Bahrain Teachers' Association developed a school reopening policy and mobilised support to teachers and students raising concerns about the effectiveness and equity of distance learning. The BTA received support from the EI Solidary Fund.

The NUTP, STU, AIPTF and the EI member organisations in the Pacific called for remedial actions as soon as it was realised that online education put considerable stress on teachers, parents, guardians, and students. The AIPTF demanded to abandon online classes and resume safe in-person teaching.

To assist teachers with online education, the PGRI launched an app, provided tools, and urged the government to distribute a guidebook on online education. The KTU Iraq started training teachers for effective online education but soon had to give up as not all students could participate.

Defence of Basic Rights

Due to the pandemic, millions lost employment, and many had no means to redress. Violations of human and trade union rights were rampant. Thousands of teachers especially in private schools lost employment and thousands did not receive salaries.

The KTU Iraq and ISTU Nepal, whose many members were laid off and were not paid salaries for months, campaigned for timely payment of salaries despite vile threats and intimidation. The PGRI urged government to pay teachers' allowances and 13th month salary, while the AIPTF affiliate in



Delhi campaigned and filed a petition against the nonpayment of salaries. The Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU) demanded salaries for those who continued to work in schools despite the school closures. In Kuwait, education personnel salaries were frozen, and across the Arab countries, many teachers received salaries with 10% cut during the pandemic.

The pandemic amplified existing inequalities and vulnerabilities of the marginalised groups, including women and girls, the elderly, and people of diverse sexual orientations. Violence against them and the rate of suicide among them have increased. It became evident that specific groups like women, minorities, refugees, and migrant workers suffer from unique forms of violence, and thus they should be extended corresponding protections.

The AEU joined the #EndCOVIDForAll campaign with the motto that “COVID-19 is not over until it is over for everyone”. The campaign urges the government to increase financial support to address the impacts on the world’s most vulnerable nations and communities.

Reopening Schools

As a growing number of countries considered reopening schools, it became important to ensure that schools are safe and do not become centres of infection. Education International released a guidance titled [Forward to School](#), calling public authorities to engage in continuous social and policy dialogue with educators and their unions; reach agreement and get clarity on the necessary health and safety measures in schools; make equity central to all plans; support physical and emotional wellbeing and recovery; and trust the professionalism of educators.

The Japan Teachers Union (JTU) negotiated increased public funding for personal protective equipment to all students of elementary and junior high schools and for learning support, postponement of fees for school trips, and additional teachers and learning support staff.

The ACT Philippines, NTA and ISTU Nepal, and KTU Iraq called on their respective governments to provide economic support for testing, protective measures and free treatment for all school workers. The ISTU also demanded that the government develop guidelines that are applicable to private schools as well.

Increasing Public Funding for Education

As the pandemic crippled all aspects of life and destroyed economies, it became apparent that public institutions and public funding are required to combat global issues. It was also exposed how essential it is to have policies in place that prevents commercial actors from exploiting the crisis for profit.



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Denouncing the World Bank's call for structural adjustment and deregulation to fight the pandemic, EI demanded increased public support to all public services and enhanced international solidarity. It must be noted that the recurring economic crises resulting from the policies of the World Bank and the IMF always require public funding to recover. EI called on the international finance institutions to provide debt relief to overcome the devastating effects of the pandemic and to enhance public spending on education and the SDGs.

The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) highlighted the closure of privatised early childhood centres when state subsidies stopped because of the COVID-19 pandemic, showing just how fragile and unsustainable the market model is in the education sector.

The AEU issued a statement calling for the increase in public education funding, highlighting that public education provides every child with the opportunity to reach their full potential, improves health and employment outcomes, boosts informed participation in society, and promotes equality.

Call for Dialogue with Education Unions

Despite many calls from EI affiliates, governments in many countries refused to consult teachers' organisations, including on COVID-19 matters, use of educational technology and reopening of schools. However, the teacher organisations from the Philippines to Nepal, from New Zealand to India, voiced their calls, which have now been proven right and up to the mark. This proves that it is the teachers who understand the education landscape and what their respective communities urgently need, and governments will stand to benefit from heeding teachers' voices.

A survey by the JTU found that many local authorities consulted JTU branches and affiliates on nationally negotiated "distribution of the public fund and provision for more teachers and education staff" but some municipalities did not consult the JTU affiliates. The JTU has informed the Ministry and local boards of the findings of the survey, aiming to increase consultation in the disbursement of fund.

Solidarity among Unions

Despite the challenges faced by all EI affiliates, EI development cooperation partners came together and established the COVID-19 Solidarity Fund to strengthen EI affiliates in dealing with the pandemic and to allow them to emerge stronger from the crisis. The fund offers technical and financial support to respond to the immediate and long-term challenges caused by the pandemic. It includes support to the teachers' trade union activities aimed at strengthening organisations, ensuring rights and drawing up policies. In the Asia-Pacific region, the ISTU Nepal and KTU Iraq benefited from the solidarity support.

