

Building Resilient and Well-Being Sensitive Education Systems: Recommendations for Practical Action by G20 Leaders

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G20 INTERFAITH FORUM 2021
WORKING GROUPS
Education



“Young people are on the frontlines of the struggle to build a better future for all.”

– António Guterres, UN Secretary-General

“Children will never accept a return to ‘normal’ after the pandemic because ‘normal’ was never good enough.”

– Henrietta H. Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in education systems worldwide. In particular, during the mass school closures, and the attempted shifts to hybrid modes of learning, significant inadequacies and drastic global disparities in students' access to quality education have been brought to light. Alongside these concerns is a further recognition of the sufferings (material, physical, social-emotional, mental, spiritual) endured by children and young people throughout the pandemic, and a striking gap in the provisions of online learning facilities and resources between higher and lower income countries. These profound hardships and inequalities have aggravated an existing epidemic of youth ill-being, not least amongst young people who are already at the margins.

Over the course of the Italian Presidency, G20 leaders have laid emphasis on developing policies and procedures to support different types of blended learning, narrow digital divides, reduce inequalities and the impact of poverty, and make educational experiences relevant to meaningful and sustainable livelihoods. In response to this year's G20 agenda, *People Planet Prosperity*, and the G20 Interfaith Forum's (IF20) theme, *A Time to Heal*, and inspired by UNESCO's Youth As Researchers' initiative,¹ the IF20 Education Working Group partners launched a **Global Listening Initiative (GLI)**. The GLI's well-being-focused dialogic process was inspired by the vision and approaches of the working group partners who are predominantly faith- and interfaith-based organisations. The aim of the GLI was two-fold: (1) to ground policy inquiry in existing global proposals and (2) to understand the lived experiences of youth in diverse contexts and engage them in identifying action points for leveraging positive change in education.

The GLI consisted in two parts: an extended Desk Review to *listen* to the widespread calls to action from diverse international organisations, global educational commissions,² religious communities, grassroots movement and scholars; and a global consultation to listen to young people and engage with their perspectives. Over two thousand adolescents (aged 14–19) from 26 countries across five continents³ took part in online and/or in-person workshops hosted by NGOs, schools, and faith-based organisations. Adolescents from diverse backgrounds were invited to reflect on their experiences of life and education during the Covid-19 pandemic; identify who and what has been most supportive to their learning and well-being; and propose policy priorities that can explicitly support healing, learning and flourishing in education. The aim of these workshops was to engage proactively in understanding participating young people's lived experiences. Instead of a systematic comparative study, participants' insights were drawn out through a deep listening and dialogic process, combined with immersive data analysis, bringing together themes arising from structured and unstructured facilitators' and youth's reports, images, drawings, and quotes from participants.

Both processes have yielded rich understandings of the potential to work purposefully through education programs to advocate for and advance equity, inclusion, and well-being. Conceptions and practices of healing and well-being rooted in faith, indigenous and other spiritual traditions have special importance and distinctive facets in the circumstances of COVID-19. In reviewing both academic and operational analyses of global education priorities, the **IF20 Education Working Group partners** identified four key challenges: (a) widespread youth mental and emotional ill-being aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic; (b) prevailing youth disengagement; (c) significant gaps and digital divides in educational access; and (d) a disconnection of classroom learning from immediate local and global concerns. Findings from the youth consultation echoed these concerns. In the light of policy priorities outlined by G20 leaders, and the emergent insights from the GLI processes, the IF20 Education Working Group partners support five key interconnected recommendations to address global challenges.

¹ UNESCO (2021) 'Youth as researchers.' Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/youth/yar>

² Including UNESCO, UNICEF, the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, the Global Compact on Education, the Global Partnership for Education, The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD), and Religions for Peace.

³ Youth participants joined workshops from Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Curacao, Ecuador, Haiti, Nicaragua, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Iraq, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Uganda, the UK, and the US. These young people were intentionally invited and selected through the IF20 Education Working Group Partners' networks. Special attention was paid to ensure that young people from all backgrounds were included, especially girls, and those from minorities and vulnerable backgrounds. Participating organisations, including NGOs, schools and other groups already working with youth, invited young people from their existing networks. Participation was voluntary.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL ACTION

1. SAFEGUARD HEALING AND WELL-BEING AS A CORNERSTONE OF EDUCATION

Education is essential not only to healing the trauma of COVID-19, but also addressing the pre-existing epidemic of youth mental and emotional illbeing. Faith-sensitive conceptions and practices of healing and well-being should be considered to enrich educational effort to this end. This is a significant step that all G20 countries can take for education, guided by a common objective of nurturing students' holistic well-being through education.

2. ENGAGE YOUTH IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Youth have a significant part to play in educational decisions that directly affect their learning, well-being, and present and future lives. Therefore, all young people, including girls and youth from minority and vulnerable backgrounds, must be respected and engaged as actors, innovators, co-creators, partners, and advocates for transforming education. G20 leaders should consider faith communities as key partners for education in this regard as many have provided meaningful support in terms of youth engagement.

3. ENSURE ALL LEARNERS' EQUITABLE AND CONSISTENT ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

To improve learners' equitable experience of, and equal access to, good quality education requires a commitment to making digital technological infrastructures available in homes, schools, and communities. Broad G20 political partnerships and public and private investments in educational resources are key to educational inclusion.

