

# Under-resourced, undervalued, and underutilized: Making the case for teachers in refugee and emergency contexts

---

Amy R. West

American Institutes for Research: [awest@air.org](mailto:awest@air.org)

**Hannah Reeves Ring**

American Institutes for Research: [hrring@air.org](mailto:hrring@air.org)

*Teachers are a critical resource for children in refugee and emergency settings. Yet few studies have examined what motivates or demotivates teachers, especially in refugee and emergency contexts. In this article we explore the key findings from field research conducted in Algeria and Ethiopia by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as part of a study for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The findings are organized according to seven critical factors: teacher recruitment, selection, and deployment; the teaching environment; certification; professional development; incentives; management structures; and, status and social recognition.*

*Keywords: teacher retention; refugee education; Algeria, Ethiopia*

## INTRODUCTION

Equitable access to education for children and youth is a critical focus in international education. Little attention, however, has been given to *teachers* and the role they play in delivering quality education and achieving the “Education for All” priorities and “Millennium Development Goals”. Mourshed, Chijioke, and Barber (2007) argue that even in the world’s best school systems, the quality of the teacher is a primary driver of variation in student learning outcomes. While teacher quality is also recognized as a primary driver of variation in student learning outcomes in refugee and emergency settings, few studies have examined on-the-ground realities that motivate or demotivate teachers in these contexts (Penson, Yonemura, Sesnan, Ochs, & Chanda, 2011).

Based on an examination of secondary source materials from academic experts and grey literature from United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), we identified seven key areas affecting teacher retention worldwide: (1) teacher recruitment, selection, and deployment; (2) the teaching environment; (3) certification; (4) professional development; (5) incentives; (6) management structures; and (7) status and social recognition. These seven themes were discussed with and endorsed by 13 education experts from around the world who serve as leading senior education specialists in academia, at major think tanks and research institutions, and in refugee and emergency contexts. Using these seven critical areas as a framework, we explore what motivates or demotivates teachers in the most extreme and challenging of environments, where education is focused on developing and sustaining individuals and communities, and

supporting healthy and productive lives despite the temporary or protracted nature of their circumstances. Citing original research from distinct refugee contexts in two countries, we explore the key issues that influence teacher retention in complex emergencies and offer suggestions for cost-effective policies and technical responses that would reinvigorate teaching forces, attract new teachers, and reinforce the value we as education practitioners place on education for all.

## **METHODOLOGY OF OVERALL STUDY**

After a thorough literature review (West & Reeves, 2015), we designed a set of protocols for gathering basic quantitative data and qualitative findings from the education priority countries of the UNHCR. While the overall study included a survey administered in eight priority countries as well as in-depth research in Algeria, Ethiopia, and Pakistan, this article concentrates exclusively on the qualitative findings specific to the refugee contexts in Algeria and Ethiopia. In June 2013, author Hannah Reeves conducted field research in two Somali refugee camps and two Eritrean camps in Ethiopia; in October 2013, author Amy R. West conducted field research in two of the largest Sahrawi refugee camps in southwestern Algeria. Together, our findings and supporting information bring into sharp focus certain patterns consistent with a demotivated and weakened teaching force in refugee settings and the effect this has on the quality and consistency of education services delivered in these environments.

### **Methodology of Field Research in Algeria and Ethiopia**

As the body of existing research shows, teachers are a critical resource for children in refugee and emergency settings. In our research on the challenge of attracting and retaining teachers in this environment, we conducted 10-day field missions each to two Somali and two Eritrean camps near Jijiga and Shire, Ethiopia, in June 2013, and to two Sahrawi camps near Tindouf, Algeria, in October 2013. The field visits were constrained by funding, the logistics around visiting the camps, and security. We were only able to access camps after receiving formal permission from each country's government and with the cooperation of UNHCR's country representative and collaboration with UNHCR country office teams. Prior to the field visits, we created an interview schedule in partnership with the UNHCR country teams and implementing partners responsible for education service delivery in the camps. We requested to meet with as many individuals as possible, with special attention to recruiting both female and male participants; members of different religious, social, and ethnic groups; young and old individuals; new as well as experienced teachers, head teachers, and supervisors; and NGO and UNHCR staff members with various responsibilities related to education. UNHCR and its partners coordinated meeting venues and participants, as well as interpretation services as needed.

Based on the conceptual framework we developed during our literature review, we created three tools to conduct open-ended qualitative inquiry, a method that allowed us flexibility to explore the seven key areas of interest as well as any additional unforeseen patterns that emerged during discussions. On site, we collected data through focus groups and semi-structured interviews with individuals representing ministries of education, regional educational directors and supervisors, head teachers, teachers, and parent-teacher associations (PTAs). Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes, and each individual interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. We did not record the focus group discussions and interviews, but the author responsible for that specific country field

visit took detailed notes.

