



Education  
and Solidarity  
Network



# International Barometer on Education Personnel's Health and Well-being

Summary | Report | 2021



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In order to better understand the working conditions and health experiences of the educational population, the Education and Solidarity Network (ESN) and the MGEN Foundation for Public Health (FESP-MGEN) have set up the International Barometer of the Health and Well-Being of Education Personnel. Its first edition was posted online and distributed by the ESN and its partners in May/June/July 2021 to teachers in 6 countries or regions across the world. The FESP-MGEN ensured the statistical analysis of the data obtained. In total, 8000 teachers from these 6 territories answered the hundred questions put to them about their working conditions, professional feeling, and well-being: 1,268 people in French-speaking Belgium, 3,646 in France, 2,349 in Quebec – sample size to be redressed by weighing – 215 in Mexico, 302 in Morocco and 222 in Gambia. This excellent participation is a testament to the interest of the profession in the topic and the high expectations in this area.

## **I. Participants in the barometer: several thousand teachers from 6 countries with varied social demographics and professional profiles**

Samples of teachers from the 6 countries participating in the survey include a variety of profiles.

In summary, over 2/3 of the teachers who responded are women, reflecting a mainly feminised professional sector, but there are exceptions, such as Gambia, where the sex ratio is the reverse (2/3 men).

The different levels of school education are well represented in the countries surveyed, except in Gambia where primary school teachers are very low in number, while in Mexico, they are the majority.

In Morocco, the option of part-time work is non-existent among the participating teachers, while it concerns one-third of the sample in Mexico, and approximately one-tenth in other countries.

The samples include teachers with varying levels of seniority, with the intermediate class of "5-30 years of experience" being the largest and the most represented. In Gambia, the absence of teachers with a seniority over 30 years is noted, in relation to the youngest age of teachers in the sample (34 years on average, versus around forty years in other countries).

Among teachers who responded to the barometer, fewer than 10% are active in professional education, except in Belgium where 20% are active within this framework.

In Morocco, on average, the schools of participating teachers are much larger (in terms of numbers of students) than in the other countries.

Ultimately, the samples of teachers from the 3 Western French-speaking countries (French-speaking Belgium, France, Quebec) appear to be comparable on a social demographic and professional level. The structure of the Moroccan sample is similar in numerous aspects. The Gambian and Mexican samples display special characteristics: in Gambia, a significantly younger, more male population who are essentially active in secondary education; in Mexico, teachers working relatively more often in private education, in smaller schools, in an urban environment and on a part-time basis.

Finally, it must be noted that the national health situation varied at the time of the survey, as demonstrated by the very variable rates of remote education (full or partial) among respondents. In summary, 100% of Mexican teachers taught remotely on at least a partial basis (80% of these on a total basis), and 51% in Gambia (1/4 of these on a total basis), while there were almost two-thirds or more teaching entirely on-site in other countries. This rate was also closely linked to the age of the students, remote education options being more limited for younger students.

All these methodological, structural and situational differences must be taken into account when interpreting comparative results.

## **II. Teachers' working conditions and environment: structural difficulties**

### **II.1. Vertical organisation, training, career development...: a certain level of dissatisfaction**

The teachers estimate their effective working time to be around 30-40 hours a weekly for full-time work, but major intra- and inter-country variations have been observed. The teachers from France and Quebec report the largest average volume of effective hours worked, with 40 and 43 hours respectively on average per week, on a full-time basis.

The sizes of classes taught vary greatly depending on the level taught, but also on the local reality. Gambia, Morocco and Mexico are distinguished by a significant proportion of classes with over 30 students (67%, 50% and 41% respectively).

Regarding autonomy at work, an essential factor in professional well-being, more than 3 out of 4 teachers rate it somewhat positively, except in Gambia where the satisfaction rate almost reaches 2/3.

Concerning the vertical dimension of work, teachers in France and Belgium are less satisfied than those in other countries: the information given and appreciation by the hierarchy are considered to be insufficient by almost half of the teachers. Opinion is more favourable concerning the horizontal dimension (making important decisions as a team), but it is still low in Belgium.

Teachers mainly express their dissatisfaction regarding training opportunities, particularly in France (78% dissatisfaction), Morocco (67%) and Belgium (59%). The rate of dissatisfaction is even more significant concerning career development opportunities and wages, almost always exceeding 50% in the 6 countries. For these two aspects, the highest rates of dissatisfaction have been systematically observed in France.