Annex D. Education International Asia-Pacific Unions Call for Quality Climate Change Education for All

Statement | 12 October 2021

Education International Asia-Pacific Unions Call for Quality Climate Change Education for All

Education International member organisations in the Asia-Pacific urge governments, education unions in the region, and delegates to the 2021 United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP 26) to ensure quality climate change education (CCE) for all and to recognise its role in a just transition to a more sustainable world.

Climate change continues to upend communities, especially in the most vulnerable parts of the world, such as the Asia-Pacific. The latest assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reveals that, by 2040 or sooner, we will reach a 1.5-degree rise in global temperatures, the most ambitious target set in the 2015 Paris Agreement. But, while we may be locked into at least 30 years of catastrophic cyclones and flooding, severe droughts, heat waves and bushfires, we have a narrow window to course correct, through dramatic and concerted actions, and limit the warming beyond 2050.

At the recently concluded conference with the theme “Mobilising Educators for Climate Change Education”, educators and their unions in the Asia-Pacific stressed the urgency of climate action in the education sector as a key step, among many, to tackling the most pressing crisis confronting humanity today. Education is a long-term investment in shaping a global citizenry equipped with the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to sustain our planet for all biodiversity, living systems, and present and future generations. Yet decision-makers have yet to invest in transforming and strengthening education systems for them to live up to this goal.

The decades-long failure to prioritise universal CCE, based on science and with a strong civic action focus, has hampered efforts to prepare learners for future global crises and for their contributions to a sustain-

able future. It has undermined the participation of all stakeholders, including educators and unionists, in social and policy dialogues and in decision-making processes towards meaningful and inclusive climate action at the national, regional and global levels. Unless decisive steps are taken, such neglect will continue to weaken our resilience against ever more devastating impacts of the climate emergency.

Now, more than ever, it is imperative that we come together to put CCE on the agenda.

We, Education International member organisations in the Asia-Pacific, call on governments to:

- Formulate and implement climate action plans that include CCE in their commitments, with specific and measurable indicators to track progress and results, to maintain transparency and accountability to all, especially the education sector, and to include education unions in the conduct of review, development, monitoring and evaluation of national climate education programmes;
- Increase domestic investment in education as a precondition for quality CCE for all;
- Hold multi-stakeholder social and policy dialogues on climate education that provide space for teachers and education support personnel, as well as their unions; student organisations; and vulnerable groups, especially prioritising the voices and needs of indigenous peoples;
- Integrate CCE, as a compulsory holistic and interdisciplinary component, into curricula in primary and secondary education, as well as in early childhood education, TVET, further and higher education, and adult education;
- Invest in making schools, learning environments, education institutions, and their education infrastructure safe and climate-proof across every jurisdiction;
- Incorporate CCE into pre- and in-service training and education of teachers, as well as in their continuing professional development; and
- Fund training institutions and invest in teaching and learning resources for CCE that are gender-responsive, up-to-date, contextually and culturally appropriate, and sensitive to the development needs of teachers and students alike.

We call on COP26 delegations to:

- Enjoin all parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, including UN member states, to deliver on their commitments to CCE and Education for Sustainable Development in the Paris Agreement (article 12) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (targets 4.7, 12.8 and 13.3);
- Uphold the need for more ambitious policy provisions for climate education in countries' updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement;
- Promote greater international cooperation through development assistance and open access to resources and knowledge to supplement domestic investments in climate education, especially in developing countries;
- Urge policymakers to draft and develop a strategic plan for national activities and strategies — including clear monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms — to implement the UNFCCC's Action for Climate Empowerment programme, which focuses on education, training, public awareness, public participation, public access to information, and international cooperation on these priority areas of climate action; and
- Support the call of trade unions for just-transition priorities in the climate negotiations agenda.

We call on EI member organisations to:

- Lobby political leaders and policymakers to integrate quality CCE for all in national curricula and education programmes;
- Advocate within the NDCs process, ensuring that ambitions for climate education are not only present but also adequately raised in countries' updated climate action plans;
- Ally with student unions, community-based organisations, civil society organisations, indigenous groups, climate activists, and other like-minded groups through partnerships and outreach to amplify the advocacy for quality CCE for all;
- Assist in the capacity building of union members and teachers, such as by establishing mentoring networks and spaces for collaboration and exchange of know-how and resources to innovate pedagogical approaches to CCE;
- Strive to decarbonise their unions and withdraw their investments

in major polluting companies;

- Promote the transformation of education institutions, through a just transition, into workplaces that are sustainable and energy efficient, with all education personnel trained in clean technologies and processes; and
- Work with other trade unions regionally and cross-regionally to forge stronger solidarity, enlist each other's support for local and regional climate action initiatives, and encourage more members and allies into action.

