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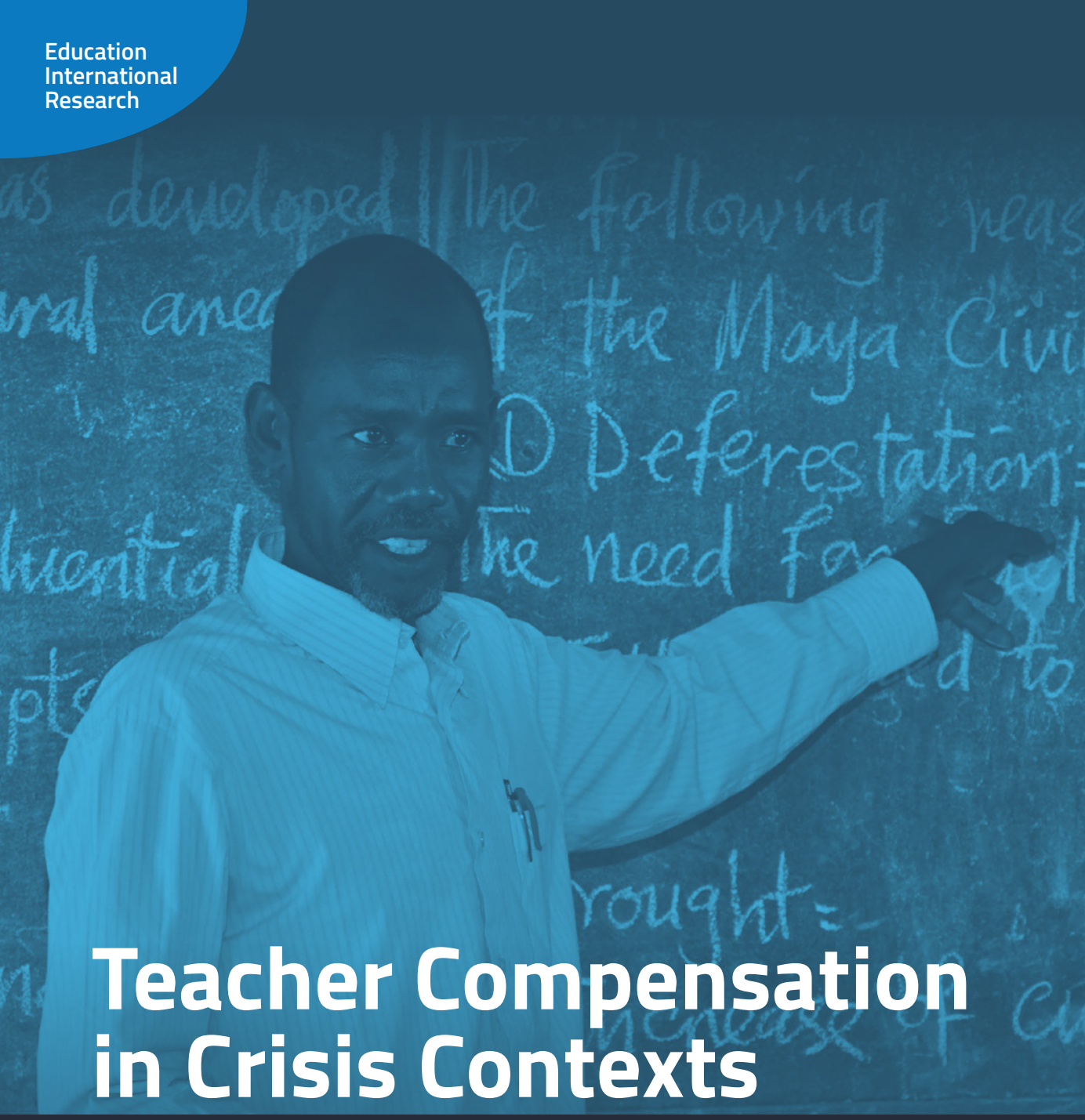