4. EMBED ECOLOGICAL AND GLOBAL CONCERNS IN CURRICULA AGENDA

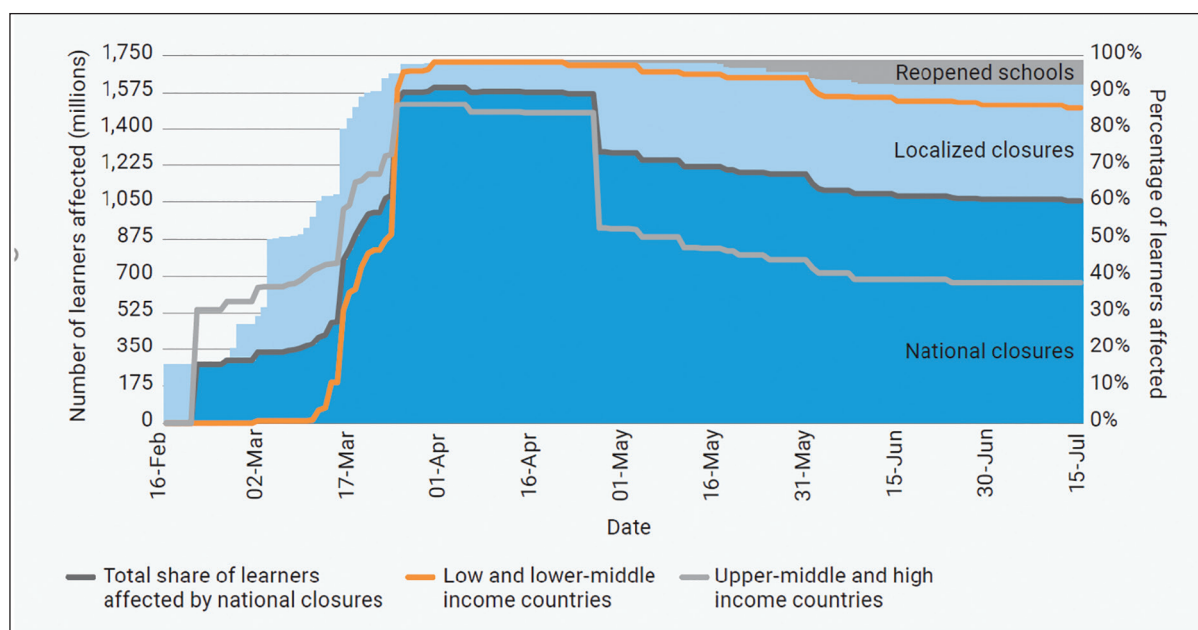
The world increasingly recognises the interdependence of human well-being and ecological flourishing, a spiritual understanding long advocated by global faith communities. Education can contribute significantly to young people's deepened awareness of the need to decentralise human self-interest, and to recentre human responsibility for regenerating our ecological environment. With the support of faith-based partners, curricula agendas must be reformed to include and promote environmental education and direct experiences in/of nature, along with a deeper understanding of SDGs and the skills to support them.

5. PRIORITISE TEACHERS' WELL-BEING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTHEN THEIR CAPACITIES TO FACILITATE BLENDED LEARNING

Teachers' well-being and continued professional development is essential to high quality education. With the strong possibility of future pandemics on the horizon, cultivating teachers' capacities to facilitate student learning and well-being through online and blended media has become a key priority. Online CPD platforms and creative resources across G20 partnerships can serve to support the sharing of innovative practices and enable mutual learning. Faith-inspired conceptions of education and well-being can help strengthen teachers' connection with the noble vocation.

CHALLENGES

Globally, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, children and young people have faced unprecedented disruption to their education and lives more broadly.⁴



Number of children affected by school closure globally in 2020.

Source: UN 2020 Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond.

A widely cited estimate⁵ is that 1.6 billion learners globally have experienced school closures due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, with over 168 million children experiencing school closures for more than a year.⁶ The figure above illustrates the disparity between wealthy countries and poorer countries in terms of school closures' impact on children and young people. This means that learning opportunities for the most vulnerable, especially girls, refugees, and children and youth with disabilities, have been sharply reduced.

Nurturing the well-being of children and young people through education has never been more important.⁷ An escalating mental health epidemic amongst young people preceded the COVID-19 pandemic and is further accentuated by it. Pressing climate and ecological crises impinge on the lives of young people and their

⁴ Stanistreet, P., M. Elfert and D. Atchoarena (eds.) (2020) Special issue on 'Education in the age of COVID-19: Understanding the consequences,' *International Review of Education* 66. <https://link.springer.com/journal/11159/volumes-and-issues/66-5>

⁵ UN (2020) *Policy Brief: Education During COVID-19 and Beyond*, New York: United Nations.

⁶ Karboul, A. (2020) 'COVID-19 put 1.6 billion children out of school. Here's how to upgrade education post-pandemic,' World Economic Forum, Dec 4, 2020. Accessed July 9, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/12/covid19-education-innovation-outcomes/>; UNICEF (2021) 'COVID-19: Schools for more than 168 million children globally have been completely closed for almost a full year, says UNICEF,' Accessed July 9, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/schools-more-168-million-children-globally-have-been-completely-closed>

⁷ WHO (2020) 'Adolescent mental health,' World Health Organization, Sept 28, 2020. Accessed July 28, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>; Parker, L. (2021) 'For young climate activists, the pandemic is the defining moment for action,' National Geographic, April, 23, 2021. Accessed July 10, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/for-young-climate-activists-pandemic-defining-moment-for-action>

families' livelihoods. Some also link the impact of COVID-19 crises to compounding effects of the climate crisis, which further displace those at the margins.⁸ Despite growing concerns about both the pandemic and climate change, a UNESCO report reviewing the global situation one year into the COVID-19 pandemic highlights a persisting lack of knowledge and understanding of the link between them. Practical recommendations on how to prevent future pandemics and ecological breakdown are limited.⁹

In examining the overlapping calls to action from international organisations, global education commissions, religious organisations, interfaith groups and communities, academics and researchers, the IF20's **Global Listening Initiative (GLI)** has identified four key areas of challenge that are prevalent in education worldwide, impacting most children and young people. Drawing on desk review findings and adolescents' perspectives, this paper explores ideas and proposals that G20 leaders might act upon to help global communities embrace the challenges.

