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Solidarity

Equality

Sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The G20 Education Working Group (EdWG) was established during the Argentinian Presidency in 2018. Subsequent presidencies all incorporated the EdWG as a permanent Working Group of the Sherpa track.

Since 2018, several educational challenges have been dealt with by the G20 EdWG, including: strengthening learning outcomes; equitable access; technological tools, digitalisation and digital technologies in education, universal quality education, financing, partnerships for education; international cooperation; skills for life and work; early childhood care and education (ECCE); universal quality education; and a focus on education for sustainable development.

South Africa is hosting the EdWG, cognisant of the fact that South Africa, as part of the troika from 2024 to 2026, will build upon the achievements of India and Brazil to ensure continuity in taking forward the development agenda. South Africa has an opportunity to champion the aspirations of emerging market economies and promote the development agenda of the African continent within the framework of the G20.

South Africa's participation in the G20 is guided by our strategic foreign policy pillars, which include:

- Enhancing the African agenda and promoting Africa's sustainable development
- South-South cooperation
- Influencing the global multilateral architecture by advancing the agenda of the South through North-South dialogue.

The priorities that South Africa will therefore focus on are:

- Priority 1: Inclusive Economic Growth, Industrialisation, Employment and Inequality
- Priority 2: Food Security
- Priority 3: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Innovation for Sustainable Development.

This issue note explains the vital role education plays in fostering solidarity, equality and sustainable development, with a view to underpinning the priorities

of the 2025 G20 EdWG. It has been compiled by South African analysts, from inside and outside government, who in the process have consulted with key non-South African subject experts.

Global solidarity requires populations who are literate and numerate and possess a sufficient understanding of their own history and the history of the world. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the need for education systems to promote the notion of global citizenship in their curricula, implying teacher training and student assessment, which advance this priority. In a context where the 19 countries of the G20 account for around 80% of global spending on defence and given the dire consequences of conflict for the entire world, the education systems of G20 countries are a vital resource for promoting peace.

Despite reductions in global poverty, the World Inequality Report points to income and wealth inequalities having worsened in recent decades. One of several reasons for this is that emerging digital technologies have not benefitted everyone equally. Part of the remedy is to widen the pool of individuals with a deeper understanding of these technologies and hence access to the associated economic and labour market opportunities. But dealing with rising inequalities is also about ensuring that all young children achieve a basic minimum level of proficiency in reading and numeracy, as emphasised by the SDGs. Children who do not achieve this are nearly always disadvantaged for life. Tackling inequality is also about promoting, through education, a commitment to social justice, human rights, and gender equality, making it clear that the threats to social stability posed by rising inequality are harmful to everyone.

A key barrier to sustainable development is the lack of sufficient action to mitigate climate change and strengthen adaptation to the ongoing changes. Parts of the world, such as Africa, are expected to see especially serious impacts of a changing climate on, for instance, food production and poverty rates. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and others have emphasised the need for climate change education as one ingredient of a more informed public discourse on the topic and as a way of promoting resilience to climate threats.

The 2025 EdWG, through a rigorous process of elimination, and while reflecting on global issues already addressed by the EdWG, the need to build South-South cooperation, and challenges and priorities in the African continent, identified the

sub-theme *Educational Professionals for Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability*, to be dealt with in terms of the following priorities:

1. Quality foundational learning: The role of early childhood care and education (ECCE) to improve the quality of foundational learning.
2. Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in a Global Context.
3. Education Professional Development for a changing world.

By targeting these priority areas, G20 member countries can create more inclusive and resilient education systems capable of preparing learners for the future. This strategic focus will not only enhance educational outcomes but also contribute to the broader goal of reducing socio-economic disparities and promoting social equity. Member countries and organisations are encouraged to share flagship, innovative, successful, and scalable programmes, policies and systems implemented in their countries to address these priority areas during the 2025 South African Presidency.

The key output from these engagements will be a compendium of four volumes to share experiences and best practices related to these priorities as a knowledge output of the South African EdWG G20 presidency.

2. PRIORITIES AND DELIVERABLES

2.1 PRIORITY 1: QUALITY FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING: THE ROLE OF ECCE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF FOUNDATIONAL LEARNING

In recent years, the global discourse on education has highlighted the importance of “foundational learning”. This concept refers to the building blocks of early learning, ideally achieved in pre-school and in the early grades of primary school, and has been referred to as “basic literacy, numeracy, and transferable skills such as socio-emotional skills” by the Global Partnership for Education. Quality foundational learning is strongly predictive of later learning and completing higher levels of education, and teachers play a pivotal role in this process.