# Teacher Compensation in Crisis Contexts

## Problems & Paradoxes for Paying Teachers in South Sudan

Mading Peter Angong, Sarah Etzel, Whitney Hough, Mary Mendenhall, Kemigisha Richardson, Tiffany Tryon, Malok Mading Wol

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## About Education Action in Crisis (EAC)

EAC is a dedicated South Sudanese non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded and managed by a team of former refugee youth who are South Sudanese educational and humanitarian professionals committed to addressing urgent community needs in South Sudan. Officially registered under the NGO Act 2016 with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in South Sudan (Reg. No: 4794), Education Action in Crisis has established itself as a key player in providing emergency humanitarian education services across various communities within the country.

## About the George Clement Bond Center for African Education at Teachers College, Columbia University

The George Clement Bond Center for African Education (CAE) promotes research and teaching about education, broadly defined, in Africa and the African Diaspora. Its central aim is to create a community of students, faculty, and staff with common interests and commitments to the fields of Education and African Studies. CAE is housed at Teachers College, Columbia University, the graduate school of education, health and psychology for Columbia University in New York, USA.

## Education International (EI)

Education International represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions and associations, representing over 33 million education employees in 375 organisations in 180 countries and territories.

# Executive Summary

Teachers are essential to upholding the right to quality education for children in crisis and displacement contexts, yet they often experience delayed, irregular, or insufficient compensation, leading to demotivation, absenteeism, and destabilization of educational systems. Challenges for paying teachers arise due to resource shortages, inadequate management structures and payroll systems, bureaucratic and logistical complications, and the devaluation of the teaching profession.

To understand how these challenges manifest in South Sudan, this qualitative study examined the current state of teacher compensation among primary education teachers. Drawing on interviews with donors, policymakers, practitioners, and teachers, it identified the challenges and opportunities for improving teacher payments and providing adequate and timely compensation. The study also examined how different and often overlapping and persistent humanitarian crises affect teacher compensation practices and the ability of the education sector to move across the humanitarian-development nexus.

Different profiles of teachers are paid through different systems: 1) government teachers on the government payroll; 2) volunteer teachers paid by the Education Cluster; and 3) volunteer or refugee "*incentive*" teachers working in refugee camps/settlements paid by UNHCR, NGOs, and/or other entities.

Unfortunately, the education system in South Sudan is facing a crisis as government teachers have not been paid in over a year (at time of publication), and no teachers (government, volunteer, or incentive) earn a livable wage when they are paid that allows them to cover even the most basic expenses due to rampant hyperinflation. One study participant stated: "*I think a teacher is the most disadvantaged person in the entire workforce of South Sudan*."

The inter-related causes of this situation include: low budget execution and limited technical capacity by the government, budgetary shortfalls attributed to reduced oil revenues as a result of the ongoing conflict in neighboring Sudan, limited banking systems, and lack of political will, to name a few.

The precarity of this situation carries numerous implications for the education system, including teacher attrition, demotivation of current and future teachers, and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession. It can also lead to school closures, student attrition, low student learning outcomes, and an increase in child protection risks inside and outside of school.

Teacher compensation in South Sudan is further framed by a number of paradoxes. One, the majority of teachers are not on the government payroll. Two, most teachers have been unable to acquire the minimum qualifications to teach the education level they were hired for, which carries implications for both their teacher development and short- and long-term earnings. Three, volunteer teachers (South Sudanese and refugee alike) typically earn more than their government counterparts. And four, the tensions around responsibility-sharing between a government unable to cover teacher compensation and donors who are reluctant to assume responsibility for recurrent teacher payments result in an education system increasingly buttressed by parents, families, and communities. To address these issues, it is imperative for governments to prioritize fair teacher compensation and develop sustainable

payment mechanisms through effective education and financial planning.

