

# The role and status of educators in emergencies

## Next steps in managing teacher migration

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The Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (CTRP) was adopted by Commonwealth Ministers of Education in 2004. It was a response to the concern voiced by a number of Commonwealth countries, particularly small states, that a significant proportion of their teaching workforce was being lost, through targeted recruitment drives, to other countries. While the mutual benefits to source and destination countries of teacher migration were recognised, it was felt that the migration process needed to be better managed in order to maximise these benefits and minimise any negative impacts.

Crucial to implementing the Protocol is data on teacher migration. Since 2006, the Commonwealth Secretariat has convened researchers and policy-makers from government, academia and civil society to address the need for reliable data on, and research about, teachers across all regions of the Commonwealth.

Previous symposia have largely concentrated on teachers recruited to work in developed countries. However, South-to-South migration is important, as are teachers who are forced to migrate because of conflict, natural disasters, environmental stress or other non-voluntary reasons. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees reached a 15-year high in 2010, with over half of them being children under 18 in need of education. Well-managed teacher migration can contribute both to increased access to education for at-risk children (such as refugees) and the quality of education children receive, even in difficult circumstances. It is critically important to provide frameworks that protect teachers, especially when cross-border migration is involuntary as teachers are then at their most vulnerable. It is also important to acknowledge that, if formally recognised and properly supported, these same teachers can present an important resource for host countries to educate children. Managing migration is thus a key factor in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on educational access and equity, as well as realising the Education For All (EFA) quality objectives.

The Sixth Symposium, co-hosted by the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa, was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 8 and 9 June 2011. In line with the global focus in 2011 on education and conflict, as reflected in the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report, *The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*, and the World Bank's World Development Report, *Conflict, Security and Development*, one of the priority activities of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Section is to conduct research on children in conflict and fragile states. Accordingly, one of the themes of the Sixth Symposium was the role and status of

refugee teachers in the provision of high quality inclusive education in difficult circumstances. Policy-makers, experts and academics met to discuss how the principles of the CTRP might be applied in emergencies, and what policies governments and other stakeholders needed to consider in order to protect the rights of teachers and enable them to maximise the role they can play in delivering education.

What follows is a brief summary of the issues raised and possible areas of policy study identified by the Symposium participants. The discussion focused around the five key questions listed below.

### 1. What are the differences in the issues faced by forced migrant teachers compared to those faced by voluntary migrant teachers?

Forced migrant teachers face sudden, drastic, unexpected and uncontrollable changes in their circumstances. The removal of options and agency is disempowering and disorienting. Teachers' power to negotiate is reduced, their access to information curtailed, their entry into the labour market possibly barred – at least to the formal market – and they may not be at all prepared for the sudden change in their situation. They may have been subjected to physical or emotional acts of violence in their home country or on route to their host country, leaving them psychosocially vulnerable; their financial security may have been severely compromised and their ability to earn placed in doubt; their legal status may be unclear (to them or the authorities); and they may be subject to intimidation or abuse in their new surroundings. Added to this, their physical well-being may be diminished; they may be inadequately sheltered or nourished; their professional qualifications may be lost or not recognised; and their exit options may be limited or non-existent.

Perhaps the most striking difference is the lack of the formal and informal institutional frameworks that usually guide migration, such as information mechanisms, recruitment agencies, support from friends and relations, previously negotiated and agreed contracts, teacher organisations or a position within an official body. Instead, refugee teachers may find themselves working for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) rather than a government, with different working culture, remuneration and professional expectations. These insecurities and uncertainties are unlikely to result in motivated, committed teachers. Certainly, experiences will vary across a wide continuum and many refugee teachers may have had opportunity to prepare or may be quickly integrated into host communities. But, on the whole, the increased vulnerability of forced migrant teachers is an issue deserving of a robust policy response.

