

Governments try to dishonour their obligations during pandemic

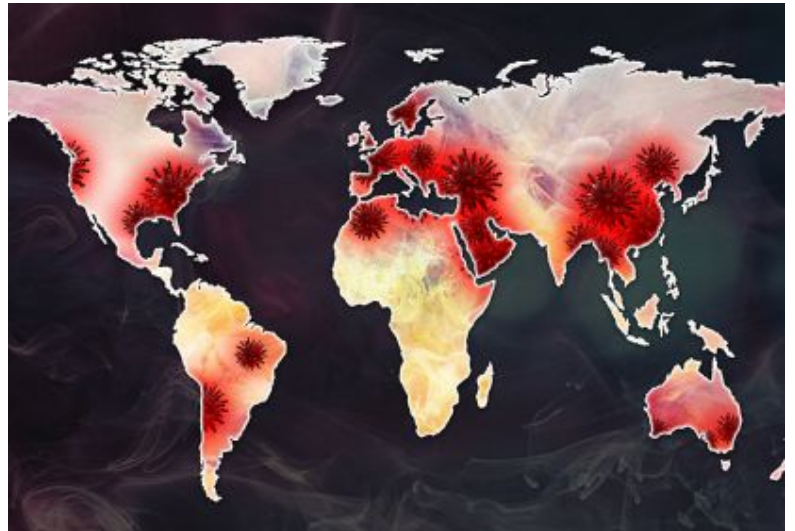
April 07, 2020

In large parts of the world, teachers and education support personnel are not being paid salaries and receiving benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic, [reports Education International](#).

In Alberta, Canada, the ruling United Conservative Party announced it would redirect \$128 million from K-12 classes (for transportation, substitute teachers and educational assistants) to the COVID-19 response while classes were cancelled. ([Global News, 28 March](#))

Alberta Teachers' Association president Jason Schilling said the announcement directed school boards to lay off about 6000 substitute teachers and up to 20,000 support staff. ([Alberta Teachers' Association, 29 March](#))

In the Philippines, the National Alliance of Teachers and Office Workers has been negotiating with employers for funds to be provided to educators during school closures. [Education International \(26 March\)](#) reports: "While in some cases negotiations have been successful and cash advances were given to educators, negotiations continue in some education institutions where the union is arguing for support to be provided in the form of grants and not loans."



Education International's [guiding principles](#) for the COVID-19 pandemic state: "The salaries, terms and conditions of teachers and education support personnel at all levels, including those of educators on fixed or short-term contracts, should be protected at all times, during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Educators must be remunerated as usual during closure periods."

Working conditions

In Quebec, Canada, teachers received notification that their collective agreements were no longer considered binding and they could be assigned different tasks, working hours and workplaces to help deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Quebec Trade Unions President Sonia Ethier said: "There has really been a serious breach on the part of the government." ([CTV News, 19 March](#))

Ms Ethier also deplored the "very restrictive and discretionary nature" of COVID-19 premiums granted to some public sector workers ([media release](#)). "The reality is that there are several tens of thousands of workers in health, education or early childhood who are necessarily assigned to the front. [The] Legault government sends a very bad signal to the personnel mobilised for the maintenance of essential services by limiting these premiums for strictly budgetary purposes. The government does not have the right to exclude people who also live in deep anxiety and anxiety because they risk daily contracting COVID-19 and passing it on to their loved ones."

The global federation of teacher unions' [key demands to all governments and international institutions](#) include that governments and employers "protect the rights and livelihoods of educators and support personnel and not use the pandemic as a reason to eliminate or weaken collective bargaining agreements negotiated and in place while, in fact, this crisis demonstrates the importance of collective bargaining and the role it plays supporting workers and their communities".

Consultation

Education International is calling on governments to consult with education unions about the process of school closures, the operation of reduced and modified education and the process of reopening schools when the pandemic is over.

All India Primary Teachers Federation President Ram Pal Singh said schools and education facilities had been closed without prior planning or warning. [Education International \(3 April\)](#) wrote: "This left students, teachers, education support personnel and families without information, guidance, and directives by public authorities to ensure the continuity of quality education."

German education union VBE's North Rhine-Westphalia state chairperson Stefan Behlau said teachers need to be included in decision making when the education ministry reacts to the changing conditions related to the pandemic. ([Education International, 1 April](#))

Federation has been in regular contact with the NSW Department of Education during the pandemic, to advocate for members' conditions, particularly in relation to health and safety. Visit [Federation's COVID-19 web page](#) for the latest developments.