Annex E. Towards Securing Decent Working Conditions for All in the Education Sector

Towards Securing Decent Working Conditions for All in the Education Sector

ABSTRACT

The school closures and the urgent shift to distance modes of teaching-learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have vastly affected the terms of employment and working conditions of teachers and education support personnel, extending their working hours and areas of work, exposing them to health and safety risks, and in some countries and sectors delaying and cutting their salaries and benefits if not dismissing them from their jobs. Drawing mainly from reports by and on member organisations of the global union federation Education International, this chapter gathers and examines how education workers in the Asia-Pacific have experienced their work during the pandemic and its implications on their terms and conditions. This documentation also highlights the plight of precarious workers, who have always endured insecurities and continue to be worst hit in the crisis. To situate the working conditions that have arisen or worsened, an overview of pre-pandemic employment in education in the region is provided. Informed by these experiences and the long-existing problems of work in education, policy recommendations towards decent conditions for all education workers are presented, which are crucial not only to a holistic, comprehensive and inclusive recovery post-pandemic but also to upholding the status of the profession and achieving quality education for all.

INTRODUCTION

The school closures and the urgent shift to distance modes of teaching-learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have vastly affected the terms of employment and working conditions of teachers and education support personnel, extending their working hours and areas of work, exposing them to health and safety risks, and in some countries and sectors delaying and cutting their salaries and benefits if not dismissing them from their jobs.

Schools have since reopened in majority of the Asia-Pacific, but at the peak of the closures in April 2020, 43 million teachers from the pre-primary to secondary levels (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UNESCAP], 2021) and many millions working in higher education and as support staff experienced varying ways and degrees of disruption in their work, which challenged them to deliver quality education through what could be referred to as emergency teaching. The education crisis brought about by the pandemic, however, persists amid the closures implemented anew due to surges in infections, the yet unknown magnitude of the effects on the students' learning and development, and the workers' rights and entitlements that have been suspended or revoked and the exacerbated precarity of work in specific sectors in education.

Drawing mainly from reports by and on member organisations of the global union federation Education International, this chapter gathers and examines how education workers in the Asia-Pacific have experienced their work during the pandemic and its implications on their terms and conditions. This documentation also highlights the plight of precarious workers, who have always endured insecurities and continue to be worst hit in the crisis. To situate the working conditions that have arisen or worsened, a brief overview of pre-pandemic employment in education in the region is provided. Informed by these experiences and the long-existing problems of work in education, policy recommendations towards decent conditions for all education workers are presented, which are crucial not only to a holistic, comprehensive and inclusive recovery post-pandemic but also to upholding the status of the profession and achieving quality education for all.

QUALITY OF EMPLOYMENT IN EDUCATION BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The extent of the impacts of the pandemic on education workers only builds upon the inadequacies and inequities in education systems that have long existed. Even prior to the pandemic, the Asia-Pacific already needed to accelerate its progress in the targets to meet Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” including in the related target under SDG 1 (No Poverty) on government spending on the essential services of education, health and social protection (UNESCAP, 2020). The underfunding of education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, primarily creates conditions of work that negatively affect teachers’ ability to provide quality education and in turn the status of teachers and the teaching profession: they work in overcrowded classrooms and receive minimal training while being paid inadequate salaries and hired under short-term, insecure contracts (EFA Monitoring Report Team, International Task Force on Teachers for EFA and Education International [EI], 2014). Teachers are “the key to achieving all of the SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda” but the teacher shortage is massive, especially in South Asia, and an estimated 32 million teaching positions will have to be filled in the region to achieve the goal of universal primary and secondary education by 2030 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016; UNESCO and UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2018, p. 117).

The results of EI’s last two global surveys on the status of teachers (Stromquist, 2018; Symeonidis, 2015), an assessment designed based on the principles of the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers (1966), the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1997) and key issues in the teaching profession, point to lagging salary levels, declining working conditions, and increasing instability with the rise in fixed-term and other contractual arrangements and employment in the private sector. Only about 21 per cent of the participating education unions in the 2018 survey indicated that their members were earning salaries comparable to those of other professionals with similar educational qualifications, and only 19 per cent said that the “salaries provide adequate and sustainable living standards” (Stromquist, 2018, p. 20). On work demands, unions in the Asia-Pacific cited having large class

sizes and dealing with students with high needs due to poverty, special needs and long absences. The working environment was linked by 41 per cent of the women teachers in a 2017 survey by the Japan Teachers' Union to their experiences with pregnancy and childbirth, as the same large-scale survey on reproductive health rights also revealed that more than half (53 per cent) of the women respondents had a pregnancy-related disorder (Norimatsu, 2019; Stromquist, 2018, p. 17). In an earlier UNESCO Bangkok Office (2015) report on teachers' status and rights in eight countries in the region, most of the case studies demonstrated a "need to ensure realistic workloads for teachers," which consider adequate time for all their duties, among other factors (p. 27).