1. YOUTH MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL ILL-BEING AGGRAVATED BY THE COVID PANDEMIC

"I faced depression and isolation, with no one to relate to and no one to share ..."

(Girl, 15, Jordan)

"I now understand better the importance of my parents, my family, my teachers, my friends. We used to be like robots, not realising the importance of these people ... around us. Our hearts were awakened."

(Girl, 17, Honduras)

"I would like (education) to provide a safe and comfortable environment where it is less judgemental, so that it is healthy for us as students to learn and try out new things without causing burnout/stress because of social expectations."

(Boy, 17, Indonesia)

"Schools test too much, hit and miss. They should change the way they evaluate the students. We are more than just getting a question right and wrong."

(Boy, 18, Brazil)

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people globally have experienced a marked decrease in mental and emotional wellness, resulting from increased isolation, family precarity, stress and trauma.¹⁰ This is compounding the pre-existing youth mental health epidemic.¹¹ One

in six persons with diagnosed mental ill-health problems are aged 10–19 years. Mental ill-health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10–19 years and suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in 15–19-year-olds.¹²

⁸ UN (2020) *Policy Brief: Education During COVID-19 and Beyond*, New York: United Nations.

⁹ UNESCO (2021) 'One year into COVID-19 education disruption: Where do we stand?' March 19, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/news/one-year-covid-19-education-disruption-where-do-we-stand>

¹⁰ UNESCO Global Education Commission (2021) 'One year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe,' Roundtable Session 3, UNESCO, March 29, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/news/one-year-covid-prioritizing-education-recovery-avoid-generational-catastrophe>

¹¹ Ford, T., A. John, and D. Gunnell (2021) 'Mental health of children and young people during pandemic,' *British Medical Journal* 372: 614. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n614>

¹² WHO (2020) 'Adolescent mental health,' World Health Organization, Sept 28, 2020. Accessed July 28, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

A May 2021 report from the OECD found that in some G20 countries, the number of young people experiencing symptoms of mental ill-health (anxiety, depression, loneliness, and withdrawal) is more than twice as high as before the COVID-19 crisis. The damaging impacts of the pandemic have hit those young people already suffering from mental health conditions and those from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds and minority groups hardest.¹³ Other international organisations are also reporting a widespread decrease in young people's well-being across all contexts.¹⁴ This epidemic of ill-being is recognised as the result of separation from peers, teachers and the wider community, pandemic-related worries (e.g. financial, health, family), and intensified emotional burdens relating to family trauma and precarity. Young people with prior experiences of trauma and vulnerability are particularly affected.¹⁵

This epidemic of ill-being was recognised by adolescent participants in the IF20's **Global Listening Initiative**. For example, workshops run by IF20 Education Working Group partner Scholas Occurrentes, having engaged more than 2000 young people from 12 countries in Asia, Europe, the Americas and the Caribbean, found that 72% of the evaluated participants associated their emotional health with negative emotions linked with current events.¹⁶

However, despite prevailing mental health challenges, many youth participants in the

GLI reported that during school closures, they were able to enjoy a slower pace of life, and they appreciated the opportunities this afforded them for activities they would not otherwise have the space to do, such as connecting more deeply with their families, with themselves and with nature. Some highlighted practices that had helped them quieten and calm the chaos around them, including guided meditation, mindfulness, prayer, and yoga, often with the support of their local faith communities. Some young people spoke of walking in nature, working in the garden, participating in online sports classes, and similar activities that have been meaningful for nurturing their well-being. Others described engaging in creative activities, self-development programmes and spiritual practices as particularly significant for their mental and emotional well-being. Religious communities and faith organisations have been recognised as offering a consistent presence and reliable support to young people who have suffered from isolation and other social emotional upheaval.

These perspectives are echoed in the findings of other recent research and listening initiatives.¹⁷ Young people contrasted this open-ended, flexible, and well-being focused pattern of living with the stress and anxiety associated with the high-stakes, content-driven approach in mainstream schooling. Their recommendations for schooling to integrate spaces for humanising activities and personal development are mirrored in high-profile calls to action in the field.¹⁸

¹³ OECD (2021) 'Supporting young people's mental health through the COVID-19,' OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19). Accessed Sept 1, 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis-84e143e5/>

¹⁴ UNESCO (2021); Ritz, D., G. O'Hare and M. Burgess. (2020) 'The hidden impact of COVID-19 on child protection and wellbeing,' Save the Children International. Accessed Aug 4, 2021. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/18174/pdf/the_hidden_impact_of_covid-19_on_child_protection_and_wellbeing.pdf

¹⁵ UK Trauma Council (2021) 'Coronavirus and trauma: Implications for children and young people.' Accessed July 10, 2021. <https://uktraumacouncil.org/resources/coronavirus-and-trauma>

¹⁶ Scholas Occurrentes (2020) 'Diagnóstico situacional de los jóvenes del mundo en período de Pandemia por COVID19,' Internal report.

¹⁷ Day, L., B. Percy-Smith, S. Rizzo, et al (2020) 'To lockdown and back: Young people's lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic,' Nuffield Foundation (Ecorys and University of Huddersfield), November 2020. Accessed July 2021. <https://www.guc19.com/pdf/resource-bank/to-lockdown-and-back-research-report.pdf>

¹⁸ Fullan, M., J. Quinn, M. Drummy and M. Gardner (2020) *Education Reimagined: The Future of Learning*. A collaborative position paper between New Pedagogies for Deep Learning and Microsoft Education. Accessed April 8, 2021. <http://aka.ms/HybridLearningPaper>

2. YOUTH DISENGAGEMENT

"Education needs to encourage more autonomy in the students."