In order to hold the government accountable, a number of efforts are currently being pursued by donors and other education actors in South Sudan. The detailed recommendations that emerged from this study reinforce many of these efforts and further point to differentiated responses for the diverse teacher profiles and related payment systems. To address systemic challenges that align with the needs of various teacher profiles—government-paid, cluster partner-supported, and UNHCR-supported—and restore the mistrust and broken social contract between the government and its teachers, this study recommends a multi-pronged approach (see Tables 6-8 at end of report for detailed recommendations):

***Immediate Reconciliation of Salary Arrears***

- Clear outstanding salaries for teachers on the government payroll.
- Improve coordination between the *Ministry of General Education and Instruction* (MoGEI), the *Ministry of Finance and Planning* (MoFP), and donors to ensure salary arrears are distributed effectively.

***Short-term Interventions***

- **For Government-Paid Teachers:** Resume payments promptly and progressively increase wages to a living standard.
- **For Cluster Partner-Supported Teachers:** Harmonize wages across implementing partners and ensure timely monthly payments, adjusting for inflation.
- **For UNHCR-Supported Teachers:** Provide consistent wages aligned with experience and qualifications, and establish mechanisms for salary harmonization across sectors.
- Implement pension and insurance programs across all profiles to enhance financial security.
- Streamline digital and manual payment systems to ensure equitable and timely salary disbursements.

***Long-Term Solutions***

- **For All Teacher Profiles:** Develop an *Education Management Information System* (EMIS) and Refugee Education *Management Information System* (REMIS) to track payroll, qualifications, and placements.
- **For Volunteer and Refugee Teachers:** Expand certification pathways, allowing experienced teachers to formalize their roles and integrate into government systems.
- For Unionized Teachers: Strengthen the teachers' union and facilitate broader stakeholder collaboration to optimize resources, advocate for teachers' needs, and build long-term sustainability.





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## *Acronyms*

| | |
|---|---|
| ADRA | *Adventist Development and Relief Agency* |
| AES | *Alternative Education System* |
| AE | *Accelerated Education* |
| ALP | *Accelerated Learning Program* |
| CPA | *Comprehensive Peace Agreement* |
| CSO | *Civil Society Organization* |
| EAC | *Education Action in Crisis* |
| ECHO | *European Commission Humanitarian Aid* |
| EMIS | *Education Management Information System* |
| EU | *European Union* |
| FCDO | *Foreign Commonwealth Development Office* |
| GDP | *Gross Domestic Product* |
| GPE | *Global Partnership for Education* |
| IDPs | *Internally Displaced Persons* |
| IGAD | *Intergovernmental Authority on Development* |
| ILO | *International Labour Organization* |
| INEE | *Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies* |
| INGO | *International Non-Governmental Organization* |
| IMF | *International Monetary Fund* |
| KI | *Key Informant* |
| LEG | *Local Education Group* |
| MoFP | *Ministry of Finance and Planning* |
| MoGEI | *Ministry of General Education and Instruction* |
| MoHEST | *Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology* |
| MoL | *Ministry of Labor* |
| NEC | *National Education Coalition* |
| NGO | *Non-Governmental Organization* |
| NTUSS | *National Teachers' Union of South Sudan* |
| OCHA | *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* |
| PFM | *Public Finance Management* |
| PTAs | *Parent Teacher Associations* |
| PTR | *Pupil to Teacher Ratio* |
| RRC | *Relief and Rehabilitation Commission* |
| SAG | *Strategic Advisory Group* |
| SETMC | *State Education Transfer Monitoring Committees* |
| SMoE | *State Ministry of Education* |
| SMoF | *State Ministry of Finance* |
| SSP | *South Sudanese Pounds* |
| TMIS | *Teacher Management Information System* |
| TPD | *Teacher Professional Development* |
| TTIs | *Teacher Training Institutions* |
| UN | *United Nations* |
| UNESCO | *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* |
| UNHCR | *United Nations Refugee Agency (formerly United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)* |
| UNICEF | *United Nations Children's Fund* |
| USAID | *United States Agency for International Development* |
| USD | *United States Dollar* |





# Introduction

Teachers play a fundamental role in upholding the right to quality education for children in crisis and displacement contexts, and they need to be fairly and consistently compensated for their efforts (Buckland, 2005; Mendenhall et al. 2018). Unfortunately, teachers working in these settings often face delayed, irregular, or insufficient payments, which can result in demotivation, increased absenteeism, and, ultimately, destabilization of the education system (INEE, 2009; Katete and Nyangarika 2020).