Education workers' experiences differ by their contexts between and within countries, but the results of a recent independent inquiry (Gallop, Kavanagh and Lee, 2021) commissioned by the New South Wales Teachers Federation (NSWTF), a branch of the Australian Education Union, to look into developments in the work of teachers and principals since 2004 may resonate with workers in the rest of the region. According to the inquiry, teachers are working an average of 55 hours a week and their work has intensified due to the mix of these factors: "constant policy changes, significant increases in student need, rapid changes in technology, the expansion and reform of the curriculum, new compliance, administration, data collection and reporting responsibilities, and higher community expectations of what schools and teachers can do" (NSWTF, 2021a, p. 1; 2021b). At the same time, there has been no wage increase commensurate to the evolved requirements of their work and the salaries have trailed behind those of other professions. The inquiry thus recommends a salary increase of 10 to 15 per cent in the next two years to address this gap and the teacher shortages, along with adding two hours to non-teaching time, hiring more school counsellors and permanent teachers, and increasing the opportunities for teachers' career growth (NSWTF, 2021a).

Meanwhile, schools have increasingly employed education workers under precarious arrangements through short-term or non-permanent contracts that do not accord them civil servant status and do not provide pension, benefits and in some cases salary increases (Stromquist, 2018, p. 35; Symeonidis, 2015, p. 40). Within the public sector, this condition is a "hidden privatisation" that builds upon benchmarking or individualised targets-based measurement of teacher performance as

basis of performance-related compensation and flexible employment contracts (Ball and Youdell, 2008, p. 92). In higher education, the casualisation of the teaching force also tends to create a stark difference in institutional status between contingent faculty and their tenured counterparts. In Japan, for instance, most public and private universities do not expect them to focus on research outside of their teaching duties, in contrast to tenured faculty (Stromquist, 2017, pp. 15–16). Similarly, in the case of education support personnel, respondents in a 2019 survey in seven case study countries shared that, because of their non-permanent employment, they “felt their jobs were very precarious . . . [or] at the mercy of changing government policy, or because their roles were dependent on funding or student numbers” (Butler, 2019, p. 46).

Anecdotes and surveys (e.g., Fraser, 2020; Heffernan and others, 2021) abound hailing and appreciating education workers for their professionalism, dedication and creativity in performing their duties during the pandemic, but such stories should not serve to obscure the reality that the unprecedented scale of the crisis would have been mitigated if school infrastructure, basic services and teacher training had been adequately provided. Internet connectivity and devices facilitate the continuity of distance teaching-learning, but in South Asia, only 55 per cent of primary schools had access to electricity, 20 per cent to computers and 11 per cent to the internet. Endangering the health and safety of students and education workers, only 51 per cent of primary schools in South Asia had basic handwashing facilities, while in Southeast Asia basic drinking water was accessible in only 67 per cent (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020, p. 8). Women teachers and students are worse affected by this lack of facilities, as their safety is also threatened when they have to walk far to access them, as documented in some countries in Africa (Stromquist, 2018, p. 16).

Similarly, professional development in the use of digital technologies in education has been raised by educators as essential (Bangs, 2020; Stromquist, 2018), yet even the advent of the present emergency did not prompt immediate support to educators. A global EI survey of its affiliate unions at the onset of the pandemic revealed that while 70 per cent of the respondents reported that teaching was being carried out using online means, less than a third (29 per cent) were

being supported with access to the appropriate resources (EI, 2020b, p. 6). From a high-income country, the Bahrain Teachers' Association shared that they have a "school of the future" project initiated in 2011 with a distance learning component, but the teachers found out that its budget had been spent on infrastructure and platforms, and their training was lacking (EI Asia-Pacific Region [EIAP], 2020b, p. 14). Notably, based on union responses to another EI survey (Colclough, 2020, p. 28), the Asia-Pacific out of all regions least covered digital competencies in initial teacher education for all education levels.

THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON EDUCATION WORKERS

It is in this context that the pandemic hit, worsening the conditions for teachers and education support personnel and putting at risk not only the learners' right to education but also the education workers' rights. Referring to teachers' "trade union rights and the right to participate in decision-making processes," United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education Koumbou Boly Barry said in her report that they "are not a luxury that may be exercised only in uneventful times" (United Nations, Human Rights Council [UNHRC], 2020, p. 13). The reports of and on EI member organisations in the Asia-Pacific, however, provide evidence that those and other rights meant to ensure decent work have been suspended, disregarded or violated in different countries and sectors, in some cases under the guise of enforcing pandemic response measures.