(Girl, 17, Brazil)

"We are already taking care of our brothers and sisters, in addition to being responsible for our studies, we can, and want to be empowered make the situations better in our community, and the world."

(Girl, 19, India)

"Listen to young people, we are the future."

(Boy, 16, Lebanon)

"We have a lot of good ideas in terms of how education can improve our learning and well-being, only if there are politicians who are willing to listen."

(Girl, 18, UK)

At 1.8 billion, our world is now home to the largest generation of youth (aged 10–24) in history.¹⁹ However, although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child advocates respecting children's views on issues that affect their lives, it is well acknowledged that in educational practice, children and young people's ... perspectives are rarely sought and even more scarcely acknowledged or acted upon.²⁰

Whilst progress has been made, ... girls and young women in lower-income countries have greatly limited access to education and are significantly more vulnerable to finding themselves unable to continue in school. These issues have been severely exacerbated by COVID-19.²¹ During COVID

outbreaks, girls and young women tend to take up duties to care for elderly and unwell family members, and younger siblings due to school closures.²² Pandemic related economic stress on families further puts girls and young women at greater risk of exploitation, abuse, domestic violence, transactional sex, and earlier or forced marriage.²³ Gender equality in education also applies to teachers, the majority of whom in many countries are women.²⁴

For some young people, especially those from vulnerable backgrounds, education can result in their disengagement. Current educational systems tend to ignore their voices and views, and the

¹⁹ Wickramanayake, J. (2020) 'Resilience and strength shine brightest: COVID-19 recovery offers the chance to create a more just, compassionate and sustainable economy for history's largest generation of youth,' OECD Forum, Aug 12, 2020. Accessed Sept 1, 2021. <https://www.oecd-forum.org/posts/resilience-and-strength-shine-brightest-covid-19-recovery-offers-the-chance-to-hit-the-re-set-button-and-create-a-more-just-compassionate-and-sustainable-economy-for-history-s-largest-generation-of-youth>

²⁰ Global Partnership for Education (2021) 'When youth speak, the world should listen.' Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/when-youth-speak-world-should-listen>

²¹ UNESCO (2021) 'Girls' education and COVID-19: New factsheet shows increased inequalities for the education of adolescent girls.' Accessed July 10, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/news/girls-education-and-covid-19-new-factsheet-shows-increased-inequalities-education-adolescent>

²² UNICEF (2021) 'Gender equality and girls' education during COVID-19.' Accessed Sept 1, 2021. <https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/gender-equality-and-girls-education-during-covid-19>; UN (2020) *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. Accessed Sept 1, 2021. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_apr_2020_updated.pdf; UNESCO (2020) 'Addressing the gender dimensions of school closures,' *COVID-19 Education Response, Education Sector Issue Notes, Issue Note N° 3.1*. Accessed Sept 1, 2021. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373379>

²³ Ritz et al, 2020; UNICEF (2020) 'Averting a lost Covid generation: A six-point plan to respond, recover and reimagine a post-pandemic world for every child.' Accessed April 21, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/averting-lost-generation-covid19-world-childrens-day-2020-brief>

²⁴ Education Support (2020) 'Covid-19: Teacher mental health and wellbeing suffers whilst lack of appreciation or guidance leaves profession struggling.' Accessed 1 Sept 2021. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/covid-19-teacher-mentalhealth-and-wellbeing-suffers-whilst-lack-appreciation>

contents of learning are often irrelevant to their lived realities and well-being. Many young people end up dropping out of education, which further entrenches disadvantages in young people, who remain disenfranchised, unemployed, and disengaged.²⁵

As such, the UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education stresses the imperative of prioritising “the participation of students and young people broadly in the co-construction of desirable change.”²⁶ A number of international research projects that have sought to understand young people’s experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic also stress that many young people feel a lack of agency, and that they experience themselves as at the receiving-end of political decisions which neither reflect nor improve their lived realities.²⁷ A preliminary report from the ongoing Nuffield Foundation funded study, *Growing Up Under COVID-19*, which reviewed the perspectives of young people across 7 countries during 2020, has identified the imperative for governments to take participatory approaches to decision making that engage and communicate with young people, listening to their voices and translating this listening into action.²⁸

Attending to students’ perspectives through dialogue and collaborative processes like the IF20

Global Listening Initiative was identified by our participants as a factor that contributed significantly to adolescents’ engagement, empowerment, and well-being. Young people also acknowledged the part that local religious and faith communities are playing in youth empowerment, such as by involving them in volunteering, community activism, and other collaborative endeavours to support SDGs. UNICEF’s global partnership on *Faith and Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities* illustrates the unique and critical roles played by religious leaders and actors in influencing values, attitudes, behaviours and actions that contribute to youth engagement and well-being especially during times of such global crisis.²⁹

Youth engagement and empowerment require concerted educational, faith, and other global effort. As highlighted by the Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action, which represents the voices of major international groups on youth,³⁰ despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic which have impeded young people from participatory processes, there remain ways that youth can be intentionally involved to support all areas of COVID-19 response and building-back-better.³¹ This is a call to action reiterated across international

²⁵ For example, a research study in the US confirms COVID-19’s impact on youth disengagement. See Bauer, L., S. Lu and E. Moss (2020) ‘Teen disengagement is on the rise,’ Brookings Institute. Accessed 1 Sept 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/10/01/teen-disengagement-is-on-the-rise/>

²⁶ UNESCO International Commission on the Futures of Education (2021) *Progress Update of the International Commission on the Futures of Education*, Paris: UNESCO.