In both country contexts, we conducted our research using a set of three protocols developed with the assistance of an experienced psychometrician for two kinds of focus group discussions and one type of semi-structured interview. One open-ended protocol, created for focus group discussions with teachers, head teachers, and supervisors, comprised questions pertaining to selection and recruitment processes, certification and training, professional development opportunities and classroom observations, access to and availability of resources and equipment, management and accountability structures, incentives (monetary and nonmonetary), working conditions, status and social recognition, community support, and future aspirations. A second protocol, developed for focus group discussions with parents and community members, concentrated mostly on status and social recognition as well as the perceived value of education in that community. The focus group discussion protocol also covered the deployment and selection of teachers in the camps, management, and accountability structures as well as whether teachers were appreciated or paid enough and the working conditions in the school environment. In addition, we used a brief, 15-question survey interview protocol to obtain information from UNHCR staff in country offices supporting education programs in the camps. Questions in this tool mainly addressed monitoring of partners delivering education services in the camps; the qualifications and experience of teachers, head teachers, and supervisors in camp schools; how compensation was determined when camp education structures were initially created; and the selection, recruitment, and placement process for new teachers.

In both cases, our research findings led to a number of context-specific suggestions. We therefore argue for cost-effective interventions that would support teachers in these types of settings and ultimately strengthen the quality of education available to refugee children. We base these suggestions on the evidence at hand. For, as a director of education in the Sahrawi camps put it, “Education is the only refuge for the children. This is the only place where children in the desert can go” (Regional Education Director, personal communication, Smara camp, Algeria, 6 October 2013).

### **Algerian context**

Southwestern Algeria has one of the most protracted refugee situations in the world. Large numbers of people fled Western Sahara after the Spanish withdrawal in 1975 and the ensuing land conflict that erupted in the wake of the Spanish departure. From the beginning, education was one of the highest priorities in the Sahrawi refugee camps, and the Sahrawi camp education system is relatively advanced compared with other refugee camp education systems. However, a number of current global crises severely affected the camp’s teachers and the ongoing quality of service delivery: (1) the global economic recession, which has reduced education assistance funds from countries such as Spain and Venezuela; (2) the Arab Spring, which has reduced Sahrawi student teacher exchange opportunities with Libyan, Syrian, and Tunisian higher education and teacher training institutes; and (3) the pullback and withdrawal of NGOs and NGO resources following the kidnapping of humanitarians working in the camps in 2011.

Five refugee camps exist near the border of Western Sahara in Algeria. The oldest of these was created more than 35 years ago and constructed by the refugees themselves (mostly female), with the international community arriving later to provide relief services.

Author Amy R. West visited two of the largest refugee camps, Smara and Laayoune, and held focus group discussions in both camps with regional education directors, school directors (or head teachers), supervisors, teachers, parents, and UNHCR's sole implementing partner for education, the Association des Femmes Algériennes pour le Développement. Across the two camps, about 80 individuals participated in interviews and focus group discussions. The majority of these individuals were females (about 60%). Among the female teachers interviewed, teaching experience ranged from 2 to 30 years. Among the male teachers interviewed, teaching experience ranged from 2 to 38 years. Among the inspectors and head teachers, range of experience in these managerial/supervisory roles was 2 to 10 years. In the Sahrawi camps, all personnel within the education system are refugees.

### **Ethiopian context**

Ethiopia hosts a number of different refugee populations from its neighbouring countries, with the largest refugee populations comprising individuals from Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan. There are currently 23 refugee camps in Ethiopia, located around Assosa, Dollo Ado, Gambela, Jijiga, Semera, and Shire. Our field research in Ethiopia focused on (1) the Eritrean refugee context in northern Ethiopia near the city of Shire and (2) the Somali refugee context in eastern Ethiopia near the city of Jijiga. Though these populations are slightly less exposed to the global crises affecting the Sahrawi camps, significant challenges exist. These include the large influx of unaccompanied minors from Eritrea, lack of recognition of Somali teaching credentials, and a pay discrepancy within the camps between refugee and host country teachers. Furthermore, the resources available to support education in these refugee camps are woefully inadequate.

In eastern Ethiopia, author Hannah Reeves visited the Sheder and Aw-barre camps (Somali refugees) and in northern Ethiopia the Mai-Ani and Adi Harush camps (Eritrean refugees) and held focus group discussions in each camp with teachers, parents, community members, and implementing partners. Across the four camps, over 100 individuals participated in interviews and focus group discussions. The majority of these individuals were males (approximately 75%) and the remainder females. In the Ethiopian camps, the teachers and education administrators were a mix of refugees and Ethiopian nationals.

