



# Evaluation of UNICEF Contribution to Teacher Development and Improved Learning Outcomes

## Good Practice Note 2: Advocating for teacher rights and welfare to support education for all children



By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

### Advocating for Teachers' Rights & Welfare Why it matters

#### Supported & respected teachers

better learning environments






quality education  
& children's well-being



need for rights, fair conditions & equal opportunities

#### UNICEF Good Practices

-  **Advocacy:** Evidence for teachers' rights & welfare
-  **Support:** Strengthening teacher resilience & well-being
-  **Equity:** Addressing teacher workforce inequalities



© UNICEF/UN0259898/Antoine Raab

## Introduction

Teachers are essential to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which commits to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030. SDG Target 4.c calls for a substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers, recognizing that teachers are key to improving children's learning outcomes. While there has been progress in the last decade, the supply of qualified teachers remains a pressing concern worldwide fuelled by a range of issues that include the working conditions and status of teaching as a profession as well as issues around teacher capabilities, qualifications, and motivations.

This document is one in a series of three good practice notes featuring good practices for designing and implementing programmes to support teacher development for improved learning outcomes. The topics presented in these good practice notes are:

- ▶ Working collaboratively with middle-tier actors on systems strengthening efforts and engaging school leaders and communities.
- ▶ Advocating for teacher rights and welfare to support education for all.
- ▶ Utilizing digital tools to accelerate teacher development initiatives so every child learns.

## Background

Teachers are fundamental to achieving quality education and ensuring children's well-being. Advocacy for teacher rights and welfare is critical, because teachers are the most significant school-related factor directly impacting the learning outcomes and overall development of children.<sup>1</sup> When teachers feel supported and respected, they are better equipped to create a positive and effective learning environment for their students.

Many countries face significant teacher shortages that impede learning. Addressing teacher rights, including improved working conditions, and equal opportunities for professional development and advancement, helps attract and retain qualified teachers to ensure every child has access to quality learning. While many factors contribute to the challenges teachers face, research and evidence that elevate teachers' voices are essential to inform policy development that is grounded in the realities of teachers' experiences.

UNICEF Innocenti's Data Must Speak initiative emphasises the importance of understanding teachers' perspectives and motivations such as student success, professional development opportunities or the desire to create a positive learning environment. The initiative draws on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive view of factors that influence learning outcomes, including 'positive deviance' research that shines light on how some teachers have achieved exceptional results in challenging environments. The approach recognizes teachers as key agents of change and acknowledges their valuable insights as co-creators of evidence-based solutions tailored to their needs and local realities.

1 Chetty, R., Friedman, J.N. and Rockoff, J.E. 2014. Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood. *American Economic Review* 104(9), pp. 2633–2679. doi: 10.1257/aer.104.9.2633.

## Good Practices: Advocating for Teachers' Rights and Welfare

The examples below describe how UNICEF has worked to enrich the evidence base to inform advocacy for teacher rights and strengthen learning outcomes for children. In addition, they show how the engagement with teachers to understand their perspectives can support governments and other

stakeholders to address systemic issues and create a more enabling environment for the profession and educational communities:

- ▶ The **use of research and evidence to inform advocacy** for teachers' rights and welfare.
- ▶ Efforts to **strengthen teacher resilience and emotional well-being**.
- ▶ Support to **address gender inequalities** in the teaching profession.

### COUNTRIES: COTE D'IVOIRE, GHANA, SERBIA

#### Research and Evidence to Inform Advocacy for Teachers' Rights and Welfare

**Cote d'Ivoire** – UNICEF Data Must Speak research identified the need to address the underrepresentation of women in teaching and leadership positions and the potential positive impact on girls' academic performance. The research found girls tended to perform better on the end-of-primary exam when taught by female teachers, an effect not observed for boys, pointing to a need to better understand the gender dynamics between teachers and students and how these may influence learning outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

**Ghana** – Qualitative research has supported a better understanding of teacher motivation to inform advocacy efforts for systems strengthening. Commissioned by UNICEF, a national motivation study explored structural and psychological drivers of teacher engagement. The study revealed that teachers' motivation was closely associated with their working conditions whereby workload, leadership support and recognition emerged as central themes for reform. Community engagement was also identified as a motivating factor by teachers interviewed as part of this evaluation, as one teacher voiced: [The parents' commitment motivates us...I have confidence in my teaching because of family engagement.](#)

**Serbia** – UNICEF supported a series of research studies using the 'most significant change' methodology to enable educators involved in teacher development programmes to share stories that they identified as representative of their individual change processes while engaged in each programme. Analyses offered valuable insights into the changes that teachers valued most, which informed the implementation of wider teacher development programmes, highlighting the psychological needs of educators for autonomy, competence and belonging/community. As one educator offered: [The most significant change, in my opinion, is the change in relation to myself. Certainly, internal motivation to change the practice, reflecting on previous practices and supporting the well-being of children.](#)<sup>3</sup>

Teachers are essential for quality education – their skills, dedication and presence are critical for children to succeed in school. Research shows a strong connection between teacher well-being and student

well-being and learning outcomes as demonstrated below by UNICEF Jamaica's good practice example that supports a comprehensive approach to teacher and student welfare.