²⁷ Williams, Z. (2020) *Review of the Impact of Mass Disruption on the Wellbeing and Mental Health of Children and Young People, and Possible Therapeutic Interventions*, GSR report number 62/2020, Cardiff: Welsh Government; OECD (2020) ‘Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience,’ *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*, June 11, 2020. Accessed Aug 4, 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

²⁸ Day, L., B. Percy-Smith, S. Rizzo, et al (2020) ‘To lockdown and back: Young people’s lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic,’ Nuffield Foundation (Ecorys and University of Huddersfield). November 2020. Accessed July 2021. <https://www.guc19.com/pdf/resource-bank/to-lockdown-and-back-research-report.pdf>.

²⁹ UNICEF (2021) ‘Launch of global multi-religious faith-in-action Covid-19 initiative,’ April 8, 2021. Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/press-releases/launch-global-multi-religious-faith-action-covid-19-initiative>.

³⁰ Including ActionAid, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Mercy Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council, Restless Development, the Office of the United Nations Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY), the World Health Organization (WHO), War Child Holland.

³¹ Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action (2020) *COVID-19: Working with and for Young People*, May 2020. Accessed July 31, 2021. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b2d24e39d5abbe187e75234/t/5ec3fd1456f8a03becbc2699/1589902616805/COMPACT+COVID19-05.pdf>

organisations and commissions, including the faith-inspired Global Compact on Education,³² the Global Partnership for Education,³³ and the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD).³⁴ Many of these

initiatives have outlined detailed approaches to engaging youth in participatory processes of decision-making. Until these calls to action are heeded, youth are at risk of remaining disengaged and disenfranchised.

3. DISRUPTION OF AND LIMITED ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

"I was told to learn by myself. The teaching was left out completely."

(Girl, 18, UK)

"I haven't been able join online classes because most families here only have one device per household ... it is difficult because my parents will need the computer to work ... and I also have brothers and sisters."

(Girl, 18, Bangladesh)

"I felt anxious about studies because I do not have a computer, and I was going to drop out of school entirely, but my teacher texted me, and she told me which text books to read, and suggested projects for me to do. Now she calls me twice a week, and we text about my progress."

(Boy, 16, Colombia)

A *Save the Children* study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 4 children had no access to any learning materials.³⁵ Nearly 500 million students have not had any access to remote learning,³⁶ primarily due to lack of access to devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops), adequate internet bandwidth, and in many cases electricity.³⁷ The digital divide means that these issues are heightened in lower-income countries, for example,

across Africa, only 1 in 4 people have access to any internet at all.³⁸ A quarter of school principals across the OECD reported that inadequate access to digital technology was hindering the learning of their students.³⁹ G20 leaders acknowledge the challenge of students' access to quality education, especially for children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in virtually all contexts.⁴⁰

³² See Global Compact on Education (2021) 'The invite of Pope Francis: Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the launch of the Global Compact on Education.' Accessed April 1, 2021. <https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/en/the-invite-of-pope-francis/>

³³ Global Partnership for Education (2021). Accessed Sept 1, 2021. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/>

³⁴ The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD) (2020) 'Statement on Covid-19 and youth.' Accessed July 31, 2021. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Youth/COVID-19_and_Youth.pdf

³⁵ Gordon, M. and M. Burgess (2020) *The Hidden Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Education and Learning*, London: Save the Children International. Accessed Apr 14, 2021. https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/18174/pdf/the_hidden_impact_of_covid-19_on_child_education.pdf

³⁶ UNESCO (2021) 'One year into COVID-19 education disruption: Where do we stand?' March 19, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/news/one-year-covid-19-education-disruption-where-do-we-stand>

³⁷ Hughes, C. (2020) 'What lessons from the coronavirus pandemic will shape the future of education?' World Economic Forum. Accessed Apr 9, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid19-lockdown-future-education/>

³⁸ UNESCO Global Education Commission (2021) 'One year into COVID: Prioritizing education recovery to avoid a generational catastrophe,' Roundtable Session 3, UNESCO, March 29, 2021. Accessed April 12, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/news/one-year-covid-prioritizing-education-recovery-avoid-generational-catastrophe>

³⁹ Schleicher, A. (2020) *The Impact of COVID-19 on Education – Insights from Education at a Glance 2020*, OECD. Accessed July 31, 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>

⁴⁰ Holland, C., D. Aldeghaither, A. Ghaffar Mughal and M. Nurunnabi (2020) 'G20 coalition in transformative action for education: Ensuring continuity of learning within and beyond the COVID-19 crisis,' T20 Saudi Arabia.

Even where technological access has allowed online learning, young people's experiences have been restricted by reduced motivation and engagement, partly due to teachers' lack of expertise in remote teaching. Hence there is growing commitment from G20 leaders and international organisations to address the deep inequalities in access to educational provision and digital technologies, and to enhance teachers' capacities to teach through digital or blended media.⁴¹

During the IF20 **GLI** workshops, adolescents described how access to digital technology (internet, laptops, tablets, smartphones, electricity) has been an important factor in making learning possible for them during lockdown, and in supporting their well-being. This includes not only access to online classes and resources but also access to sessions specifically directed towards nurturing motivation, resilience, and life skills. Good quality access to digital technology can further enable adolescents to stay connected through social media, calls and chats with their friends, teachers, faith communities, and others who provide healthcare, and social emotional support. Young people noted the need for teachers to acquire training in how to engage fully with students through online media.