### **FRAMING THE SEVEN KEY AREAS AFFECTING TEACHER RETENTION THROUGH FIELD RESEARCH**

The Algerian and Ethiopian contexts are but two examples of protracted emergencies in which people's ability to surpass the status quo relies on first gaining access to any education and then fighting for a quality one. Achieving equitable access to a quality education requires creating systems that address the same age-old challenges experienced everywhere: qualifications of available teachers and the ability to create professional development opportunities for them; standards for a process of recruitment, selection, and deployment; and effectiveness of teacher management structures that are supported by communities who value learning and understand it as both a necessity and a right. The stakes are even higher in settings where options for mobility and access to opportunities outside the perimeters of a camp are severely limited—people's lives have been "placed on hold" and, in effect, compartmentalized due to conflict or crisis. Indeed, the quality of education in these contexts will be a direct reflection of the resources available and the

priorities of not only the refugee community but also the international community on which the population depends.

Our findings from the Sahrawi, Eritrean, and Somali refugee camps illustrate the complexities around recruiting, professionally training, deploying, and retaining quality teachers in complex and protracted emergencies. The retention of not just *any* teachers but, rather, *good* teachers is a challenge. Using the seven key thematic areas from our literature review, we explore the relationship between the education services provided and the teachers serving in these environments.

### **1. Teacher recruitment, selection, and deployment**

Though existing research identifies a lack of transparency in teacher recruitment and selection as an important demotivator (Bennell, 2004; INEE, 2011), the extent to which this applies in the Sahrawi refugee context remains unclear. The Sahrawi Ministry of Education (SEM) routinely announces openings through the *wali* (camp governor), who spreads the information by word of mouth, but few teachers commented openly on the degree of transparency they perceived in their selection, recruitment, and deployment. Furthermore, staff from the UNHCR and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) were unable to report on the decision-making process, which is not shared with the international and local agencies supporting the camps (personal communication, 6-12 October 2013). In Ethiopia, however, a number of refugee teachers complained about the lack of transparency in the selection process (although teaching positions are posted publicly). In several focus group discussions, refugee teachers said they were not allowed to see the relevant selection criteria, and they accused the implementing partner managing the school of nepotism.

It has been noted in the literature that recruitment challenges and high levels of teacher attrition are often present in refugee contexts (Chapman, 1994), and this is true in both the Algerian and Ethiopian contexts. In the Sahrawi refugee context in Algeria, there are more teaching vacancies than individuals wanting to be teachers,<sup>1</sup> and the declining number of students wanting to work in education is cited as a key challenge (representative from Sahrawi Ministry of Education, personal communication, Rabouni, Algeria, 6 October 2013). Instead, young people are reportedly more interested in pursuing degrees in law or opportunities in commerce. The same issue is present in Ethiopia, where many would-be teachers pursue other professions within the refugee camp that are perceived to be more lucrative or more respected, such as health worker.

Recruitment is made more difficult by the challenge of teacher dropout. Often, teacher attrition is driven by the need to find more lucrative employment. In the camps in Algeria, the SEM stated that 3 to 4 percent of its teaching force does not show up for work at the start of each school year, but others claimed that this is not accurate and in their schools it is often more than 50 percent (representative from Sahrawi Ministry of Education, personal communication, Rabouni, Algeria, 6 October 2013). Teacher turnover was cited

---

<sup>1</sup> There are no secondary schools in the Sahrawi refugee camps. Up to 8,000 Sahrawi students who are eligible to pursue secondary education are placed in Algerian secondary schools each year, paid for by the Algerian Ministry of Education.

as an issue in Ethiopia as well, with refugee teachers alleged to have a markedly higher attrition rate than Ethiopian teachers teaching at the same refugee camp schools.

It has been argued that high attrition rates can result in the recruitment of unqualified and underprepared teachers (which, in turn, further exacerbates teacher turnover) (Chapman, 1994). Parents in the Sahrawi camps felt that the quality of teachers varied from school to school; at the primary level, especially, parents mentioned there were teachers without teaching certificates and teachers with a university degree who were not “quality” teachers. Parents claimed that many qualified teachers (and qualified potential teachers) had lost interest in teaching because of poor incentives, an unsupportive and deteriorating teaching environment, and family responsibilities, and that this had led the SEM to resort to hiring unqualified teachers to fill positions. Some blamed deteriorating teacher quality on teachers’ inability to keep abreast of new teaching methods and approaches due to the inaccessibility of the outside world from such remote environments. Similarly, teachers in refugee schools in Ethiopia complained of isolation and a lack of access to current materials and up-to-date subject area knowledge.