The complexities of teacher compensation in crisis and displacement contexts are multifaceted and often arise from a combination of resource deficits, logistical challenges, and systemic inefficiencies. Inadequate teacher management structures (Mendenhall et. al, 2018; UNESCO, 2024), poor payroll systems, and inefficient banking systems (Brandt and De Herdt, 2020) further aggravate the situation, making timely and fair payments difficult (Dolan et al., 2012). The devaluation and deprofessionalization of the teaching profession, which we are witnessing globally, further exacerbate these technical challenges.

It is imperative for governments to prioritize teacher compensation and implement sustainable payment mechanisms through education and financial planning to support the rebuilding of the education system, prevent the attrition of skilled teachers, and ensure all students the right to quality and safe education (Hanaf et al., 2024; Dolan et al., 2012). In the absence of these efforts, the financial instability faced by teachers significantly impacts individual, family, and community well-being (Bennell, 2023). Irregular or insufficient payments lead to increased stress, financial insecurity, and negative effects on family and community relationships, which in turn affects teachers' performance and engagement (Mabor, 2018; Benell, 2023).

Unfortunately, the situation in South Sudan has reached a critical inflection point where teachers on the government payroll have not been paid since October 2023, and teachers paid through other mechanisms do not receive enough to cover basic expenses due to the hyperinflation wreaking havoc across the country. While the current crisis has been exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in neighboring Sudan and related interruptions to oil revenues, the government has faced persistent challenges in paying teachers regular and decent wages for many years (Mabor, 2018; South Sudan Education Cluster, 2021).

While the study presented in this report focuses on teachers and the education sector, the overarching challenges that it uncovers related to mistrust in the government, insufficient resources, and mismanagement of funds negatively impact other social sectors and related jobs in South Sudan (e.g. healthcare workers, police, etc.). As study participants made abundantly clear, the social contract between the South Sudanese government and its people is broken, as teachers look for alternative livelihoods to survive and schools shutter. The current crisis carries sweeping implications for the teachers, families, and communities trying to hold a failing system together. Major and urgent reforms are needed to prevent the total collapse of the education system in South Sudan, and paying teachers decent and livable wages is a critical first step.

## *Study objectives and research questions*

This research study was conducted in South Sudan, a context where teachers are burdened with heavy workloads and extremely difficult working conditions. Despite their indispensable role in the education system, their earnings are grossly inadequate and fail to recognize their expertise and critical role in fostering high-quality, protective educational environments. In efforts to address these harsh realities, the purpose of this study is to understand the current landscape of teacher compensation and examine the adequacy of current teacher payment systems in South Sudan, determining whether teachers are receiving sufficient compensation to meet their basic needs. Additionally, it aims to assess the effectiveness and durability of existing payment mechanisms, emphasizing the need for a sustainable governance approach to ensure long-term viability and consistency of these systems in emergency contexts. To that end, the overarching research questions for this study include:

1. What is the current state of teacher compensation in South Sudan?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for improving teacher compensation practices and providing adequate and timely salaries for different profiles of teachers?
3. How do times of crisis impact teacher compensation practices?

Given that basic education in South Sudan is defined as the first eight years of primary schooling, this study focuses on teacher compensation for primary education teachers.

# South Sudan Context

The Republic of South Sudan became the world's youngest country in 2011 after gaining independence from Sudan. Rich in natural resources and biodiversity, it remains one of the poorest countries with a gross domestic product (GDP) of 12 billion — declining at a rate of -10.8% per annum (World Bank, 2024b). Of South Sudan's population of 12.7 million, approximately 76% are in need of humanitarian assistance (CIA, 2024; OCHA 2023).

