



Summary Brief

WOMEN WHO TEACH:

Recruiting and Retaining Female Teachers in Crisis Contexts

MIND THE GAP 3:
Equity and Inclusion in and Through Girls' Education in Crisis



This brief was developed to support the dissemination of key messages in [Mind the Gap 3: Promoting Equity and Inclusion in and Through Girls' Education in Crisis](#). It provides an overview of evidence and gaps in the recruitment and retention of female teachers in emergency contexts and recommends actions for supporting female teachers' wellbeing and professional development.

Female teachers play a pivotal role in ensuring girls' education access and learning.

The presence of female teachers in schools and education systems is often associated with expanded educational opportunities and attainment for girls. Female teachers act as role models and an increased presence of female educators can support shifts in gender norms. These teachers can be especially important in conservative communities, where social norms may limit girls' mobility and interactions. Female teachers often play a key role in encouraging communities to send girls to school, and reassuring communities that girls are safe in school.¹

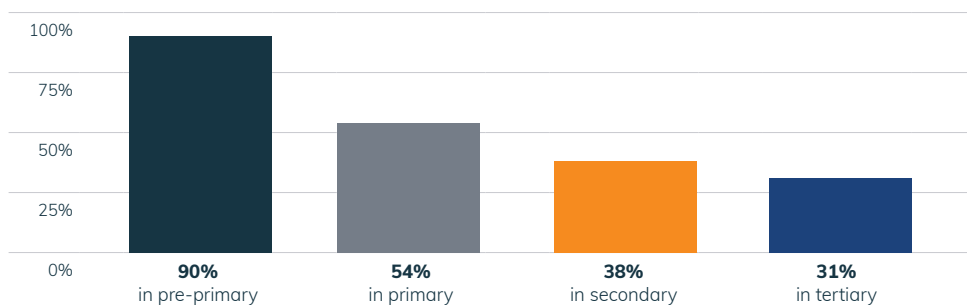
¹ See INEE (2023) *Mind the Gap 3*, Section 3.1

Female teachers may also support girls' interests and help them build confidence.² In particular, they have been found to positively influence girls' perceptions, interest, and confidence in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects, as well as their STEM career aspirations. Female teachers can positively influence girls' STEM education by dispelling myths about girls' innate math and science abilities, and by acting as role models for girls and boys.³

Women are underrepresented in the teacher workforce in crisis-affected contexts.

There is a global shortage of teachers in general, and of qualified teachers in particular. There is an ongoing gender imbalance in the education workforce, and an acute shortage of female teachers at all levels in crisis-affected contexts. Shortages of female teachers are particularly acute in rural and remote areas.⁴ While women continue to dominate positions within pre-primary and primary education, the proportion of teachers who are women sharply declines at the secondary and tertiary levels (see Figure 1). In many crisis-affected countries, women are less likely than men to have the qualifications required to enter national teacher training.⁵

Figure 1: The female proportion of the teacher workforce in crisis-affected contexts



Source: Data retrieved February 2023 from the UIS database. Averages based on the Mind the Gap 3 authors' calculations from the most recent data (2017–2021) for the 32 crisis-affected countries with data available.

² See INEE (2023) *Mind the Gap 3*, Section 3.1.1

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2017). *Cracking the code: Girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000253479>

⁴ Naylor, R. (2019). *Getting more female teachers into rural schools: Lessons from Malawi to Sierra Leone*. UKFIET. <https://www.ukfiet.org/2019/getting-more-female-teachers-into-rural-schoolslessons-from-malawi-to-sierra-leone-via-ukfiet/>

⁵ See INEE (2023) *Mind the Gap 3*, Section 3.2

Additionally, despite women's increasing participation in the teacher workforce, very few women occupy leadership positions. School leadership is an important influence on school culture and teacher wellbeing and has long been identified as a powerful lever to improve the quality of teaching and learning worldwide.⁶ Women face a range of barriers to entering school leadership, including required training programs being held during school breaks, making it difficult for women who are primary caregivers to attend; the use of non-merit-based criteria for selection and recruitment; a lack of support within education systems; and biased attitudes towards women's leadership. However, research suggests where women are in leadership positions, attendance, learning outcomes, and safety in schools improve.⁷

Female teachers face gendered threats to their safety and wellbeing.