With significant expansion of access to schooling around the world, much of the focus in the international commitments has shifted to expanding access to early childhood development opportunities, as well as the quality of learning, especially foundational literacy and numeracy. For example, SD 4, indicator 4.2 states that by 2030 all girls and boys should have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary

education. Furthermore, indicator 4.1.1a targets the proportion of children in grades 2 and 3 “achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex.” Teachers are instrumental in guiding students to meet these benchmarks.

The availability of comparable data to track progress on SDG global indicator 4.2 across countries is limited. South Africa has introduced a national survey to measure the proportion of children developmentally on track by age five. However, no comparable data is available on child outcomes below age five.

ECCE is crucial for developing early literacy, early numeracy, and social-emotional skills during a critical period for cognitive development. Extensive research highlights the cost-effectiveness of pre-primary education, as noted by the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel. Children who attend quality pre-primary programmes tend to have larger vocabularies, better number awareness, stronger perceptual skills, improved social skills, and greater curiosity. Furthermore, quality ECCE provision is a strong social equaliser, with children from disadvantaged families benefiting most from ECCE. ECCE supports the re-integration of women into the workforce, bringing more comprehensive economic benefits at the macro level and fostering an optimistic outlook on the potential impact. These skills contribute to higher competency levels in reading and mathematics.

Conversely, when children are denied access to quality pre-primary programmes, there is a high risk that they will start school without reaching critical developmental milestones, making it harder for them to reach their full potential. Extensive research points to the importance of teachers and practitioners in pre-primary education as essential for the quality of the process. It further underscores the need for inclusive developmental policies to meet this investment. United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) data from lower- and middle-income countries indicate that in 2019 around 44% of children in ECCE programmes were on track in emergent literacy and numeracy, compared to only 12% of those not in ECCE. Additionally, data from the Analysis Programme of the CONFEMEN Education Systems (PASEC) of nine African countries show that children who attended pre-primary schooling are twice as likely to achieve minimum literacy competencies by grade 2.

Despite these benefits, access to quality pre-primary education still needs to be improved in many low- and middle-income countries. Ensuring the effectiveness

of pre-primary education requires comprehensive planning and implementation, including a well-aligned curriculum, adequately trained and supported teachers, sufficient funding, and robust quality assurance mechanisms. The engagement of families and communities is also crucial. However, many countries face challenges such as insufficient pre-primary teachers and inadequate regulation of the pre-primary sector. Parenting support programmes are also key to enabling early stimulation during the first 1000 days. Addressing these issues is essential to leverage the full potential of pre-primary education in promoting foundational learning and improving educational outcomes while enhancing system efficiency by reducing repetition and the need for catch-up programmes. A substantial body of research demonstrates the benefits of investing in early learning teachers to enhance programme quality and child development outcomes.

Despite the evidence, the early learning sector in many developing countries has historically operated informally, with low and sporadic expenditure on the training and development of teachers, low levels of qualifications among the workforce, minimal state oversight and support, low wages, and precarious working conditions. Often, countries do not have fit-for-purpose qualifications and training frameworks to enable ECCE teachers to upskill effectively.

The structured pedagogy programmes implemented in South African primary schools over the years, such as the Early Grade Reading Study and Teaching Mathematics for Understanding, have shown that providing quality materials to both learners and teachers that are aligned to the curriculum is an effective way to improve learning outcomes in the early grades. These lessons should also be applied in the ECCE sector.

The role of parents, ECCE, and primary teachers is critical in improving the quality of foundational learning in a sustainable manner. Recognising that several countries are testing different approaches to the training and support for ECCE and adapting them as required, the South African G20 Presidency will focus on exploring current opportunities for delivering ECCE for the future in resource-constrained environments.

At sub-theme level, the following key areas are highlighted for deeper engagement:

- A fit-for-purpose articulation between minimum qualifications for ECCE teachers, high-quality pre-service training and innovation in the in-service training and development of ECCE teachers

- The development and implementation of quality assurance initiatives in ECCE programmes
- Frameworks for parenting support programmes
- Fostering collaboration with stakeholders in developing a capable, professional workforce
- Innovative, sustainable parenting support programmes.

