

## Foreword

---

The Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol, adopted by Commonwealth ministers of education in 2004, has provided a robust framework for managing the international migration of teachers. It sets out the principles of protecting source countries' education systems, recognises the benefits of encouraging migration to destination countries, and promotes the ethical recruitment of teachers and the protection of their rights, including those of refugee teachers.

The role that refugee teachers play in providing access to quality education in emergency situations, and their legal, professional, social and economic status, are issues that are currently poorly addressed in the literature. This study, which involved field research in three Commonwealth countries currently hosting refugee teachers, aims to fill this gap. Its goal is to provide ministries responsible for the welfare of refugees who are also teachers, along with other stakeholders such as multilateral agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with information about the issues faced by refugee teachers. It includes policy recommendations to reduce the institutional barriers refugee teachers sometimes face, so that their experience and expertise can be more quickly and efficiently utilised in the event of an emergency.

As the study recognises, there is a continuum between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration, with teachers migrating in response to a complex interplay of 'push' and 'pull' factors. Intuitively we understand that teachers moving across a border to escape sudden onset of conflict or a natural disaster face issues that could be very different from a teacher deciding to migrate primarily in search of, say, improved pay or feeling professionally 'blocked' and searching for advancement. In fact, the study found that many of the issues faced by refugee teachers are similar – the need for secure employment and a reliable salary; the difficulties of being accepted or valued by host communities; the wish to exercise their profession to the best of their abilities. However, the experience of these issues might be qualitatively different, and made more intense due to lack of preparedness, on the part of the teacher and/or the host country. The resilience of refugee teachers shines through, but this prompts questions such as: what are the factors that can allow teachers' resilience to flourish, and what factors might erode it?

Three points emerging from the study are worth drawing attention to here. First, the situation on the ground is that teachers are often discouraged by the way they are treated by the officials and employers they encounter. There is a net loss of teachers over years, not a gain. This suggests too little readiness to deal with the new situation both as an employment problem and as a social challenge.

Second, teachers reflect the flexible age in which we live. As their circumstances change, qualified teachers may remain as teachers, or they may give up teaching, temporarily

or permanently. A myriad of factors surround the decision. For the education policy-maker attempting to manage teacher supply and demand, this situation is not helped by the fact that teachers might have been reluctant or accidental teachers, rather than teaching being a definite and preferred career choice. This suggests the need to build in greater flexibility into education planning.

Although one can predict that teachers will generally position themselves where the incentives are strongest, many other factors are less predictable. One of these is whether the teacher will wish to stay on as a teacher and make a career of teaching. The Refugee Education Trust (RET) has noted that in camps the appointment as teachers of young people who are initially not qualified has often transformed their community role. Some reluctant, 'press-ganged' teachers come to like teaching and may take it up as a career. However, it is also important to note that many more do not. The case of returnees to South Sudan, discussed later in this document is a case in point.

Third, in the final analysis, financial security, stability and, to a lesser extent, the career prospects available, in the form of a 'ladder', are what keep teachers on the job. It is on these factors that policy should focus particularly.

The study does find that refugee teachers are playing crucial roles in providing education, and not just in emergency settings. This report starts a conversation about how host countries – and home countries on their return – can maximise the potential offered by refugee teachers, and the Commonwealth Secretariat looks forward to more voices joining the debate.

## **Esther Eghobamien**

Interim Director, Social Transformation Programmes Division  
Commonwealth Secretariat

## Acknowledgements

---

The authors would like to thank all the interviewees who generously gave their time to be interviewed for this research, and to the officials who assisted us in their enquiries.

The Commonwealth Secretariat would like to thank the experts who reviewed draft versions of the report, and who provided such perceptive comments: Dr Marina Anselme, Eleanor Brown and Ita Sheehy.

## Dedication

---

This publication is dedicated to all those who teach, train and run education programmes in difficult conditions. In particular it is dedicated to Mr Abdi Ali Yusuf, who was shot dead while escorting a Norwegian Refugee Council mission in Ifo Camp, Dadaab, Kenya on 29 June 2012.