## **2. *Teaching environment***

Existing research has noted that the provision of safe and comfortable schools with sound infrastructure can be challenging in refugee and emergency settings and that the lack thereof—along with excessive workload—can negatively affect teacher motivation (Harding & Mansaray, 2006; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). In the Sahrawi camps, there was no uniform standard for the construction or repair of a school, and there were no safety or inspection standards. The SEM had no additional resources to improve the teaching environment, and resources made available by donors were being invested in student materials or in supporting secondary education for students outside the camps, not in camp teachers or school structures. UNHCR and UNICEF field representatives commented on a lack of functioning toilets, limited availability of tables and chairs, roofs collapsing from termite infestation, and scarce material resources. There was no electricity in the schools, and classrooms were poorly lit. Some classrooms had small windows to allow in light, but there was no glass (nor doors) to keep out the desert sand. One female head teacher in the Sahrawi camps asked,

If the floors are destroyed, if the desks and tables are broken or not enough, if there are no books for teachers and students to use, and if the roofs are caving in, how will this encourage a teacher to come into this world each day and do her job? (personal communication, 8 October 2013)

In Ethiopia, both refugee and national teachers alike discussed the difficulty of adjusting to the isolated environment and harsh climate of the camps, having come from large urban areas such as Mogadishu or Addis Ababa. Both Ethiopia and Algeria’s refugee camps had little or no access to updated content or curriculum. In some refugee schools in Ethiopia, the Eritrean curriculum was taught in some grades and the Ethiopian curriculum in others. This presented a challenge for students and teachers, and it created issues in preparing students for Ethiopian national exams. One teacher complained that teachers lacked freedom to decide what to teach in their classrooms or how to interact with their students, resulting in demotivation and a loss of effectiveness. In the Sahrawi camps, the Algerian curriculum was followed, though not every teacher had access to an updated syllabus or teacher’s guide.

The schools in both countries' camps were mostly lacking subject matter guides, organizational and management resources, tools for facilitation, visual aids, and classroom equipment. The teachers in Ethiopia reported a lack of basic instructional materials in their classrooms, and they expressed a desire for designated playing fields for their students. Most of the teachers in the Eritrean and Somali camps wished for a fence around their schools' grounds to help them monitor their students and to increase security (though most teachers in both settings reported that safety and security were not significant concerns at school). Some teachers in both countries complained of the long distance they had to walk to reach the school—these complaints came from both national teachers walking from outside the camp and from refugee teachers who sometimes traversed no less than 35 kilometres between home and school, sometimes in inclement weather and extreme heat. Many of the teachers in both countries also reported working long hours and working harder than they would in other available positions. Overcrowded classrooms were also frequently cited in the context of unfavourable teaching environments.

Existing scholarship has also highlighted the extent to which psychological trauma associated with violent conflict can affect teachers (Penson & Sesnan, n.d), and this was evident in both the Algerian and Ethiopian contexts. Parents in one Sahrawi camp noted the psychological stress that the perceived poor teaching and learning environment had on teachers (personal communication, Smara camp, 9 October 2013). In addition, several teachers in both countries reported having students with discipline issues, psychological problems, and a lack of motivation. Some teachers felt demotivated themselves by their perceived inability to “reach” their students or adequately address the trauma and related problems with which their students were grappling. One teacher at an Eritrean refugee camp school indicated that teachers had to be careful when reprimanding students because the students were emotionally fragile (personal communication, Adi Harush camp, 19 June 2013). Another mentioned that many of the students were orphans without primary caregivers and, therefore, there was often no responsible adult with whom to discuss a student's behavioural issues (personal communication, Adi Harush camp, 19 June 2013).

### **3. Certification**

Current research suggests that a lack of recognition of existing teacher credentials and a lack of access to certification are significant issues for refugee teachers. The absence of a global standard for emergency credentialing of teachers, in many cases, makes it extremely difficult to source would-be teachers from refugee populations and ensure that standards of pre-service training safeguard the quality of education provided (Penson et al., 2011).

Refugee teachers' credentials are frequently not recognized by the host country, which means they cannot be formally employed as teachers nor given appropriate compensation (Penson & Sesnan, n.d.). This was a significant issue for Somali refugee teachers in Ethiopia because neither the education completed nor the teaching certification obtained in Somalia are officially recognized by Ethiopia. Somali teachers at one school said they had to “restart their education” in Ethiopia, some having to go back to the eighth grade to obtain a secondary certificate. The difficulty of studying toward a teaching certificate was compounded by the geographic isolation of the refugee schools and the lack of opportunities for professional development.

In the early years in the Sahrawi camps in Algeria, “anyone who could read and write” was recruited to be a teacher—the issue of certification was not as pressing as the need to educate students (Sahrawi Ministry of Education representative, personal communication, 6 October 2013).<sup>2</sup> As time went on, teacher qualifications increased, with trained teachers graduating from Algerian, Cuban, Libyan, Spanish, Syrian, and Tunisian teacher training institutes and universities in the 1990s and 2000s. The SEM accepted certified teachers from any country’s teacher training institute as well as individuals with a bachelor’s (or higher) degree from a university.