Whilst many **GLI** participants had access to online teaching provision, young people found it harder

to ask questions, or to go deeply into subject materials, and noted the detrimental impacts of limited relationships and connections with teachers, leaving them struggling to self-motivate. Where they did have richer connections with their teachers (e.g. if teachers called them to check-in regularly), youth felt they were more able to solve learning and personal problems both independently and relationally, which in turn had a positive impact on their well-being. In some settings, teachers were recognised to be willing to go over and above the call of duty in offering emotional and educational support. Thus the **GLI** workshops witnessed many adolescents proposing that educational systems must support teachers' well-being and professional development, which is regarded as a key to students' learning and well-being.

According to a 2020 OECD report, whilst many countries have put into place additional emergency spending to support vulnerable students and distance learning packages, there may be longer term negative impacts on education budgets as part of the economic fallout of the global crisis. Prioritising the required investments in teacher professional development and infrastructures that ensure consistent access to quality digital and face-to-face learning opportunities is a key component of strengthening education systems towards resilience.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

4. EDUCATIONAL DISCONNECTION FROM CONCERNS OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL COMMUNITIES

"I have been really supported by my volunteering work, it has provided me with a sense of purpose and a feeling of making a difference... I would like lessons to be more about real life, such as learning how to deal and face problems or changes."

(Girl, 18, UK)

"We need more conversations about politics: what is our role that we live in a democracy, understand what is happening, what is our scenario."

(Boy, 17, Brazil)

"Focus on building the students' motivation for learning, renewing education by human interaction, giving students space for consultation, and advance global solidarity. Keep focusing on improving students' attitude, knowledge, and skills."

(Girl, 16, Indonesia)

There has been widespread recognition of the links between the COVID-19 pandemic and ecological crises, which exacerbate the risk of similar future pandemics.⁴³ These crises have aggravated young people's anxiety and vulnerability. Despite the need to understand the pressing ecological and climate change challenges confronting humanity, school curricula consistently fail to inform and engage children and young people on these global issues, or to engage youth with local communities to enact positive change and support UN SDGs. Education's focus on contents that are far from students' lived realities can leave young people feeling ignorant of possible approaches to engaging proactively with both local and global concerns.⁴⁴

International organisations, major global educational commissions, scholars, and religious and faith leaders have highlighted the importance

of ensuring that education furnishes children and young people with the competencies for global flourishing.⁴⁵ In particular, they are calling for consistent educational support from faith organisations, parents, and others in the community in a time of disorientation and crisis, and highlighting the importance of co-creative solutions for global challenges and the need to strengthen communities.⁴⁶

Environmental education has been identified as central to building "societies that are characterised by flexible, creative, adaptable, well-informed and inventive sustainable well-being communities."⁴⁷ With the pressing need for the global community to move beyond "ambivalent consumerism" to a post-material society, education must be a key factor in driving change.⁴⁸ It can contribute to motivating, empowering and nurturing hope

⁴³ Harvard School of Public Health (2021) 'Coronavirus and climate change,' Centre for Climate, Health and Global Environment. Accessed Aug 11, 2021. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/subtopics/coronavirus-and-climate-change/>

⁴⁴ UNICEF (2021) 'Youth for climate action.' Accessed Aug 4, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/youth-action>; Lehtonen, A., A. O. Salonen and H. Cantell (2019) 'Climate change education: A new approach for a world of wicked problems,' in: Cook, J. (ed.) *Sustainability, Human Well-Being, and the Future of Education*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-78580-6_11

⁴⁵ Stanistreet, P., M. Elfert and D. Atchoarena (2021) 'Introduction to education in the age of COVID-19: Implications for the future,' *International Review of Education* 67: 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-021-09904-y>

⁴⁶ Stanistreet, P., M. Elfert and D. Atchoarena (eds.) (2020) Special issue on 'Education in the age of COVID-19: Understanding the consequences,' *International Review of Education* 66. <https://link.springer.com/journal/11159/volumes-and-issues/66-5>

⁴⁷ Lehtonen, A., A. O. Salonen and H. Cantell (2019).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

in young people, in the face of widespread eco-anxiety and despair.⁴⁹

Young people have been recognised as “agents of change, entrepreneurs and innovators,”⁵⁰: an important driving force for climate action.⁵¹

Education can make a significant contribution to scaling up youth-led efforts and enhancing youth knowledge and skills to actively identify meaningful approaches to ensuring global flourishing, including human well-being and the wellness of the planet.⁵²

Many participants in the **GLI** workshops expressed frustration at their experiences of an education that fails to acknowledge the pressing concerns facing global societies. They called for a focus on scientific literacy in schools, thereby enriching their understanding and enhancing their capacities to act and to take responsibility for health and ecological crises. They also proposed a shift

away from a traditional top-down standardised curriculum towards co-created and emergent curricula, integrating knowledge, skills and experience relevant to *global* concerns. Service learning was also underlined, which provides opportunities for youth to connect education with community transformation at local and wider levels. Youth also highlighted that education can nurture a spiritual consciousness of interconnectedness amongst all, and transcendent values often found at the core of religions and faiths.

Efforts from international organisations, such as the UN Climate Change Conference’s Youth Summit,⁵³ UNICEF Youth for Climate Action,⁵⁴ UNESCO’s Youth Leadership Workshops,⁵⁵ OECD G20 Youth Goal,⁵⁶ G20 Young Global Changers,⁵⁷ and other similar initiatives all underscore the connection between education and nurturing young people’s proactive part in building a better future for all.