Several historic and contemporary crises exacerbate South Sudan's fragility. Post-independence, the country experienced civil war from 2013-2018, resulting in instability and economic stagnation (World Bank, 2024a). While the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan brought about a period of relative stability, incidences of intercommunal conflict continue to drive insecurity and displacement (UCDP, 2024; World Bank, 2024a). Among the top five nations in the world most impacted by climate change, South Sudan experiences additional vulnerabilities from heightened flooding, severe droughts, and ongoing food insecurity (OCHA, 2023; UNHCR, 2024b). Compounding conflicts and environmental crises contribute to a reality where 2 million people are displaced internally, and 2.3 million live as refugees in neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2024a).

South Sudan's economy has undergone repeated shocks from global and regional crises, resulting in high inflation rates, currency depreciation, and exorbitant food prices (WFP, 2024). The Covid-19 pandemic began a period of increased economic instability, with inflation rates reaching 29.68% in 2020, and rising to 43% in 2021 (CIA, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Conditions never fully recovered and have further deteriorated since the onset of the conflict in Sudan in April 2023, reaching a heightened state of crisis since February 2024, when South Sudan's primary pipeline for oil exports ruptured due to conflict in Sudan (ICG, 2024; World Bank, 2024a). The 1,500 km Petrodar pipeline, when operational, typically transports 150,000 barrels of oil per day (60% of the country's oil production) from South Sudan's Upper Nile State to Sudan's coast on the Red Sea. It serves as South Sudan's primary connection point to international markets (ICG, 2024; Reuters, 2024). Given that oil exports typically account for 85% of the national revenue, the fallout of this blockage has been devastating. Reports estimate the government could run out of financial reserves if the pipeline is not repaired in the near future, which is unlikely while conflict continues in Sudan (ICG, 2024). Moreover, ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Ukraine have jointly contributed to rising food prices. The World Food Programme estimates over half of South Sudan's population (approximately 7.1 million people) experiences acute hunger (United Nations, 2022; WFP, 2024). Presently, the IMF estimates inflation at 54.8% (IMF, 2024).

Against this backdrop, South Sudan also hosts 468,759 refugees, primarily from Sudan (443,525), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (13,852), and Ethiopia (5,387), with others from Eritrea, the Central African Republic, Burundi, and Somalia (UNHCR, 2024a). The country has also received 1,466,948 spontaneous refugee returnees, 616,682 of whom returned as a result of the ongoing crisis in Sudan (UNHCR 2024a; UNHCR 2024c).

## *Educational landscape*

South Sudan's formal education system is divided into three levels: pre-primary (2 years), primary (8 years), and secondary (4 years). Compulsory education begins at the primary level, and is free for all students as dictated in the 2012 General Education Act (UNESCO, 2023; MoJ, 2014) (See Box 1 for an overview of additional policies and projects that shape South Sudan's educational landscape.) Primary school enrollment is at 82%, yet the primary completion rate is significantly lower at 21% (World Bank, 2024b). Only 9.9% of students complete lower secondary school (World Bank, 2024b).

As indicated by low completion rates, educational interruptions are common due to the compounding crises that South Sudan experiences. Over 1,281 schools were considered non-operational in 2023 due to conflict (39%), natural disasters (9%), a lack of learners (32%), a lack of teachers (46%), and other causes (16%). Non-operational schools accounted for approximately 17% of the 7,737 schools enumerated in the Ministry of Education and Instruction's (MoGEI) 2023 National

**Table 1: Number of students and teachers in the national education system by level/type[1]**

| Education Level | Number of Students | | | Number of Teachers | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| **Pre-primary** | 77,865 | 73,402 | 151,267 | 1,336 | 2,464 | 3,800 |
| **Primary** | 968,719 | 854,712 | 1,823,431 | 30,082 | 6,065 | 36,147 |
| **Secondary** | 90,313 | 71,852 | 162,165 | 5,461 | 545 | 6,006 |
| **AES** | 39,324 | 39,289 | 78,631 | 1,839 | 295 | 3,583 |
| **Total** | **1,176,239** | **1,039,355** | **2,215,495** | **38,718** | **9,369** | **49,536** |

Table adapted from the 2023 South Sudan Education Census (MoGEI, 2023a).