However, the quality of the teaching force in the Sahrawi refugee camps has declined again over the last 10 years as access to accredited teacher training institutes has become more limited. The teacher training institutes in Algeria have been shut down for the last 10 years due to the lack of Algerian students pursuing a teacher career track, and other countries have experienced political or economic crises that have limited the assistance they provide potential Sahrawi teachers. In response, the Sahrawi education system’s standards have eased again. For example, the SEM has started accepting those completing lower secondary classes into a one-year program at a teacher training centre established in the refugee camps, the quality of which has never been independently evaluated. This reduction in standards has had a ripple effect on the quality of education provided to Sahrawi children over time.

#### **4. Professional development**

Existing research has highlighted the difficulties associated with providing ongoing professional development and support to teachers in refugee and emergency settings, and the remote refugee camp settings in northern and eastern Ethiopia certainly present considerable professional development challenges (Mpokosa, Ndaruhutse, McBride, Nock, & Penson, 2008). Teachers at all four camps visited in Ethiopia indicated that the geographic isolation limited opportunities for professional development training and for interaction with colleagues beyond the camps. One of the few opportunities available to a small number of teachers at Sheder and Aw-barre camps is a summer course at the Jijiga Teacher Training Institute. The summer course, however, is a significant source of contention because of the limited number of slots available and the perception that “only refugee teachers” or “only national teachers” have access to it (personal communication, Sheder and Aw-barre camps, 13 June 2013).

Throughout focus group discussions, new teachers in the Sahrawi camps also lamented the lack of teaching materials that they knew existed in other countries. They reported feeling burdened by their lack of Internet access and inability to afford transportation to engage with their Algerian colleagues or international counterparts (for all but one of the Algerian camps, the nearest town, Tindouf, is 15 to 45 km away). Formal professional development in the Sahrawi camps was largely limited to varying degrees of pre-service training; there were generally no resources to provide reference tools or supplemental materials, let alone the training in how to use them. Though SEM has stated that it monitors teachers’ professional development needs, these data have not been made

---

<sup>2</sup> The Sahrawi refugee camps were initially settled by women who fled the war in Western Sahara and who were largely responsible for establishing the camps, including the education system. When the Spanish withdrew from Western Sahara, there were only a handful of qualified teachers left among the local population.



available to UNHCR or UNICEF. UNICEF staff indicated that SEM does not value baseline indicators and performance measurement that would assist in professional development programming.

In this context of scarce professional development resources, the teachers in the Sahrawi camps reported creating informal professional development systems among their peers. Despite the challenges, the Sahrawi teachers have created a culture of peer training and teacher-to-teacher support. Teachers in one camp met and exchanged resources and feedback informally with each other on a daily basis and also spent 2–3 hours a week on formal feedback on lesson plans and subject-specific matters. The newer teachers, mostly females, said that the more experienced teachers assisted them in lesson planning and also sometimes observed their classes, giving feedback on ways to strengthen their teaching (personal communication, Smara camp, 8 October 2013). One teacher reported that he took the initiative to travel to Tindouf to observe classes in a town school. One of the school's instructors let the Sahrawi teacher take over teaching for a session and then provided feedback that the Sahrawi teacher reported finding extremely helpful (personal communication, 7 October 2013).

## **5. Incentives**

Although research suggests that monetary and nonmonetary compensation can improve teacher retention (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007), providing such compensation is often challenging in refugee settings, and complaints about compensation were universal in the Sahrawi, Eritrean, and Somali camps. In both Algeria and Ethiopia, refugees do not have a legal right to work; instead, they receive a stipend. In Ethiopia, teachers complained of low pay and expressed frustration that people in other professions with similar educational and professional backgrounds were better paid. The issue of unequal pay for refugee versus national teachers was an additional source of resentment for refugee teachers in Ethiopia.

In the Sahrawi context, the “peace period” (defined here as beginning in 1992) brought a reduction in the amount of humanitarian assistance provided and a corresponding deterioration in living conditions. Teachers are treated the same as the rest of the population (for example, they receive ration cards and hygiene kits), but the stipends they receive have been constant for more than a decade, significantly limiting what they are able to purchase in the local market where prices have increased over time.<sup>3</sup> While other jobs are more attractive, they are difficult to obtain, and 95 percent of teachers are unable to obtain a second job because of the extent of their teaching commitments (specifically, the amount of time they must spend on teaching, grading, and preparation) (personal communication, Laayoune camp, 12 October 2013).