- 2 UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, Ministry of Education and Literacy of Côte d'Ivoire and UNICEF Côte d'Ivoire, *Data Must Speak: Unpacking Factors Influencing School Performance in Côte d'Ivoire*. UNICEF Innocenti, Florence (Italy), 2023.
- 3 "Stories About the Most Significant Change: A picture about the teacher in the context of the application of the new fundamentals of the 'Year of Take off' aircraft programme" is a summary of the results of four studies provided for in the monitoring and evaluation framework of the Capacity Building Support Program for the Implementation of the New Foundations of the PVO "Years of Ascension" programme implemented by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with UNICEF and the Institute of Pedagogy and Andragogy of the Faculty of Philosophy with support from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

**COUNTRY: JAMAICA****Strengthening Teacher Resilience and Emotional Well-Being****Context**

UNICEF Jamaica has supported a holistic package of interventions aimed at enhancing teacher socioemotional well-being and improving school environments. Developed with the Jamaica Teaching Council in response to learning environment challenges after the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, 'Return to Happiness' was a psychosocial recovery programme designed to help teachers prepare mentally for online teaching, adjust to hybrid environments, and to the full return to classrooms, after the reopening of schools. The companion initiative, 'Heart of Teaching,' focused on supporting teachers' emotional resilience, self-awareness, and professional identities, offering a safe, structured space for teachers to reconnect with their motivations, manage emotional stress and self-reflection, and to better engage with their students.

**Role of teachers' well-being in teacher development**

Advocacy for teacher rights and welfare is a key component to addressing the global learning crisis by strengthening the foundation of quality education: the teachers themselves. Listening to teachers and promoting their well-being is directly linked to the achievement of SDG 4 on inclusive and quality education.

**Good practices**

- ▶ **Prioritising teachers' wellbeing and scaling the approach.** These training programmes placed teachers' mental health and student-teacher relationships as central to learning outcomes. Teachers reported feeling more confident, supported, and effective in the classroom. Many described improved teacher-student relationships, better classroom management, and greater openness to discussing mental health in a culture where mental health has traditionally been seen as taboo. Both courses have been scaled nationally and are now part of the country's ongoing teacher development offerings. The 'Heart of Teaching' course has strategically been offered to teachers affected by the 2024 Hurricane Beryl. As one Government official observed: [There is systemic support from UNICEF to train teachers on mental health, but also to improve teachers' wellbeing.](#)
- ▶ **Breaking taboos with a holistic approach to mental health and safe school environments.** UNICEF further strengthened instructional leadership through online platforms like Agora and the Child-Friendly Schools framework, with modules on school safety for school leaders. The 'Leadership for Safer Schools' module reinforced a child-rights focused approach to emotionally and physically inclusive and safe school environments. Collectively, these interventions contributed to better working conditions by reducing emotional strain, increasing peer support, and fostering a professional culture based on care, trust, and self-reflection.

Gender inequalities within the teaching profession include patterns in many countries of fewer women in leadership and higher school level teaching roles, fewer men in lower school level teaching roles, and fewer female teachers in emergency settings. Addressing gender inequalities within the profession is a critical aspect of a transformative approach to systems strengthening in education to provide quality education for all children.

UNICEF has contributed to emerging evidence that suggests female school leaders may foster more positive learning environments and help raise the aspirations of girls. The Women in Learning Leadership initiative—led by UNICEF Innocenti, IIEP-UNESCO, and the Gender at the Centre Initiative—seeks to expand the evidence available on gender and school leadership; it explores barriers women face in attaining leadership roles, compares outcomes in schools led by women and men, and identifies effective leadership practices that can be applied and scaled. Other good practice examples of UNICEF work to address gender inequalities within the profession are highlighted below.

**COUNTRIES: CAMBODIA, ETHIOPIA, YEMEN****UNICEF Support to Addressing Gender Inequalities in the Teaching Profession**

**Cambodia** – Women in Cambodia remain underrepresented as leaders within schools and across the education system. The Education Capacity Development Partnership Fund Phase III included a focus on promoting gender equity as part of an outcome to strengthen education system human resource planning, deployment, and performance management. UNICEF activities included research on gender-equitable promotion guidelines, training on gender mainstreaming in the workforce and leadership training for women.