Educators faced or endure the confluence of impacts of the pandemic on their compensation and job security, safety and health at work, and trade union rights, but the experiences that this section gathers are not only of individual challenges but also of unions' actions to safeguard their members' and learners' rights and wellbeing, as they have been doing even before the pandemic.

COMPENSATION AND JOB SECURITY

In a survey conducted by EI (2020b) on 20 March to 9 April 2020 when the school closures and other measures had just been imposed, the responding EI member organisations shared that education workers had seen their compensation and benefits delayed or cut or their contracts not renewed, or they had been furloughed (put on unpaid leave) or

temporarily or permanently dismissed. The government responses “significantly affected” the working conditions of these groups, from most to least reported by the unions: (1) education workers in private institutions, (2) higher education personnel and researchers, (3) supply/substitution teachers, (4) early childhood education (ECE) workers, and (5) immigrant teachers (p. 13), which are groups with mostly precarious employment arrangements even prior to this crisis. (*See next section for discussion on precarious workers.*) Regardless of the sector they work in, teachers on temporary contracts and education support personnel also suffered negative impacts on their remuneration and/or employment situation.

Teachers on permanent contracts, however, including those in the public sector who traditionally have protected conditions, were not spared. The EI (2020b) survey respondents turned out to be right to be concerned about possible changes in their conditions in the following months of the pandemic, as cases in the Asia-Pacific show. In Iraq, the Kurdistan Teachers Union protested the almost half-year delay in the payment of teachers’ salaries in 2020, which was later slapped with a 21-per cent cut (EI, 2020d, 2021a). In addition to similarly speaking out on the delay with teachers’ salaries of up to five months in some states, the All India Primary Teachers’ Federation (AIPTF) called on the government to unfreeze the year-long fixing to 2019 rates of the dearness allowance (cost-of-living adjustments) that teachers and other public employees receive, purportedly due to budget constraints caused by pandemic-related spending (Seth, 2020; Singh, 2020a, 2020b). Meanwhile, in Sri Lanka, the Ceylon Tamil Teachers’ Union opposed the government’s attempt to reduce the public employees’ salaries without their consent and the later request for them to contribute a month’s salary to the pandemic fund (EIAP, 2020b, p. 23).

Where workers were required to work extra days to adapt to distance teaching-learning and attend to additional tasks, claiming the proper compensation has been proving difficult. In the Philippines, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) continues to press the government for the grant of the corresponding service credits (leave entitlement) and payment of the 25 per cent overtime premium over a year since public sector educators rendered around 80 extra days of work in an extended, 13-month school year (Hernando-Malipot, 2021a, 2021c). As in the case of workers in other countries in the region, and

as schools in the Philippines are among the longest to remain closed (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2021), they have also been demanding increased teaching allowance for the internet, communication and printing expenses necessary for distance teaching, which they have had to cover out of pocket (EI, 2021b).

SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

As teachers were already grappling with burdening duties and workload before the pandemic, the urgent and additional demands caused by the school closures and the pandemic in general have only contributed to the further deterioration of their working conditions. Educators’ health and safety are threatened specifically by their high risk of exposure to the virus, extended working hours and responsibilities, and mounting psychosocial health concerns. With all these pressures on workers, the pandemic has brought to the fore the issue of wellbeing, which had “relatively little attention before the crisis” (EI, 2020c, p. 50) yet remains unevenly addressed among countries throughout the pandemic.

Slow and inadequate response to adapt schools to the pandemic and the pre-existing poor integration of health in schools, apparent in the lack of supposedly basic provisions of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and health professionals, impelled education unions to act to safeguard their members’ and learners’ health and safety. A few months into the pandemic, ACT in the Philippines set up a hotline to hear complaints and provide support to teachers who were required to report to school physically amid a “lack of essential health measures” and no provisions for supplies such as facemasks and for health and sanitation personnel and equipment (ACT, 2020a, 2020b). Noting that teachers are not “quarantine experts”, the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union pressed for the deployment to schools of dedicated staff for the new responsibilities that had been assigned to teachers, including participating in the sanitation of classrooms and the operation of urgent care programmes, and reporting on students suspected to be infected (Bahk, 2020; EIAP, 2020b, p. 12). Unions in different countries, such as the AIPTF in India, All Ceylon Union of Teachers in Sri Lanka, and National Alliance of Teachers and Office Workers in the Philippines, called for or joined efforts in the installation of the necessary facilities as precondition to the reopening of schools (EIAP, 2020b; Singh, 2020a).