---

<sup>3</sup> As a point of comparison, according to a representative from the Algerian Ministry of National Education, preprimary and primary Algerian national school teachers in the area of Tindouf are paid \$700–\$1,000 a month, lower secondary school teachers are paid \$600–1,200 a month, and upper secondary school teachers are paid \$800–1,400 a month. The figure of \$33 a month as a stipend for Sahrawi refugee teachers is not based on a labour market assessment. The arbitrary assignment of \$33 a month began in 2008 when UNHCR divided the total budget line for teachers' stipends by the number of teachers in one of the largest Sahrawi refugee camps. This figure was then applied to the other Sahrawi refugee camps and has not been adjusted since.

## **6. *Management structures***

The existing body of research highlights that the absence of effective management can affect teacher retention and morale (Sommers, 2004). Several teachers at Eritrean and Somali refugee schools in Ethiopia reported perceiving a lack of support from their school management, evidenced by infrequent observation of their teaching in the classroom and a lack of feedback. Numerous refugee teachers also identified a lack of access to administrative camp services (such as resettlement and protection services), which are intended for all refugees living in the camp but are often only available during school hours. Somali refugee teachers at one school reported having very little contact with the camp administration: “I’ve been teaching here for four years, and no one from the camp administration visits me” (personal communication, Aw-barre camp, 14 June 2013).

Additionally, a representative from the leadership at another Ethiopian camp reported in one interview that refugee teachers sometimes had to miss class to collect their rations and that deductions were taken from refugee teachers’ incentive payments whenever they missed class. Teachers reported that this reflected a lack of understanding by management and that it reduced their motivation to work. One camp community member cited the example of a female refugee teacher who missed class to take her daughter to the hospital and had her incentive payment reduced substantially as a result. In addition, most refugee teachers indicated that they were responsible for finding their own replacements if they wanted or needed to take leave—a challenging task because replacements are not paid.

In the Sahrawi camps, the challenges were different and were mostly related to alignment of management support structures. Many in the Sahrawi camps felt that the management structure was supportive but not as effective as it could be. In these camps, it is not the Algerian Ministry of National Education that makes decisions but rather the Sahrawi Ministry of Education, established as part of the government in exile (personal communication, Laayoune camp, 10 October 2013). Teachers claimed that the education system management provided needed emotional and psychological support. However, one teacher characterized the alignment of processes for reinforcing support structures—from retaining new teachers to engaging more experienced teachers to strengthening the role and capacity of head teachers, supervisors, and ministry officials—as questionable:

The management is only as good as the teachers. Efforts at the bottom will create a strong structure; if where you put your foot is not strong enough, you will fall down. You do not build a house and start with the roof; you move the body forward with your feet. (personal communication, Laayoune camp, 10 October 2013)

Parents in the Sahrawi camps also acknowledged that management and accountability varied from school to school. Where classes were overcrowded, teachers and head teachers had more difficulty managing classrooms and maintaining schools. “With overcrowding,” one parent said, “the strength of how people manage decreases significantly” (personal communication, Laayoune camp, 12 October 2013).

In Ethiopia, both national and refugee teachers reported feeling like outsiders, and they missed being part of a teachers’ union (they do not have access to an Ethiopian union because the refugee schools where they work are privately administered; thus, they are not government employees). On a related note, several teachers also expressed a strong desire to be “linked to the outside world” through a teachers’ association that could provide access to their peers and additional resources. A desire to connect with a local

teachers' union in Algeria (where professional syndicates are strong) was expressed in the Sahrawi camps as well.

With regard to decision-making, teachers usually reported that NGOs in charge of education service delivery made most of the decisions about education in the refugee schools. Some teachers indicated that their PTA was very active, while others complained that the PTA existed "in name only." Some teachers reported a language barrier between themselves and the school director, which inhibited communication between teachers and the school leadership. One national teacher complained that the NGO responsible for his school had no local education expertise and that the designated person in Addis Ababa did not understand the realities on the ground in the camps.

### **7. *Status and social recognition***

Research suggests that opaque, unfair, or altogether absent employment policies as well as pessimistic or disapproving attitudes toward teachers can negatively affect teacher retention and recruitment efforts (Duthilleul, 2004; Nieto, 2003). In the case of both the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria and the Eritrean and Somali refugees in Ethiopia, the absence of the formal right to work undermines the teachers' professional status. However, the attitudes and behaviours exhibited toward teachers by the Sahrawi community were exemplary. "Education is noble. It helps a community develop. Without education a society cannot produce doctors, engineers, and architects," said one Sahrawi teacher (personal communication, Smara camp, 7 October 2013). Teachers are respected as part of Sahrawi tradition. The older Sahrawis remembered the strength of the Spanish-run education system. They remembered the collapse of this support and the efforts that went into rebuilding the camp education system (almost no teachers were left in Western Sahara when the Spanish withdrew). One refugee teacher with 38 years of experience said,

We began teaching with the will to serve. It was a duty and a humanitarian cause we believed in, as we saw our children without teachers. Education is part of the community we have built; illiterate people cannot express their rights. (Personal communication, Laayoune camp, 12 October 2013)

This respect for education as a basic necessity has been embedded in the society as part of its culture, but circumstances and attitudes are changing. Numerous Sahrawi parents felt that the absence of teacher qualifications and insufficient expertise were two of the most important issues the community faced in witnessing a decline in educational quality (personal communication, Smara camp, 8 October 2013, and Laayoune camp, 12 October 2013).

