



# L20 Statement to the G20 Education Working Group Meeting (13-14 May 2021)

The Italian Presidency of the G20 has focussed on the unprecedented impact of COVID-19. In the education and training sector, the three priorities of the G20 are equity, particularly in terms of digital equity and combatting school dropout; the switch to blended and hybrid education and training and its impact on learning; and the transition from school to work with a particular focus on technical and vocational education and training which has been severely affected by the pandemic.

## **The challenge at hand: The impact of COVID-19 in education**

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted education, with prolonged school closures and the transition of over 90% of the global student population to off-site emergency education formats in very short time frames. No education system was fully prepared for this challenge.

Teachers and education support personnel all over the world have mobilised to provide education to their students despite the emergency lockdown measures, working together to find solutions to overcome pedagogical challenges and the digital divide. Similarly, labour market systems had to provide parents with leave arrangements and trade unions and employers had to accommodate working parents. This was not possible for all workers – especially those in informal and non-standard jobs. Women were particularly affected by these developments in terms of their career progression and income sustainability.

Education unions have emerged as the primary structures of support for teachers and education support personnel, providing their members with practical information, advice and spaces to share their experiences and work together. In many countries, unions have also been instrumental in guiding government's response to the crisis in education. Countries where governments have engaged in constant and meaningful social dialogue with unions have fared much better.

'Online learning' and 'emergency remote teaching' have positioned education technology (edtech) as an integral component of education globally. While recognising the important role edtech has played in enabling millions of students to access education during the school closures, the need to regulate the edtech industry and to consider critical consequences related to equity and teachers' professional autonomy, *inter alia*, is essential.

To help address the equity challenges the pandemic exacerbated, Education International published [Auditing Educational Equity in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Guide for Education](#)

[Unions](#). The Guide stresses the importance of equity audits in enabling a deep analysis of pre-existing structural inequalities, and of the impact of full and partial closures and reopenings on students and educators, as well as on education systems and institutions.

As some countries gradually exit the peak of the crisis and transition back to onsite education, the L20 is advocating for educators and their unions to be consulted and involved in recovery planning processes and is calling on all governments to not allow economic interests to override the health and safety of students, staff and communities. In fact, budgets should be earmarked for education in national as well as regional and global recovery plans and stimulus packages, including the EU recovery fund, in order to ensure that all students return to quality education and training. Education investment is central to the pandemic recovery. It is essential to ensure that lower-income countries have the fiscal space to invest in education, including through debt restructuring and cancellation.

In line with SDG4, good working conditions for teachers with permanent contracts and enhanced teacher status, good quality continuous professional development and an infrastructure that ensures quality education from early childhood through school, TVET and higher education, supplemented by a lifelong learning guarantee are essential. As we have raised at the G20 before, workers' rights are central to any functioning and effective education system.

### **Equity and digital access**

Based on a global survey of all Education International (EI) members, the [Teaching with Tech report](#) exposed some clear trends in digital access and equity. Levels of access to remote education vary not only between countries but also within the same country, with rich schools in urban areas having much better access than poor schools in rural areas. This is true across G20 countries and requires both infrastructure investment and individual support to rectify. Education unions have mobilised in support of national digital equity audits, with a workable example coming out of Australia [showing that much more needs to be done to connect vulnerable students](#). All countries should enact digital equity audits to ensure universal access to education.

### **Hybrid/blended education**

Digital tools are important to support learning during the pandemic. However, teachers were neither prepared for this change nor did it come at no personal cost. As EI's study - [A Review of Technology in Teaching and Learning](#) - pointed out, teachers were not pedagogically prepared for the shift to online learning, having had limited access to continuous professional development. While access to continuous professional development is necessary, it is not sufficient. Survey results from Canada and the UK have shown the intense pressure this digital way of working has put on teachers and the toll it has taken on their mental health. Teaching students in the classroom in addition to students at home has increased teachers' workload and has negatively affected their work-life balance. The wellbeing of students and teachers

must be at the centre of any recovery plan. Class size controls are a critical protection in these difficult times.

Successful experiences of blended and hybrid education have been dependent on the willingness of education systems to listen to their teachers. Where teachers' professional autonomy has been acknowledged and supported, students and the education workforce have fared much better.

### **Transitions from school to work**

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is at the centre of effective transitions from school to work and plays a key role in achieving [social justice](#) and better labour market integration. The L20 welcomes the joint session with Labour Ministers that should be an occasion to discuss access and quality in relation to TVET – following on from long-standing G20 social partners' calls for quality apprenticeships. Without proper investments and collective agreements, we risk seeing apprenticeship numbers drop. We further underline the importance of climate change education and ensuring that TVET supports a just transition by preparing students for a new green, but also more digital economy.

The Italian Presidency has rightly sought to focus on vulnerable and marginalised groups. TVET institutions need dedicated funding and educators' working conditions must be improved to remove precarity and provide more continuity for students in this critical sector. Apprentices and learners need to have appropriate learning and work-based learning opportunities and to obtain fair wages. Social partners should be encouraged to take a lead on this.

Finally, education needs to be accessible throughout a person's life, with lifelong learning opportunities delivered by qualified teachers and trainers as a basic human right, as well as an aid to economic recovery.