Public sector education workers in many countries in the region are usually engaged in state and community activities outside teaching, while schools are also used as relief centres in emergencies, but the workers' assignments during the pandemic have particularly endangered their health and for some led to death. On mandatory elections duty in the state Uttar Pradesh in India when the country was in the middle of the worst surge in infections in 2021, over 1,600 primary school workers died of COVID-19, the figure excluding secondary level educators and other public employees (Pandey, 2021, para. 12). Throughout the local poll activities—from training to preparing and holding the voting and to counting the votes, all gathering thousands of people, the Uttar Pradeshiya Prathmik Shikashak Sangh (2021) repeatedly wrote letters to the election authorities at first seeking the provision of protective tools and enforcement of protocols and thereafter requesting postponement of the polls, to no avail (People's Archive of Rural India, 2021). Education workers had also been assigned to distribute food rations, conduct contact tracing, and manage quarantine centres, including schools being used as makeshift sites (Baruah, 2020; Kumar, 2020). In India and Nepal, deaths of workers due to infection linked to quarantine duty were also reported (EIAP, 2020b, p. 16; Nair and Jain, 2021).

In continuing teaching-learning through different periods of the pandemic and in many countries in the region, teachers and their unions noted how workloads have increased, working hours have been extended, and workers have been under immense pressure and stress. When governments announced school closures, teachers had to quickly adjust to the remote setup, in most cases without previous training, producing and/or gathering digital materials for online, TV or radio delivery or paper-based learning kits for distribution, or both where technologies are not equally accessible or provided to all learners. Educators have also had to devise more alternatives to reach out to students, as in the case of members of the Assam State Primary Teachers' Association, a branch of the AIPTF, who recorded audio lessons and sent them through messaging platforms, and of the Nepal Teachers' Association who monitored students' health and studies through the "Every Home a School" campaign (EI, 2020c, p. 38). Where schools were reopened, teachers such as in parts of Australia and in South Korea, facilitated a hybrid of in-school and remote classes (EI, 2020c, p. 22; EIAP, 2020b, p. 12), which entail different preparations.

Teaching-learning has also involved more coordination with students and parents, teachers' training on or self-learning of educational technologies, and implementation of health and safety measures in schools, among other related tasks and alongside a multitude of job-related stresses (see EI, 2020c, p. 51). Meanwhile, a survey (Sedgwick, 2020) by the Tertiary Education Union in New Zealand in the early months of the pandemic found that, amid pandemic-induced stresses and the overwhelming workload, educators constantly worried about not "doing enough" to fulfil work expectations, while their institutions operated under "business as usual" (pp. 5, 12). These pressures have worse affected women educators, as women in the region have disproportionately borne the emotional and mental brunt of the crisis and took on more unpaid and time-consuming work, and have their resources hit the hardest. based on surveys at the onset of the pandemic (UN Women, 2020). In response to the increased demands on workers, teachers and their unions in many countries in the region have called for reduced class sizes and workload, adjustments in curricula and school timetables, adequate rest, proper training on the use of technologies in education, additional personnel and resources for educators and learners, and psychosocial support, and for the prioritisation of educators in vaccination to minimise the possible disruption in schools in the event of surges in infections (see EIAP, 2020b; Henebery, 2021; Hernando-Malipot, 2021b; Mohamed Radhi, 2020; Tan, 2020).

TRADE UNION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Education workers in the region have experienced how "periods of crisis tend to reinforce authoritarian and top-down attitudes" (UNHRC, 2020, p. 13), as many governments attacked unions and their rights and limited their participation in decision-making on pandemic responses, including in relation to salaries and working conditions. The Asia-Pacific also remained the second worst region for workers' rights (International Trade Union Confederation, 2021), and in countries such as Cambodia and the Philippines harassment and intimidation of education unionists continued.

Citing emergency defence laws during the pandemic as justification for freezing public sector salaries, the Jordanian government reneged on a pay hike it had promised teachers in 2019 as a concession following

a month-long strike led by the Jordanian Teachers' Association (Tadros and Reals, 2020). When the union mounted massive street protests in July–August 2020 against the government's backpedalling, the government shut down the union for two years and arrested 13 of its board members, which UN human rights experts called “a serious violation of the rights to freedom of association and expression” (UN News, 2020), and jailed hundreds more of protesting teachers for supposedly breaching anti-coronavirus bans on public gatherings. Earlier in 2020, Iraqi authorities brutally dispersed the peaceful demonstration of education workers in the Dohuk Governorate in Kurdistan over the months-long delay in the payment of their salaries and arrested over a hundred of the teachers, many of them injured (EI, 2020d).

In New South Wales in Australia in late 2020, when the state government was allowing other much larger gatherings, the right to protest would have also been restricted under the pretence of enforcing health measures. The Supreme Court upheld the right by denying the application of the police to prohibit the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) from holding a rally against funding cuts in higher education, planned to be held with precautions and physical distancing (NTEU, 2020).