### **II.2. School climate and social relationships at work: a resource to be capitalised on**

On a global level, teachers rate the working climate favourably, even though in Belgium and France, many still see it in a negative light (42% in Belgium, 35% in France).

Regarding social relationships with different parties in the educational community (management, colleagues, students' parents, students), dissatisfaction is still relatively minor, but it is almost at 1/3 concerning management in France and Belgium where these figures are the worst of all.

### **II.3. Violence at work: problematic normalisation**

The teachers feel safe within their school most of the time. However, a non-negligible portion (up to 18% in Gambia) can report "rarely" feeling safe or "not feeling safe at all".

A majority of teachers have a positive opinion of students' level of discipline, the favourable opinion rate ranging from 92% in Mexico to 63% and 61% respectively in Belgium and France.

The rates of teachers who report having been victims of violence at work over the past 12 months vary: approximately 3/10 in France, Quebec, Belgium; half as many in Morocco, Gambia, Mexico. The rates of teachers who have witnessed violence are approximately double the rates of teachers who are victims of violence, except for Gambia, where the two rates of victims and of witnesses are approximately the same.

The people responsible for the violence experienced by teachers are often students or students' parents but also, in several cases, other members of staff. This category is particularly represented among people responsible for violence acts reported in Belgium, Gambia and Mexico. People outside the school may also be involved, especially in Gambia, in Morocco and, to a lesser extent, in Mexico.

### **II.4. Physical environment: mixed results**

If opinions are divided on the physical environment within each country, with all levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction represented without any negligible percentages, satisfaction is generally at a slight advantage, except for material conditions (space, educational material, internet etc.), over which the feeling is particularly negative in Morocco (84%) and, to a lesser extent, in Gambia (57%), Belgium (55%) and France (54%). Morocco is distinguished by systematically pejorative indicators compared to other countries, such as material conditions, internal and external environments, and Mexico and Quebec by indicators which are often more favourable than in the other countries surveyed.

### **II.5. Private life – professional life: a difficult balance**

If teachers have divided opinions on the work/life balance, it is France in which the balance is considered in the least positive light, with levels of dissatisfaction reaching 70% (versus staggered rates between 57% in Belgium and 38% in Mexico).

The usual durations of the journey between home and work vary greatly from one country to another, with very few teachers making a single trip lasting over 1 hour in France (5%), Quebec (2%) and Belgium (6%), with this rate growing to 13% in Morocco, 15% in Mexico and 35% in Gambia.

### **III. Health and well-being of teachers: a heterogeneous experience around the world**

#### **III.1. Indicators of well-being at work in certain countries are concerning**

The three indirect indicators of job satisfaction (advantage/disadvantage balance of the job; if they had the chance to start over, etc.; social appreciation) appear to be somewhat poor, with a mainly negative opinion present in all countries. In particular, the low social appreciation for the job of teacher is greatly mourned in Belgium, Quebec and France by almost 9 out of 10 teachers. Nevertheless, teachers still "agree" or "completely agree" with the statement "on the whole, my work gives me satisfaction", for a majority among them, except in France, where the percentage almost reaches 50%.

Compared to other countries, the French indicators of job satisfaction are particularly poor, followed by those from Belgium and Quebec. In Mexico, job satisfaction appears to be relatively stable within the sample of respondents.

The portion of teachers who consider their work to have been somewhat or very stressful since the start of the academic year varies greatly: 39% in Gambia (13% "very stressful"), 49% in Mexico (12% "very stressful"), 62% in Morocco (22% "very stressful"), 67% in Belgium (26% "very stressful"), 70% in Quebec (27% "very stressful") and 81% in France (36% "very stressful").

#### **III.2. Overall health is preserved on a global level, but mental health is somewhat weakened**

The quality of life assessment is relatively preserved in Quebec, Gambia and Mexico. It appears to be dented in France, Belgium and Morocco, with fewer than 50% having a favourable opinion. The selection of the option "Worst possible life" by 9% of the sample of Moroccan teachers should be noted, possibly echoing the material and environmental difficulties reported in this territory.