⁴⁹ Ojala, M. (2012) ‘Hope and climate change: The importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people,’ *Environmental Education Research* 18(5): 625–642. Accessed Aug 4, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2011.637157>

⁵⁰ United Nations (2021) ‘Youth in action.’ Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/youth-in-action>

⁵¹ Parker, L. (2021) ‘For young climate activists, the pandemic is the defining moment for action,’ National Geographic, April 23, 2021. Accessed July 10, 2021. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/for-young-climate-activists-pandemic-defining-moment-for-action>

⁵² UNICEF (2021) ‘Youth for climate action.’ Accessed Aug 4, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/youth-action#increasing-youth>

⁵³ UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021 (2021) ‘The youth summit.’ Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://ukcop26.org/pre-cop/the-youth-summit/>

⁵⁴ UNICEF (2021) ‘Youth for climate action.’ Accessed Aug 4, 2021. <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change/youth-action>

⁵⁵ UNESCO (2021) ‘By youth, with youth, for youth.’ Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://en.unesco.org/youth>

⁵⁶ OECD (2020) *Helping Disadvantaged Youth: Progress and Policy Action towards the Antalya G20 Youth Goal*, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development International Labour Organization, April 8, 2020. Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/employment/youth/OECD-ILO-Progress-Policy-Action-Antalya-G20-Youth-Goal.pdf>

⁵⁷ Global Solutions Initiative Foundation (2021). Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.global-solutions-initiative.org/young-global-changers/>

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL ACTION BY G20 LEADERS

Drawing on insights from the **Global Listening Initiative** and the experiences of IF20 Education Working Group partners, five priority areas for practical policy action are underlined in the light of the need for educational transformation as we move forward. Each priority is supported with illustrative actions, including examples of how to put recommendations into practice.

1. SAFEGUARD HEALING AND WELL-BEING AS A CORNERSTONE OF EDUCATION

Anxiety, uncertainty, fear and isolation have become more prevalent... There is a risk that by focussing on academics only, schools are forgetting that wellness needs to come first.

– World Economic Forum⁵⁸

What would it look like to rebuild schools in a manner that centered the holistic needs of students and educators? This question needs to be the bedrock of further research and discussions, guiding the work of ... schools moving forward.

– Partnership for Resilience⁵⁹

Education is essential not only to healing the trauma of COVID-19, but also addressing the pre-existing epidemic of youth mental and emotional illbeing. Faith-sensitive conceptions and practices of healing and well-being can enrich educational effort to this end. This is a significant step that all G20 countries can take for education, guided by a common objective of nurturing students' holistic well-being through education. Specific actions could include:

- a) **Focusing teaching and learning specifically on enriching students' and teachers' healing and well-being** (e.g. social-emotional support, faith-inspired care and nurture of the individual, safeguarding the interests and needs of vulnerable youth, counselling, peer mediation, and restorative encounters);
- b) **Developing whole school relational processes** (e.g. teachers being physically and emotionally available and spiritually present, enriching children and young people's humanising experiences through unstructured play, time in nature, sports and physical activities, music, poetry, arts; faith-based ethical and spiritual activities, such as silent reflection meditation, and prayer; and caring for the vulnerable);
- c) **Shifting from stress-inducing standardisation and high-stakes testing to a relational, participatory, and well-being-sensitive approach to educational evaluation** (e.g. learning journals, peer-review, teachers' formative feedback, student-led learning review, or portfolio evaluation).

2. ENGAGE YOUTH IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

This really is the time for us to start taking young people seriously, listen to what they are telling us, value their contributions and support their involvement as a force for change.

– Percy-Smith, Centre for Applied Childhood, Youth and Family Research⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Hughes, C. (2020) 'What lessons from the coronavirus pandemic will shape the future of education?' World Economic Forum. Accessed Apr 9, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid19-lockdown-future-education/>

⁵⁹ Partnership for Resilience (2020) *Rebuilding for a New Normal: A Study of the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trauma-Responsive Schools and Key Recommendations for Communities*. Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://edredesign.org/files/edredesign/files/rebuilding-new-normal-report>

⁶⁰ University of Huddersfield (2020) 'Young people feel let down by politicians and media stereotypes, says new research.' Nov 2020. Accessed Sept 14, 2021. <https://www.hud.ac.uk/news/2020/november/to-lockdown-and-back-growing-up-under-covid19/>

[Engaging youth] in global peace and sustainable development processes is not only a way to be more inclusive: it also has a revitalising effect. Youth are passionate, energetic, and creative, and they seek innovative solutions to the world's problems. It is our responsibility, as partners for youth, to empower them to do so.

– UNV Partner for Youth⁶¹

Youth have a significant part to play in educational decisions that directly affect their learning, well-being, and present and future lives. Therefore, all young people, including girls and youth from minority and vulnerable backgrounds, must be respected and engaged as actors, innovators, co-creators, partners, and advocates for transforming education. G20 leaders should consider faith communities as partners in education in this regard as many have provided meaningful support in terms of youth engagement. Specific actions could include:

- a) **Involving young people formally and informally in educational decisions at all levels, e.g. school, community, and beyond** (e.g. attending to diverse youth voices, perspectives and worldviews; embedding democratic processes in listening to youth and acting upon their concerns; practising lived citizenship in education, such as fair and inclusive processes of electing class representatives, meeting with local politicians, and taking part in youth parliaments);
- b) **Providing opportunities for youth to play an active part in proposing innovative educational visions and strategies that can help enable them to meet global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, social injustice, and the climate crisis** (e.g. supporting the involvement of youth, especially girls and those from vulnerable backgrounds, in shaping and establishing school ethos, curricula themes, and pedagogical approaches; encouraging greater youth self-efficacy through project-based learning; empowering girls and youth from vulnerable backgrounds to become members of school councils, organise student-led events, and facilitate community activities);
- c) **Nurturing relevant competencies to empower youth leadership** (e.g. offering opportunities for youth-led programmes and providing youth leadership capacity-building).