Refugee teachers in Ethiopia, however, painted a more complicated picture of their status within the community. Both refugee and national teachers seemed to agree that they received positive recognition from their communities but that the teaching profession is not highly regarded in Ethiopia. As one Somali teacher explained: "The social status of teachers in the Somali community is very low—teachers are not seen as capable and productive citizens [by their peers]" (personal communication, Sheder camp, 12 June 2013). Another teacher commented, "Even my mom discouraged me from becoming a teacher" (personal communication, Sheder camp, 13 June 2013). It is interesting to note that several teachers said their work was moderately more respected in the refugee schools because the surrounding communities saw the impact of their work firsthand. A number of teachers asserted that the lack of respect for the teaching profession was

associated with low pay. One refugee teacher remarked that refugee teachers in particular (more so than Ethiopian national teachers) were not respected and did not have the same power and authority as national teachers.

## **SUGGESTED POLICY AND TECHNICAL RESPONSES**

Retention of quality teachers is vitally important to educational quality. This is particularly true in refugee and emergency settings, where education resources are stretched so thin. As the World Bank (2010) notes, “If teachers work and live in an environment where they consistently have insufficient resources to accomplish what is expected of them, they can grow increasingly de-motivated” (p. 22). We offer the following suggestions for cost-effective policy and technical responses to the seven categories of teacher retention issues we have discussed within the refugee and emergency contexts. These suggestions are drawn from our review of the literature and from the qualitative data we collected in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria and the Eritrean and Somali refugee camps in Ethiopia.

*Recruitment, selection, and deployment.* A transparent process with known criteria for teacher recruitment, selection, and deployment in refugee settings must be in place. This process—whether managed by a government in exile in the camps, a host country government unit, or UNHCR and its implementing partners—should place emphasis on ensuring that a teacher cadre is prepared to enter the classroom (i.e., that they have received quality pre-service training focused on key competency areas). In order to reinforce this process, it is also important that each country tracks the progression of these teachers, including initial recruitment, migration (if applicable), and retention over time.

*Teaching environment.* Given the harsh and often isolated environments in which refugee camps are located, it is critical to track the deterioration of the school environment over time. Monitoring the effects of the natural environment on the physical infrastructure of camp schools is critical to ensuring safe and healthy teaching and learning environments that can be maintained and reinforced as they erode over time. In addition, all schools need to have access to psychological counselling (for teachers and students). Furthermore, service providers should ensure that all schools are separated from the surrounding areas by an uninterrupted fence or wall, classrooms are adequately lit, and teachers have access to a well-lit space in the evenings for lesson planning and other preparations. On an individual country basis, service providers should take steps to improve the safety and ease (i.e., distance, security) of teachers’ commutes to and from school.

*Certification.* To standardize the requirements for teaching qualifications and certification in refugee settings, UN agencies and governments should advocate for increased cross-border cooperation. They should also collaborate on concrete regional strategies and policies that would retain teachers and attract new teachers, allowing individuals to access teacher training institutes in host countries and helping teachers to grow professionally in the midst of the hardships of forced migration.

*Professional development.* Service providers should establish a regular schedule for classroom observation and feedback in conjunction with a clear plan for improving teacher performance over time. Ideally, structures should be put in place that allow teachers to interact with local teacher training institutes and teachers’ unions (or other

host community networks and resources) and to expand access to professional development opportunities for teachers in refugee contexts. In-service support, consistent feedback from well-trained supervisors, and mentorship, especially for new teachers, are important in retaining the best teachers.

*Incentives.* An initial and periodic local labour market analysis would ensure that teacher incentives or stipends are adequate and appropriate based on the cost of living and the other jobs available to individuals with similar educational attainment or experiences.

*Teacher management structure.* As with teacher evaluation and feedback, systems should be put in place to monitor and evaluate the performance of school leadership and to provide opportunities for teachers to give feedback on head teachers, supervisors, and management. Routine feedback from teachers on the performance and behaviour of the implementing partner responsible for education service delivery, as well as those within the education leadership and management structure of the camp, should be encouraged, and this feedback should be used to guide programmatic and system-wide change.

*Status and social recognition.* Refugees should receive clear communication regarding their legal status and rights (e.g., the right to work). Additionally, in cases where refugee teachers are paid less than their national counterparts, they should be made aware of this (and the reasoning behind it) during the interview process and as part of their biannual or annual portfolio reviews. Schools and teachers should be intimately involved in the creation of a teacher code of conduct, and schools should develop a strategy to engage the local community in activities or policies related to teacher appreciation, support, and respect.