**Ethiopia** – Despite comprising a significant portion of the teaching workforce, women in Ethiopia are underrepresented in school leadership positions at all levels. A UNICEF pilot is planned under the ‘System Transformation of Education Programme for Girls and Learning’ to create a professional learning community for female educational leadership to motivate teachers to assume school leadership positions. The programme plans to support women’s advancement by providing selected female teachers with digital devices to incentivise professional development, facilitate networking and improve access to training content and learning platforms.

**Yemen** – A scarcity of female teachers in rural areas of Yemen is a major obstacle to girls’ education in a cultural context that restricts their engagement with male teachers. Over 2,000 rural female teachers have been provided incentives to work in conservative areas of the country that face extreme shortages of female teachers. UNICEF support to increasing the number of female teachers is designed to increase the enrolment and retention of girls in the education system while furthermore empowering female teachers and offering positive role models for girls.

**Policy Reflections**

These examples highlight that teacher rights and welfare are not only professional concerns but also fundamental to children’s right to education and learning. A stable, motivated, and supported teaching workforce is essential to ensuring that every child can access quality learning opportunities. Teachers’ well-being, motivation and professional status directly shape classroom practice, yet these dimensions are often under-recognized in policy agendas. Here are some key policy reflections:

- ▶ **Teacher well-being as a foundation for learning.** When teachers are supported emotionally and professionally, children are more likely to experience effective teaching, safe learning environments, and positive relationships in schools. Teacher well-being is therefore inseparable from children’s right to education.
- ▶ **Maximising the return on investment.** Significant resources are often dedicated to teacher training and recruitment, but these investments will have limited impact if teachers remain overburdened, unsupported, or dissatisfied. Prioritising teacher well-being ensures that system investments translate into better teaching quality and sustained learning outcomes.

- ▶ **Supportive and collaborative work environments.** Positive cultures of care, open communication and peer collaboration in schools enhance teacher satisfaction, resilience, and effectiveness.
- ▶ **Wellness and resilience programmes.** Initiatives that reduce stress and promote socio-emotional resilience, such as Jamaica’s Heart of Teaching, demonstrate how investing in teachers’ mental health can improve teacher welfare and school environments.
- ▶ **Teacher involvement in policy and reform.** Listening to teachers’ voices ensures that policies respond to their realities. Evidence from Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire shows that teachers value recognition, workload balance and community engagement as key drivers of motivation.
- ▶ **Strong leadership.** School leaders who prioritise teacher support and inclusion play a central role in creating healthy working and learning environments.
- ▶ **Gender equality in the profession.** Tackling inequalities, whether by promoting women’s leadership, supporting female teachers in underserved areas, or balancing male/female representation across levels, can strengthen teacher welfare and support gender equality in learning environments.

- ▶ **Community engagement.** When families and communities are actively engaged, teachers feel more motivated and supported, contributing to stronger links between schools and their wider ecosystems.