Teachers working in crisis-affected contexts face challenging working conditions, low pay, and low access to professional development, yet they remain passionately committed to providing quality education to some of the world's most vulnerable children. Pre-primary and primary teachers, who are predominantly women, remain particularly poorly paid and inadequately recognized for their role in supporting and responding to their learners' needs. This continues to affect the mental health and wellbeing of teachers working in crisis-affected contexts—where they, too, are often experiencing the same disruption, violence, and displacement as their learners.

Female teachers in crisis-affected contexts are also subjected to higher levels of gender-based harassment, discrimination, exploitation, and violence in and around schools. These threats to their safety have a profound impact on their wellbeing and may affect female teachers' willingness to remain in or return to teaching positions, especially in remote and insecure settings where less support may be available.

Improving female teachers' wellbeing and working conditions

In order to holistically support female teachers, initiatives must take into account the barriers women face entering and remaining in the teaching profession.⁸ Some promising approaches identified in *Mind the Gap 3* include:

- Removing financial barriers to teacher training through **scholarships and stipends** to support women entering and remaining in teacher training programs.
- Providing **incentives** such as housing allowances and stipends for female teachers working in rural or remote areas.

6 Wolf, S., Torrente, C., McCoy, M., Rasheed, D., & Aber, J. L. (2015). Cumulative risk and teacher wellbeing in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Comparative Education Review*, 59(4), 717–742. <https://doi.org/10.1086/682902>

7 See INEE (2023) *Mind the Gap 3*, Section 3.4

8 For more details and case studies on improving recruitment and retention of female teachers, see *Mind the Gap 3*, Section 3.5.

- Developing **alternative routes to a professional teaching qualification**, such as through hands-on training as learning assistants, community teachers, or teacher teams.
- Providing access to **continuing professional development** opportunities and support to build leadership skills and competencies may increase the attractiveness of the teaching profession, reduce attrition, and increase the number of female teachers promoted into leadership positions.
- Prioritizing the **safety, protection, and wellbeing** of female teachers, for example, by providing targeted psychosocial support services or safe transportation options to and from school for female teachers and education personnel staff.
- **Engaging with communities** in teacher recruitment, ensuring that the community supports recruited teachers and that female teachers feel protected and valued by the community. Promoting the engagement and decision-making power of female teachers in community structures related to education, such as parent-teacher associations and school management committees, can demonstrate the added value female teachers bring to schools and communities.

Gaps

In addition to the previously mentioned gaps on teacher wellbeing, support, and professional development, *Mind the Gap 3* highlights the following gaps in data, evidence, and actions for recruiting and retaining female teachers in crisis-affected contexts:

- **Female teachers' voices** are often missing from education programming and policy discussions which have direct effects on their lives and livelihoods. Until their stories, experiences, and challenges are actively sought out and they are able to meaningfully participate in critical discussions and decision making, the education sector cannot be truly responsive to the needs of female teachers.
- **Data** on female teachers in crisis settings continues to be limited, patchy, and difficult to collect, with very little disability-disaggregated data available. Some data is available on pupil-teacher ratios from individual countries, but there is no systematic sex-disaggregated data on teachers. In particular, more robust systems are needed to systematically collect data on:
 - Teachers with disabilities, and training related to disability and inclusion
 - Teachers working in non-formal education settings
 - Training and professional development opportunities offered to refugee and internally displaced teachers
- Further **evidence** is needed to better understand female teachers' experiences in and around schools. In particular, further evidence is needed on:
 - The incentives and training needed to enable women to progress through the teaching profession at the same rate as men

- Effective strategies to support, recruit, and retain female teachers in fragile environments
- The impact of wellbeing programs on female teachers' wellbeing and perceived safety

Recommendations

The following actions are suggested in order to support the recruitment and retention of female teachers in crisis-affected contexts:

Programming

- Governments and education partners should provide targeted support to young women and girls to complete secondary education with the necessary qualifications and preparedness to enter and succeed in higher education, including at teacher training institutions.
- Governments and education partners should put in place strategies to ensure the safety, protection, and support of female teachers both at training centers and within schools, including:
 - Supporting school leadership to build a culture of gender equality, supported by robust codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms to address abuse and discrimination directed at female teachers;
 - Providing onsite childcare services, and dedicated bathrooms and breastfeeding spaces for female teachers;
 - Providing gender and inclusion training for teachers and other education personnel to address the harmful norms and power dynamics which lead to gender-based violence.
- In recognition of national authorities' responsibility to support the needs of all learners, civil society, donors, and other education partners should support the capacity of national authorities to address gender stereotypes within education systems, schools, and communities and provide targeted support to female teachers.
- Civil society should continue to advocate for adequate remuneration, more training, and more secure employment for teachers, particularly in pre-primary settings.
- Civil society and school leadership should provide opportunities for continuous professional development that can be delivered during school or working hours and place no additional burden on teachers, including the expectation that they use personal time and resources to attend.
- Civil society should establish supportive peer networks for female teachers and leaders with Teacher Learning Circles established to support their continuous professional development. Tools, such as the [INEE Teachers in Crisis Contexts Peer Coaching Pack](#) can be used to encourage collaborative activities in order to strengthen these networks and communities of practice.

- Civil society and school leadership should provide career guidance and mentorship opportunities for female teachers. Linking strong female leaders with aspiring leaders to build confidence and motivation can support their progression into and retention in positions of responsibility.

Policy and planning

- Governments should support schools and teacher training colleges in creating alternative pathways into teaching for those who have not had the necessary level of schooling in order to bring more women, including those with disabilities, into the teaching profession. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that formal and alternative pathways are accessible and respond to the specific needs of women and people with disabilities.
- Governments should ensure that refugee teachers can access the professional development required to become nationally recognized teachers and provide clear routes for transferring qualifications.
- Governments and education partners should strengthen teacher deployment systems to take into account teachers' family responsibilities, disabilities, health needs, and linguistic backgrounds.
- Governments and education partners should develop and roll out strategies to bring more women into leadership positions by providing sufficient support for women to relocate and take up positions in more remote areas while meeting their family and caregiving needs. For example, job guarantees may be provided for spouses when women relocate to take on leadership positions in order to address the lack of female teacher mobility, which is often linked to a spouse's job.

Funding

- Donors should support national governments in addressing the gender balance within the teaching workforce and prioritize funding initiatives that support female teachers' safety, wellbeing, and professional development — providing incentives and prioritizing safety and protection in more remote areas.
- Donors should support the engagement of female teachers, including those with disabilities, at the policy level, to ensure education policy and programming is responsive to their specific needs and challenges.

Data collection, monitoring, and analysis

- Data collectors and collators should collaborate with local actors (including teachers' unions, women's rights groups, organizations working in refugee settings, and female teachers themselves) to ensure that:
 - Data on teachers in crisis-affected contexts is comprehensive, sex-disaggregated, and includes information on teachers with disabilities.
 - Female teachers' voices and lived experiences are prioritized and complement quantitative data in crisis settings, in order to better understand their biggest challenges and barriers and tailor appropriate responses.

Further resources on supporting female teachers:

- **ECW, INEE, UNGEI (2021). EiE-GenKit, 5.4 Teacher and education personnel recruitment, conditions of work, training, and support and supervision.** This tool provides a checklist of key actions and signposts to resources for gender-responsive teacher recruitment, conditions of work, training, support, and supervision.
- **INEE (2022). INEE Guidance Note for Teacher Wellbeing in Emergency Settings.** This guidance note provides practical advice for supporting teacher wellbeing by promoting mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for teachers; creating more enabling work environments for teachers; and enhancing teacher voice, agency, and leadership in crises.
- **INEE (2021). Educate Us! podcast, Episode 6: Teachers - The Backbone of Education.** In this podcast episode, teachers from Colombia, Myanmar, Niger, and Syria share how displacement has affected their work and their wellbeing and how they're continuing to support fellow teachers and learners.
- **Plan International (2020). Gender Responsive Pedagogy Teacher Training Pack.** This training pack integrates gender equality into child-centered teacher professional development. The pack is adaptable to multiple contexts and is designed to provide practical solutions for teachers in low-resource environments

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