2.2 PRIORITY 2: MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

In 2020, the G20 Ministers recognised the value of fostering internationalisation in education as a means of improving the quality of education at all levels and cultivating global citizens who are prepared for an increasingly interconnected world. This not only encompasses intercultural, international, and global dimensions in education but also student and staff mobility and international research collaboration. As the focus of the EdWG includes teachers, lecturers and researchers, emphasis on the recognition of their qualifications will be important.

The following have contributed to the mobility of people, specifically teachers, lecturers and researchers seeking employment and study opportunities in countries other than their own:

- Globalisation of education: As more students study abroad and institutions collaborate internationally, there is a growing need for standardised recognition of qualifications across borders, not only for students, but also for teachers, lecturers and researchers.
- Global growth in online learning: Worldwide there has been a five-fold increase in employer provision of online learning opportunities for employees, a four-fold increase in individuals independently seeking online learning opportunities, and a nine-fold increase in online learning opportunities created through government programmes. The e-learning market is projected to grow by 20.5% from 2022 to 2030.
- Labour force mobility: The increasing international mobility of teachers, lecturers and researchers necessitates recognition of qualifications to facilitate job transitions and career mobility across different countries. This implies mutual recognition practices, agreements and frameworks.
- Quality assurance mechanisms: Quality assurance mechanisms ensure that recognised qualifications meet certain standards, promoting trust and

credibility globally, while specific mechanisms may be needed to ensure the quality of education delivered across borders¹.

- Skills and knowledge-based economies: There is a shift towards recognising skills and competencies rather than just formal qualifications and encouraging the development of frameworks that support micro-credentialling, thus recognising experiential and non-formal learning.
- Labour market requirements: The recognition of qualifications should be aligned with the evolving demands of the global labour market, ensuring that recognised qualifications are relevant and responsive to industry needs.
- Policy synchronisation: International organisations like UNESCO and OECD work towards synchronising recognition policies through frameworks and promoting consistency in recognition practices globally. These include the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* and regional conventions. Conventions create a normative platform for fostering trust among countries' higher education systems. These conventions should therefore be used as a foundation for understanding expected future qualifications, which could lead to revising what is now in place or comprehensively rethinking planning around qualifications.
- Enabling mechanisms: There are other global and continental qualifications frameworks and networks that are supporting the recognition of international qualifications and provide a learning network for the sharing of information and collaboration².
- Mutually beneficial and ethical utilisation of migrant skills and education: Migrant labourers often fall victim to unfair labour practices and other forms of employment prejudice, as they often have to accept unfavourable employment conditions below their qualification or skills levels, and below what they would ordinarily enjoy in the country where the original accreditation occurred. This is often caused by barriers in the transferability of qualifications. This can affect students who study abroad and return to their country of origin.

Within the EdWG, after six years of interactions, it is possible to recognise that some countries have been more successful than others at creating qualifications and structures needed for the mobility of teachers, lecturers and

¹ See OECD (2005) Recommendation of the Council concerning Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0340>

² For example, in Europe, the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) Networks support recognition in the framework of the Lisbon Convention

researchers. At the same time, the EdWG recognises the complexity of trying to replicate best practices in different contexts and has discouraged one-size-fits-all solutions. Therefore, it is prudent for the EdWG to explore global trends related to the recognition of qualifications across borders and to ensure that the global recognition of qualifications does not result in a unidirectional skills flight.

In pursuance of the above, the focus will be on:

- Understanding the qualifications and quality assurance regimes in different countries and the current realities and challenges with respect to the recognition of foreign qualifications.
- Exploring the possible mechanisms for mutual recognition of qualifications and skills, including micro-credentials.
- Exploring enabling mechanisms, global and regional conventions, and continental qualifications frameworks and networks, in support of the recognition of qualifications across national borders.
- Exploring innovative approaches to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability³.

2.3 PRIORITY 3: EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Over the past decade, the G20 EdWG has concentrated on expanding global access to schooling and enhancing the quality of learning. Central to these efforts is the goal of ensuring that every classroom has a competent, motivated, and empowered teacher within a well-resourced school. This focus has included addressing teacher shortages and managing supply and demand with a view to achieving the 2030 education targets of SDG 4.c.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted this need, amplifying the fragility of societal systems, and volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), which exacerbated existing challenges of inequality and environmental degradation. What is needed are 21st-century skills in areas such as digital literacy, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving. In addition, social, emotional, and cognitive competencies are essential for meeting the evolving

³ See OECD (2023), “Micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability: Uses and possibilities”, OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 66, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9c4b7b68-en>

demands of the job market and fostering innovation and entrepreneurship (SDG 4.4).