By contrast, overall health appears to be preserved on a global level with fewer than 2 out of 10 teachers considering it to be bad or very bad (even less than 1/10 in Quebec, Gambia and Mexico). However, it appears to be weakened on a psychological level in France, Belgium and, to a lesser extent, in Quebec, with almost one out of 2 teachers reporting often, very often or always experiencing negative feelings, or often, very often or always lacking the time/energy to carry out their work. For the latter issue, the portion of Moroccan teachers (57%) is equally problematic.

The rate of teachers who believe they have been limited in their daily activities on health grounds over the past 6 months is particularly significant: from 42% in Mexico to 70% in Morocco. The reasons mentioned the most often are related to mental health: significant tiredness, sleep problems, depression, mental health problems...even if other causes may be found from time to time.

## **IV. Teaching in times of COVID: various concerns, a global resilience**

At the time of the survey, the portion of teachers totally or partially working remotely varied greatly depending on territories - and the local epidemic situation - but also, within the same territory, depending on the level of education, as well as the age of the students and the remote teaching opportunities adapted for this age. For example, in Mexico, 80% of teachers worked entirely remotely, and 20% partially, while in Belgium, 80% of teachers worked entirely on-site, 18% partially, and only 2% entirely remotely.

Henceforth, the relative weight of concerns at work during this pandemic period varied greatly between countries, but the workload and work/life balance were noticeable in the 6 countries. In France, the lack of planning and institutional guidance weighted also significantly, while in Morocco, concerns at work related frequently with teaching remotely. In Mexico, worry for the students and the fear of contracting COVID-19 were the main preoccupations. In Gambia, on top of their concerns, teachers reported difficulties in applying health measures and social distancing in classes and schools.

Nevertheless, at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year, global feeling regarding the COVID crisis was still somewhat positive, since in general, at least two out of three teachers stated that they agreed, or agreed somewhat, with the statement "I was able to adapt", illustrating the resilience of the profession. The observation was a little less favourable in Mexico, most likely associated with the epidemic climate and the general "total remote working" situation at the time of the survey.

## **V. Training, professional support, occupational health... areas for improvement behind teachers' responses**

Behind the statistics lie certain levers which could be implemented to promote the well-being of teachers. If one need is frequently and persistently expressed, it is the need for training: almost two-thirds of teachers (from 64% in Gambia to 76% in France) stated that they carried out tasks in which they needed more training. In general, the training topics requested depend on the level of seniority: they are more likely to be pedagogy/student management for young teachers, and numerical tools for more senior teachers.

Teachers also emphasise the importance of joint work and point to a lack of support from the hierarchy, particularly in France and Belgium.

In France, Belgium, Gambia and, to a lesser extent, Mexico, teachers believe that they are somewhat poorly informed about health-related matters, both from a general perspective and from a professional or purely educational perspective. On a global level, they express expectations for the educational institution to take more interest in their quality of life at work, particularly on a school administration or hierarchical level. Finally, they mourn the almost complete lack of occupational health. Mexico is a notable exception in this regard (and, to a lesser extent, Quebec), with 1 out of 3 teachers (1 out of 5 respectively) reporting an annual appointment with the occupational physician.

For the question, "Are you satisfied with your access to healthcare in your country? ", the positive response rate varies greatly: 82% in Belgium, 71% in France, 66% in Quebec, but 23% in Mexico, 8% in Gambia and 5% in Morocco. The same pattern can be seen for opting out of healthcare for financial reasons: from 14% in Quebec to 50% or more in Gambia and Morocco. In general, these aspects are closely linked with satisfaction with regards to wages.

**Conclusion** *At the end of the 2020/2021 academic year, after a long pandemic period, alternating between in-person and remote lessons, stricter or more relaxed health protocols, teachers around the world were put to the test. The International Barometer of the Health and Well-Being of Education Personnel demonstrates this on a global level, indicating also that situations regarding certain aspects vary greatly due to different local realities, both on a socio-economic and on a cultural level, or even on a situational level. The results suggest that the COVID crisis exacerbated pre-existing problems in the education sector: effort/reward and work/life imbalance, lack of training, of career development and of hierarchical support, school violence. Nevertheless, teacher's feeling about how they coped during the crisis is still somewhat positive, illustrating the resilience of the profession. Given the major short- and long-term societal impact of teachers' health, monitoring it over the years, crossing perspectives and reactively identifying areas for improvement must remain a priority.*