3. ENSURE ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S EQUITABLE AND CONSISTENT ACCESS TO GOOD QUALITY EDUCATION BOTH IN PERSON AND ONLINE

The necessity for online/blended learning demands 'the need for resources to be made available on a fair, democratic, human-centred basis.

– Education in the age of COVID-19: Implications for the future⁶²

Ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to succeed at school and develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will allow them to contribute to society is at the heart of the global agenda and education's promise to our future society.

– OECD⁶³

To improve learners' equitable experience of, and equal access to, good quality education requires a commitment to making digital technological infrastructures available in homes, schools, and communities.

⁶¹ UN Volunteers (2014) *Partners for Youth: UNV Success Stories*. Accessed Sept 1, 2021. https://www.unv.org/sites/default/files/UNV%20Success%20Stories_FINAL_ws.pdf

⁶² Stanistreet, P., M. Elfert and D. Atchoarena (eds.) (2020) Special Issue on 'Education in the age of COVID-19: Understanding the consequences,' *International Review of Education* 66. <https://link.springer.com/journal/11159/volumes-and-issues/66-5>

⁶³ OECD (2020) 'Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience,' *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*, June 11, 2020. Accessed Aug 4, 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>

Broad G20 political partnerships and public and private investments in educational resources are key to educational inclusion. Specific actions could include:

- a) **Committing to financing education inclusively, equitably and equally** (e.g. bridging the digital gap, access gap, gender gap, and opportunity gap);
- b) **Investing in good quality educational resources and facilities for all** (e.g. digital learning platforms, ICT devices, and other equipment for blended learning);
- c) **Providing infrastructures that ensure access to online learning** (e.g. electricity, internet connection, and good bandwidth).

4. EMBED ECOLOGICAL AND GLOBAL CONCERNS IN CURRICULA AGENDA

[Education must nurture students] *who are open, responsible, prepared to listen, dialogue and reflect with others, and capable of weaving relationships with families, between generations, and with civil society, and thus to create a new humanism.*

– Global Compact on Education⁶⁴

[Education for the future] *is restructured to promote global citizenship ... to instil in learners the inherent interconnect- edness and dignity of all life and create values of acceptance, equality, respect for diversity, empathy and compas- sion in us.*

– Open Access Government⁶⁵

The world increasingly recognises the interdependence of human well-being and ecological flourishing, a spiritual understanding long advocated by global faith communities. Education can contribute significantly to young people's deepened awareness of the need to decentralise human self-interest, and to recentre human responsibility for regenerating our ecological environment. With the support of faith-based partners, curricula agendas must be reformed to include and promote environmental education and direct experiences in/of nature, along with a deeper understanding of SDGs and the skills to support them. Specific actions could include:

- a) **Integrating environmental and nature-based learning in curricula** (e.g. making ecological literacy a consistent common thread of all curricula topics, including a positive and proactive understanding of UN SDGs; faith-based understandings of man-nature interdependence; and direct experiences in nature);
- b) **Supporting co-created curricular contents with youth to ensure that they are community-rooted as well as relevant to global concerns and challenges** (e.g. offering opportunities to learn about local and global climate change challenges and ecological crises, and working with youth to identify practical and well-informed localised approaches for supporting SDGs and community regeneration);
- c) **Enabling young people to participate in service learning and contribute to the regeneration of their local communities** (e.g. providing opportunities for young people to play an active part in community regeneration and improvement, such as giving practical support to the vulnerable in the school and those in need in the community; engaging in intergenerational learning, civic participation and faith-based community actions).

⁶⁴ Global Compact on Education (nd) Accessed Sept 1, 2021. <https://www.educationglobalcompact.org/en/>

⁶⁵ Open Access Government (2019) 'Education: Global citizenship for human flourishing,' Oct 15, 2019. Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/education-global-citizenship-for-human-flourishing/75764/>

5. PRIORITISE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING AND STRENGTHEN THEIR CAPACITIES TO FACILITATE BLENDED LEARNING

It's an understatement to say that the last year has been challenging for teachers. We've asked them to learn entirely new methods for teaching in online and hybrid environments. We've asked them to address the trauma and stress students are experiencing as we navigate the pandemic and we've asked them to do all this while navigating their stresses, both professional and personal.

— Brooke Stafford-Brizard⁶⁶

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted that both initial and in-service teacher education are in need of reform to better train teachers in new methods of education ... Many more teachers will need psychological support themselves if they are to meet the needs of their students.

— UN 2020 Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond⁶⁷

Teachers' well-being and continued professional development is essential to high quality education. With the strong possibility of future pandemics on the horizon, cultivating teachers' capacities to facilitate student learning and well-being through online and blended media has become a key priority. Online CPD platforms and creative resources across G20 partnerships can serve to support the sharing of innovative practices and enable mutual learning. Faith-inspired conceptions of education and well-being can help strengthen teachers' connection with the noble vocation. Specific actions could include:

- a) **Establishing online platforms and resources for teachers' professional learning and well-being** (e.g. in collaboration with NGOs, faith, and other global partners);
- b) **Financing professional development programmes that can enhance teachers well-being and strengthen their pedagogical capacities for digital and online education** (e.g. initial teacher education; continuous professional development; lifelong learning);
- c) **Nurturing teachers' professional competencies** (e.g. facilitating collaborative and dialogic learning; co-creating with youth deep listening spaces, and mutual learning).

⁶⁶ Stafford-Brizard, B. (2021). 'Four ways to support teacher well-being.' Accessed Aug 19, 2021. <https://www.ascd.org/blogs/four-ways-to-support-teacher-well-being>

⁶⁷ United Nations (2020) *Policy Brief: Education During COVID-19 and Beyond*, August 2020. Accessed Sept 1, 2021. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_education_august_2020.pdf

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