These 21st-century skills have received prominence as countries grapple with the challenge of optimally developing and retaining teachers to be able to develop these skills in learners.

UNESCO's 2024 report, *The Global Report on Teachers: Addressing Teacher Shortages and Transforming the Profession*, points to the imperative of reversing teacher shortages, highlighting that:

- Globally, 44 million additional primary and secondary teachers will be needed to achieve universal education by 2030 (13 million at the primary level and 31 million at the secondary level).
- Sub-Saharan Africa will need an additional 15 million teachers (4.4 million at primary and 10.6 million at secondary).
- The qualitative gap is a significant challenge. Whereas the global average of qualified teachers is 85%, in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is as low as 69%.

Teacher attrition, which significantly exacerbates teacher shortages, has doubled globally from 4.62% in 2015 to 9.06% in 2022. According to the 2024 Global Report, teacher attrition is expected to account for more than half, specifically 58%, of the global demand for teachers, with many new teachers needed to replace those who have left the profession. According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 data, in 41 OECD countries, 16% of teachers under the age of 35 intended to leave the profession within five years. Attending to teacher retention is therefore essential for meeting 2030 teacher supply targets.

Attrition rates follow a U-shaped pattern, peaking in the early and late career stages. In addition to the increased costs associated with training new teachers is the detrimental impact on education systems because countries lose the advantage of their teachers reaching their “peak level of efficacy”, which typically occurs within the first ten years of teaching. This negatively affects students, schools, and systems, impacting performance and perpetuating recruitment challenges. The Global Report advocates more ongoing, teacher-driven professional development, using a range of collaborative modalities, including induction programmes for both novice teachers and principals, mentoring, and professional learning communities. The latter have been shown to address a number of school-based challenges, leading to improved individual and collective efficacy, job satisfaction, and teacher retention.

Teacher supply cannot be considered in isolation from teacher retention. While retention is influenced by extrinsic factors, it is primarily dependent on support structures and relationships within the teaching profession, which in turn are influenced by initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing in-service training throughout the teacher's career.

Despite policies for continuing professional development (CPD), limited financial resources in many African Union countries impede effective induction and CPD programmes, underscoring the need for this Working Group to consider how countries with fiscal limitations can establish robust professional development systems to support teacher growth and adaptability and how this might contribute to teacher retention and the development of 21st-century skills.

There is a critical need for teachers to equip learners with the skills needed for the future of work. Labour market forecasts predict that a substantial portion of job functions will be automated in the coming years, a shift that could exacerbate youth unemployment and deepen existing disparities, signalling the need for immediate and strategic action, especially in regions like Africa, to ensure the development of future-ready skills for an adaptable workforce capable of thriving in a VUCA world. In particular, the rise of generative AI underscores the need for a renewed focus on developing teachers who are equipped to assist young people in building a broad range of competencies and skills, as well as the right values and mindsets. All of this is contingent on having capable teachers who can deliver a holistic education.

Teacher skilling and reskilling are critical elements of teacher retention and can enhance teachers' job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and autonomy. There is a growing recognition that supporting teachers' professional development throughout their careers is essential. However, the inadequacy of such support is cited as a complex challenge, closely linked to high teacher attrition rates, an issue that previous working groups highlighted.

The South African G20 Presidency will focus on programmes and innovations related to enhancing the role of professional development and support across the teacher career continuum with a view to mitigating teacher attrition and enhancing strategies for the integration of 21st-century skills, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

In pursuance of the above, the focus will be on:

- Practices of countries with respect to teacher retention, efficacy, and autonomy in ITE and in-service training.
- The challenges of teacher retention, with respect to conditions of service but also other factors, and strategies for enhancement.
- The impact of new teacher induction, orientation, and mentoring programmes in mitigating attrition.
- Key strategies for enhancing teacher retention and efficacy.
- Insights and best practices on integrating 21st-century skills into teacher education and showcasing innovative practices for upskilling teachers.
- Integrating 21st-century skills into teacher education programmes.