## CONCLUSION

The realities experienced in refugee and emergency educational settings can be quite daunting, but in the quest to provide education for all, it is important to remember one of the most fundamental variables in that equation: teachers. In contexts like the Sahrawi, Eritrean, and Somali refugee camps in Algeria and Ethiopia, where resources are limited, focusing on the recruitment and retention of good teachers is imperative.

In addition, for education service delivery providers in refugee or emergency contexts, it is important to set expectations and be consistent at the local and even regional level. Harmonizing processes for recruiting, training, and supporting teachers is critical when there are multiple actors delivering services who are accountable to one coordinating body such as UNHCR or a ministry of education. This requires establishing clear expectations with these actors, or implementing partners, on the delivery of education support and services and revisiting these expectations on a regular basis. Such expectations could include, for example, uniform criteria and processes for teacher recruitment, selection, and deployment; minimum standards for equipment and facilities at refugee schools (and the maintenance of equipment and facilities over time); equitable distribution of equipment and supplies to refugee schools; harmonized incentives and other nonmonetary benefits (e.g., transportation, school cleaning) across all implementing partners in the camps; a transparent (i.e., publicly posted) incentive scale for all sectors available at each camp; a clear, consistent, country-level policy on the curriculum to be taught in all refugee schools; and strict monitoring requirements for implementing partners and education management in refugee settings.

Addressing teacher retention across the seven areas explored in this article can provide a helpful framework to mitigate some of the obstacles associated with teacher motivation, satisfaction, and retention. The compounding factors present in refugee and emergency settings create a unique and under-researched lens through which to view the issue of teacher retention. Furthermore, cost-effective policies and technical responses that begin to address teacher retention challenges will affect student achievement, reinvigorate teaching forces, and attract new teachers to serve in even the most difficult contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Bennell, P., & Akyeampong, K. (2007). *Teacher motivation in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia* (DFID Educational Papers, No. 71). London, UK: Department for International Development
- Bennell, P. (2004). *Teacher motivation and incentives in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia*. Brighton, UK: Knowledge for Skills and Development. Retrieved from <http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/dfidtea.pdf>
- Chapman, D. (1994). *Reducing teacher absenteeism and attrition: Causes, consequences and responses*. Paris, France: International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO.
- Duthilleul, Y. (2004). *International perspectives on contract teachers and their impact on meeting Education for All: The cases of Cambodia, India and Nicaragua* (Synthesis Report). Paris, France: International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/research/basic/PDF/teachers3.pdf>
- Harding, J. B., & Mansaray, A. T. (2006). *Teacher motivation and incentives in Sierra Leone*. DFID.
- Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). (2011). *Third international policy dialogue forum of the Task Force on Teachers for EFA: Understanding the role of teacher policy and programming in fragility*.
- Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C., & Barber, M. (2007). *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*. Retrieved from McKinsey & Company website: [http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/How-the-Worlds-Most-Improved-School-Systems-Keep-Getting-Better\\_Download-version\\_Final.pdf](http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/How-the-Worlds-Most-Improved-School-Systems-Keep-Getting-Better_Download-version_Final.pdf)
- Mpokosa, C., Ndaruhutse, S., McBride, C., Nock, S., & Penson, J. (2008). *Managing teachers: The centrality of teacher management to quality education. Lessons from developing countries*. Retrieved from VSO International website: [http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/Managing\\_Teachers\\_tcm76-20998.pdf](http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/Managing_Teachers_tcm76-20998.pdf)
- Nieto, S. (2003). Challenging current notions of “highly qualified teachers” through work in a teachers’ inquiry group. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(5)
- Penson, J., & Sesnan, B. (n.d.). *Educators in exile*. Unpublished manuscript.

- Penson, J., Yonemura, A., Sesnan, B., Ochs, K., & Chanda, C. (2011). *Beyond the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol: Next steps in managing teacher migration in emergencies*. Retrieved from UNESCO–International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa website: <http://www.eng.unesco-iiicba.org/sites/default/files/PensonYonemuraSesnanOchsChandaBeyondTheCommonwealthTeacherRecruitmentProtocol.pdf>
- Ring, H. & West, A. (2015). Teacher retention in refugee and emergency settings: The state of the literature. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives* 14 (3), pp. 106-121.
- Sommers, M. (2004). *Coordinating education during emergencies and reconstruction: Challenges and possibilities*. Paris, France: International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO.
- The World Bank Group. (2010). *Teacher policy and management in fragile and conflict-affected situations: A review of issues, policies and experiences*. Prepared for the Ninth High-Level Meeting on EFA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.