1 In some instances, the disaggregated figures for male and female teachers do not add up to the reported totals. This is due to data discrepancies within the 2023 South Sudan Education Census, and highlights the need to strengthen data collection and management systems to collect accurate data on teachers within the country.

Table 2: **Number of teachers on government payroll by education level**

| Level | Teachers on Government Payroll | | Teachers NOT on Government Payroll | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| **PPR** | 455 | 12% | 3,345 | 88% |
| **PRI** | 11,676 | 32% | 24,471 | 68% |
| **SEC** | 1,610 | 27% | 4,396 | 73% |
| **Total** | **13,741** | **30%** | **32,212** | **70%** |

Table adapted from the 2023 South Sudan Education Census (MoGEI, 2023a).

Education Census (NES) (MoGEI, 2023a). Moreover, South Sudan has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in the world, with an estimated 2.5 – 2.8 million school age children not involved in education (UNESCO, 2023; USAID, 2024). As a result, the country has an Alternative Education System (AES) composed of various programs that target out-of-school children, overage children, adults with interrupted education, and pastoralist communities (UNESCO, 2023). (See Table 1 for a breakdown of the number of students and teachers in the education system by level.)

According to data from MoGEI's 2023 NES, there are 45,953 teachers working in the general education system (excluding the 3,583 working in AES). Of the teachers in the general system, 27,321 (59%) are considered full-time teachers, 1,684 (4%) are part-time, and 16,948 (37%) are classified volunteers (MoGEI, 2023a). Moreover, only 30% of teachers are officially on the government payroll (MoGEI, 2023a). See Table 2 for a full breakdown of teachers on the government payroll by education level.

There are three primary forms of teaching qualifications in South Sudan: 1) a Certificate of Secondary Education; 2) a Diploma from a Teacher Training Institute; and 3) a Bachelor's Degree completed at a four-year university (MoGEI, 2017). According to South Sudan's General Education Policy (2017-2027) a certificate is required to teach pre-primary students, a diploma is needed to teach at the primary level, while a bachelor's degree is needed to teach at the secondary level (MoGEI, 2017). In practice, this qualification framework may be overlooked during times of crisis, particularly in remote areas. For instance, diploma holders sometimes teach at the secondary level during a teacher shortage (CSO KI, 2024). According to baseline indicators from South Sudan's GESP (2023-2027), 80% of teachers meet the minimum qualification requirements to teach at the pre-primary level, compared to 68% at the primary level, 63% at the secondary level, and 73% in AES (MoGEI, 2023b). In contrast, NES data reports that 37.41% of South Sudan's teaching force was considered untrained as of 2023, revealing inconsistencies between MoGEI documents and indicating

Table 3: **Number of teachers by school level and training type**

| Level | Teacher's Qualification Level | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | None | Certificate | Diploma | Degree | Other |
| **AES** | 718 | 1,182 | 106 | 91 | 74 |
| **PPR** | 1,553 | 1,807 | 206 | 90 | 89 |
| **PRI** | 13,937 | 18,803 | 1,326 | 885 | 655 |
| **SEC** | 1,472 | 1,388 | 804 | 2,009 | 89 |
| **Total** | **17,680** | **23,180** | **2,442** | **3,045** | **907** |

Table adapted from the 2023 South Sudan Education Census (MoGEI, 2023a).





that the percent of qualified teachers at each level may be lower in practice (MoGEI, 2023a). Of the 29,574 teachers with formal qualifications, 78.37% hold a Certificate, 8.27% hold a Diploma, 10.3% hold a Degree, and 3.1% hold other qualifications (MoGEI, 2023a). For a full breakdown of teachers by certification type and school level, see Table 3.

Table 4 captures the different profiles of teachers who are working in the education system in South Sudan, and which will be described further in this report: government teachers, volunteer teachers, and contract teachers.