## Implication for UNICEF and international development

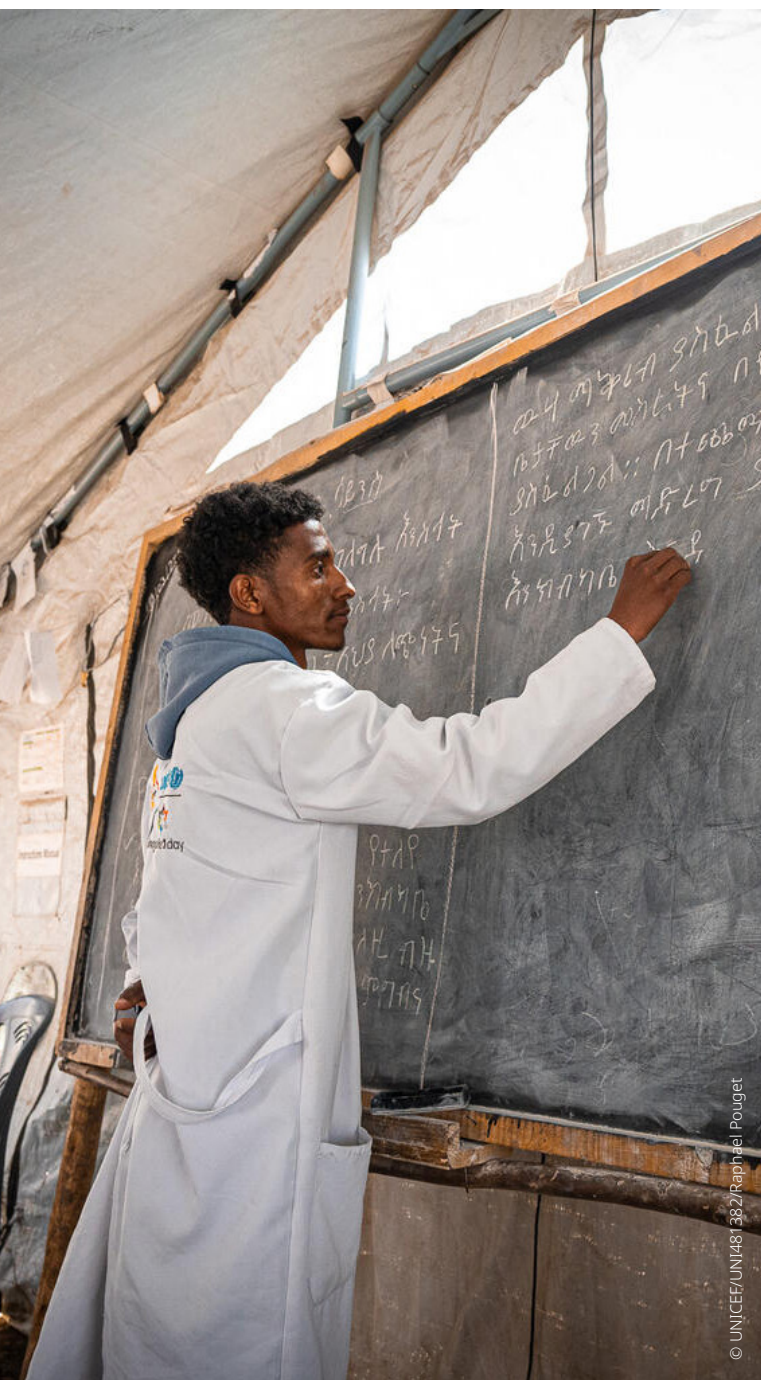
Addressing teacher rights and welfare involves considerations of both operational efficiency and effectiveness. Investments in teacher training or supply are more likely to reach their intended outcomes when accompanied by attention to teacher welfare. Supporting teacher well-being, representation and equity can contribute to improved learning outcomes.

## Policy Takeaways on Teacher Rights and Welfare

- ▶ **Linking teacher well-being to children's right to education.** Place teacher welfare at the centre of efforts to deliver quality education.
- ▶ **Protecting the return on investment.** Ensure that spending on training and recruitment is matched by investment in teacher well-being, so gains in supply and skills are not undermined.
- ▶ **Elevating teacher voices.** Engage teachers in shaping policies and reforms that affect their profession.
- ▶ **Institutionalizing well-being support.** Embed resilience, wellness, and safe working conditions into teacher development systems.
- ▶ **Addressing gender disparities.** Ensure equality for women and men in teaching and leadership roles.
- ▶ **Investing in leadership and collaboration.** Provide training to school leaders to foster supportive environments and strengthen peer-to-peer support professional cultures.

## A Point Worth Considering

Although awareness of teacher welfare is increasing, it is often regarded as subordinate to performance-centred reforms. Overlooking this issue can diminish teacher motivation and retention, resulting in inefficient use of educational resources, as investments in training and recruitment may not yield optimal results. Prioritising teacher well-being within policy frameworks is therefore critical to upholding every child's right to quality education.



### About the note







The discussion and policy reflections included in this note are the product of further analyses of the thematic experts and the evidence collected that informed the “Evaluation of UNICEF Contribution to Teacher Development and Improved Learning Outcomes” which took place between September 2024 and July 2025. This evaluation, commissioned by UNICEF Evaluation Office, was conducted by a team of external evaluators (Alvin Leung, Andrea L. Esser, Magali Ramos Jarrin, and Paola Vela). Tami Aritomi was the evaluation manager.

The opinions expressed on the policy reflections are those of the author(s) and do not reflect UNICEF official position.

For every child,  
**trusted evidence driving impact**

**For further information,  
please contact:**

**UNICEF  
Evaluation Office**  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY, 10017 USA

-  [www.unicef.org/evaluation](http://www.unicef.org/evaluation)
-  UNICEF Evaluation
-  @unicef-evaluation.bsky.social
-  @UNICEFEval
-  Evaluation YouTube channel
-  [evalhelp@unicef.org](mailto:evalhelp@unicef.org)

**unicef**   
for every child

© **United Nations  
Children’s Fund (UNICEF)**  
**October 2025**