Where a government has delegatised a union, repressing its members and violating their rights, the mechanisms for dialogue that are even more important during a crisis are limited. In the case of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, it had to maximise alliances with civil society organisations, use various communication channels with members of Parliament, and engage social media for its causes to be heard. The strategy proved successful when the union secured from the Ministry of Education the permission for teachers to work from home and teach from there remotely instead of doing it from school as initially required (EI, 2020c, p. 11; EIAP, 2020b, pp. 13–15).

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CLOSURES ON PRECARIOUS WORKERS IN EDUCATION

As the pandemic exacerbated the conditions of education workers, it has laid bare the extent of how vulnerable workers are under temporary contracts and casual employment, which by design afford them limited or no access to social protection during crises. Schools closed and, in many countries in the region, workers in ECE and higher education

and in private institutions, where such precarious work arrangements are primarily exploited, were left with cuts and non-payment of their salaries, layoffs, and uncertainties in their continuing or future employment in education.

The ECE sector has generally suffered from lower government investment than other levels of education and has a higher concentration of private providers, thus ECE institutions struggled to sustain adequate operations, provide guidance and tools for distance teaching-learning, and maintain the salaries and positions of workers (UNESCO Bangkok Office and UNESCO Dakar Office, 2021, pp. 10, 29). Rapid regional personnel surveys in April–July 2020 found that although more than half of the pre-primary teachers surveyed in 24 Asia-Pacific countries noted that their entire staff remained at work despite the closures, just over 50 per cent said their salaries were protected under social security measures (p. 17). Unfair dismissals and non-payment of salaries for months were reported among contract teachers and staff in ECE in the Philippines, Nepal and Sri Lanka (EIAP, 2020a, p. 2).

In Nepal, the Institutional School Teachers' Union continues to call the governments' attention to the plight of the over 50,000 or one-third of private school workers who have not received their salaries from the start of the pandemic (H. K. Thapa and M. Phuyal, personal communication, July 29, 2021; prevails up to this writing), showing how unstable employment is in for-profit private institutions relying on student fees for their operations. Only around 30 per cent of the private school workers were compensated based on government regulations, while the rest were not paid their regular salaries, in most cases educators who were distant teaching. In 2020, over 3,000 workers were dismissed, and among those who are still employed under no-work, no-pay arrangements, the worst affected have been education support personnel, especially those whose work depend on schools being open, such as drivers and sanitation staff. The clamour for federal government provision of salary allowance had been ignored and referred to the local governments (Lama, 2020), thus among the union's demands is the mandatory enrolment of private education workers in a social security fund (EI, 2020e).

The experience of sessional instructors and other casual teaching staff in Australian universities during the pandemic further illustrates their precarity during crises. They were the first to be let go during the

initial lockdowns, with 10,000 positions lost by late 2020, according to a report commissioned by the NTEU (Littleton and Stanford, 2021, p. 2). This workers' instability, however, applies to the higher education sector in general—similarly underfunded and, in the case of Australia, driven by international student fees, as the over 34,000 permanent or full-time positions cut in the first half of 2021, accounting for 84 per cent of job losses in the sector that year, were from public universities. Meanwhile, as permanent positions were lost, casual staff were rehired, fuelling greater casualisation in higher education. In addition to the reliance of universities on casual employees, it has come to light during the pandemic that wage theft is widespread, through such exploitative practices as not properly compensating marking student assignments, not paying for other work-related tasks, and misclassifying work so that lower rates could be paid (Barnes, 2020). Following the NTEU's two-year investigation into various forms of wage theft by private higher education providers, three institutions were compelled to repay millions of dollars to hundreds of casual workers in 2020, and at least seven other universities were under investigation (Evans, 2020, p. 5).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS DECENT WORK FOR ALL IN EDUCATION

As the impact of the pandemic on education workers in the region not only exposed but also worsened their already deteriorating terms and conditions even before the pandemic, the agenda towards decent work for all workers in education should derive from the calls that educators and their unions have advanced over the years. Educators' compensation and job security, safety and health at work, and rights have been suffering through the inadequacies and inequities in the sector brought about by the chronic underfunding and the expanding commercialisation and privatisation in/of education and public services. Within these systemic conditions, the educators' experiences summarised in this chapter have shown how the rights, resources and support they have defended and demanded have become crucial to their and learners' overall wellbeing during the present crisis.