## 2. What are the similarities?

Of course, teachers who migrate voluntarily may also be subject to vulnerability or insecurity to a greater or lesser extent. Recruitment agencies, for example, may not always work for the best interests of migrant teachers. Furthermore, host communities may be hostile; expectations in terms of living accommodation, job profile, salary and status may not be met; culture shock and disorientation may occur; bureaucratic hurdles may prevent the recognition of qualifications; separation from family and community may bring isolation and loneliness; and lack of familiarity with the legal context or dependency on a job for a visa may substantially reduce a migrant teacher's ability to negotiate. Teachers who migrate voluntarily may also be subject to absent or weak contracts, which are then not enforced; their physical security may be at risk due to lack of knowledge of their surroundings; and they may lack the privileges that local teachers enjoy. Both forced and voluntary migrants need to undergo a process of adaptation, and both seek the same end: survival.

But it would be wrong to assume that there are only 'forced' and 'voluntary' migrants. In reality, a teacher may elect to migrate in response to a long build-up of political repression, or a steady decline in their economic circumstances. Lack of locally available jobs may spur a teacher to move abroad for employment. The reasons for migrating may be numerous for any one teacher, a complex interaction between 'push' and 'pull' factors, but in the end they may feel they have exhausted all other options. However, a teacher fleeing an earthquake or sudden onset conflict clearly has different needs to a teacher moving abroad in a considered and well-prepared effort to maximise their earning potential or to seek new career opportunities.

## 3. Should emerging instruments for managing teacher migration specifically address issues related to forced migration?

It is beyond doubt that the issue of forced migration should be specifically addressed in policy. As conflict and natural (climate-induced) disasters seem set to increase, policy needs to expect the unexpected and plan for unanticipated cross-border migration of education professionals. The need to avoid exploitation of vulnerability, the exigencies of disaster preparedness, and the interests of international co-operation all point towards the requirement to set in place national and regional policies that protect teachers who are forced to migrate. Emerging instruments for managing teacher mobility, recruitment and migration should also recognise that not all migrant teachers choose to migrate, and that this necessitates special consideration.

## 4. What additional responsibilities do governments that host refugee teachers have?

- Reducing the barriers to integration into the (formal) labour market.
- Providing the professional development necessary for refugee teachers to achieve the qualifications required to teach in the formal system.
- Developing a transitional mechanism for teachers as yet unqualified under the host country system (or unable to demonstrate their qualification) so that they are able to teach before qualification

status is given. This might involve a competency-based rapid assessment of a teacher's ability in the classroom.

- Incorporating migration issues into national policy.
- Ensuring that refugees are subject to equal treatment under the law protecting human rights and advocating for fair and equal treatment of migrants.
- Creating and/or strengthening mechanisms to support refugee teachers in host countries.
- Providing physical security, both within the classroom and in the greater society, as well as safe passage within the country.

## 5. What policies must governments consider to ensure the welfare of refugee teachers and to create an enabling environment for them to teach?

- A housing policy that encourages teachers to stay where needed in order to mitigate the effect of the emergency.
- Fast-track official recognition of refugee status and of professional qualifications/ability to teach.
- An integrated migrant management policy between different authorities/agencies, encouraging the rapid registration of teachers.
- Increased awareness raising among host communities and in the work environment to migrants' needs.
- A migration policy enabling the removal of bureaucratic hurdles to integration and movement of migrant teachers.
- A policy that does not discriminate against migrant teachers being considered for promotion.
- A policy ensuring reasonable security of employment for migrant teachers.
- A migration policy sensitive to gender needs.
- A language policy that promotes the recognition and utilisation of migrants' language while also offering support for learning of the language of host communities.
- Government guidance on acceptable minimum remuneration for teachers.

More details about the Symposium can be found on the websites of the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO-IICBA, including the presentations made there. The Symposium debates and papers form the basis of a summary paper presented at the 11th UKFIET International Conference on Education and Development in Oxford, UK, on 13–15 September 2011. The full Symposium Report and additional material will be published by the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO as a peer-reviewed book.

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