Education systems will then have to ensure such rights and provisions in rebuilding from the pandemic and in preparing to respond to future disruptions in teaching-learning, including due to the effects of

climate change. As it had been before the pandemic, the important lesson remains that educators are irreplaceable. A “holistic, comprehensive and inclusive” recovery post-pandemic (EIAP, 2020a, p. 1) thus requires that educators have decent working conditions, which in turn contribute to upholding the status of the teaching profession and ultimately to working towards achieving quality education for all. To these ends, the following recommendations are put forward:

Adequately fund all levels of public education. To guarantee the rights of education workers and learners at all levels, governments must allocate 4–6 per cent of gross domestic product or at least 15 per cent of their public expenditures to education, following the Incheon Declaration’s benchmark (UNESCO, 2016, p. 67).

Protect the terms, working conditions and rights of all education workers at all times. Crises should not be an excuse to unilaterally suspend or revoke or to violate the right of workers to decent work. As the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation (1966/2016) stipulates, “salaries and working conditions for teachers should be determined through the process of negotiation between teachers’ organizations and the employers of teachers” (p. 35).

End the precarious employment of teachers and education support personnel at all levels and sectors and provide all workers with social protection and proper remuneration. Policies that enable the casualisation and precarity in education must be repealed, and mechanisms to enforce the right to social protection in all contingencies (see ILO, 2020; ILO/UNESCO, 1966/2016, pp. 42–44), including sickness, must be established or made accessible to all education workers.

Tighten the regulation of private education providers. Where regulations of private schools exist, they usually do not involve the regular monitoring of compliance with labour laws, while to begin with private workers in many countries do not enjoy similar protections of their rights as those in the public sector.

Conduct inquiries on the nature and conditions of work of teachers and perform equity audits of institutional practices and working conditions. The assessments of teachers’ working conditions at a national or local scale would provide the information on whether workers’ rights are upheld and the bases to enact policies to improve the status of teachers. On the other hand, the equity audits would

investigate how policies and practices further disadvantage vulnerable groups among educators in terms of working conditions and access to resources and opportunities (see sample questions in EI, 2020a, pp. 14–18).

Make every school a health-promoting school. Introduced in 1995 but to date widely implemented in only a few countries, this approach recognises the relationship between health and education, thus aiming “to make all schools places that promote, protect and nurture health; that contribute to wellbeing, life skills, cognitive and socioemotional skills and healthy lifestyles in a safe learning environment” (Ghebreyesus and Azoulay, 2021, p. iv). In keeping with its standards, governments must assign to every school qualified health care professionals, including psychosocial services staff, and provide basic health facilities.

Provide adequate resources and professional support to teachers and education support personnel. Ensuring that education workers are well resourced and well supported is an investment not only in educators and their wellbeing but in quality education for all learners. Especially considering the needs of educators from vulnerable and marginalised groups, education institutions must provide the resources and opportunities for educators’ continuing professional development.

Engage in social and policy dialogue with educators and their unions. The involvement of education unions in the decision-making in matters that affect working conditions and policies in education is important, especially during and in rebuilding from crises. Unions (e.g., see EIAP, 2020b, pp. 9–10) reported a better pandemic response when they had a positive engagement with the government.

In pushing this agenda for decent work for all teachers and education support personnel, education unions in the region are recommended to:

Continue to stand for the rights of all educators. Unions must still monitor the impact of the pandemic on workers and learners, amplify their campaigns for better and more accessible public services and quality education for all, promote equality and union solidarity, and defend rights and democracy—all necessary conditions for the respect of workers’ rights.

Systematically and comprehensively document rights viola-

tions. Unions should be guided by proper, complete, accurate and up to date information on the gaps between decent work and the policies and practices in the profession. Such evidence base—from first-hand accounts and testimonials to records and all manner of paper trail—lends credence to unions’ advocacy plans, awareness-raising initiatives, contributions to social and policy dialogue, and cases to seek redress and hold duty-bearers accountable for their violations.

Engage with the trade union movement and the broader public in advancing decent work for all workers. In solidarity with workers from other sectors and in collaboration with other stakeholders, calls for a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive recovery from the pandemic can gain more support and, through these efforts, secure decent working conditions for the education sector and beyond.

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Annex F. Education International Urgent Action Appeals Pertaining to Asia-Pacific Countries, 2018–2022

Education International Urgent Action Appeals Pertaining to Asia-Pacific Countries, 2018–2022

DATE	SUBJECT
18 November 2019	Red-tagging and anti-union repression in the Philippines
30 January 2020	Call for solidarity with Australia
10 February 2021	Solidarity with the trade unions and workers of Myanmar in their fight for democracy
8 April 2021	Support education workers fighting for democracy and free education in Myanmar
20 October 2021	Dissolution of the Jordanian Teachers' Association, dismissal of teachers and obstruction of union work
4 November 2021	Dissolution of the union movement in Hong Kong
14 December 2021	Solidarity with Afghanistan
8 March 2022	Tonga volcanic eruption and tsunami
13 May 2022	Solidarity with Afghanistan
17 June 2022	Free jailed teacher unionists in Iran





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