## *History of delays in teachers' salaries*

Delays in teachers' salaries have reached unprecedented levels over the past year. However, the issue predates the current crisis. South Sudan has a long history of irregular payments for civil servants, with teachers reporting salary delays in 2013 at the onset of the South Sudanese Civil War (Mabor, 2018). In 2016, a local news outlet reported on a teacher collapsing in school due to hunger, as teachers in other parts of the country went on strike over extended salary delays (Eye Radio, 2016). Further reports indicate that teachers also experienced salary delays in 2019 and 2020, when they again went on strike (Emmanuel, 2020; UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, numerous local news features over the years highlight the dismal state of civil servant payment, the governments' stated reasons for the delays, and promises to address salary arrears (Akile, 2019; 2021; James, 2023; Johnson, 2024). Despite government promises, the issues persist, and arrears are rarely paid (Mabor, 2018). Teachers interviewed for this study echoed these trends, describing how they have experienced 1-2 month salary delays for several years. Yet there was consensus that the current delay (10 months at the time interviews took place) was unlike anything they had experienced previously. According to one KI, teacher payment issues have become more extreme throughout South Sudan's history, while the period from 2018 to present has been "the worst of its kind" and sparked concerns for continued salary delays in the future (CSO KI, 2024). These accounts indicate that South Sudan's current economic situation exacerbated an already tenuous and fractured payment system, rather than sparking new payment delays all together.

Table 4: **Teacher profile descriptions**

| Teacher Profile | Description |
|---|---|
| ***Government Teachers*** | Individuals with varying qualifications (who may or may not meet the national requirements for the educational level they are teaching) who are recognized by the government and are paid a salary by the Government of South Sudan. Some of the unqualified teachers may not have completed primary and/or secondary school. |
| ***Volunteer Teachers*** (National and Refugee) | Individuals with varying qualifications — some with formal teaching credentials from either South Sudan, neighboring countries, or their countries of origin and others without formal teaching qualifications. Some may not have completed primary and/or secondary school. Volunteer teachers receive incentive payments from churches, parents/families, NGOs, INGOs, donors, and/or UN agencies. In refugee settings, refugee teachers are further classified as "incentive teachers." |
| ***Contract Teachers*** (definition included here, but outside the scope of this study/report) | Expatriates with formal teaching qualifications from other countries in the region, such as Kenya and Uganda, hired on fixed-term contracts to address teacher shortages. These teachers are predominantly working in private schools, and sometimes include South Sudanese teachers as well. |

## *Box 1:* Select policies and projects framing teacher compensation in South Sudan

### Select national and regional policies

#### *General Education Sector Plan (2023-27)*

Developed by UNESCO and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in consultation with the national MoGEI and state ministries of education (SMoEs), the GESP 2023-2027 builds from existing national policies and findings from UNESCO's Education Sector Analysis (2022) to outline forward thinking education sector reforms. Policy Goal 3: Improve the quality and retention of the teaching workforce aims to enhance teacher management frameworks, improve teacher motivation, well-being, and working conditions, while Policy Goal 8: Increase domestic public financing to education acknowledges past trends of low education budget execution rates, calling for full execution of the general education budget by 2027, and an increase in government expenditure allocated to education (from the current allocation of 5% to 20%) by 2026. Additionally, the plan proposes raising teachers' salaries to a rate of two times the per capita GDP and introducing hardship allowances for those teaching in difficult circumstances. If implemented, these reforms would go a long way towards improving teachers' conditions within South Sudan.

#### *Global Compact on Refugees (2018) – Government of South Sudan Pledges (2023)*

As a signatory to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), the Government of South Sudan has committed to upholding global strategies designed to support refugees, including providing equitable, quality educational experiences for refugee learners (UNHCR, 2024d). In 2023, the GoSS made commitments designed to increase the inclusivity and quality of refugee learners educational experiences, such as improving school infrastructure, training 1,400 additional teachers in refugee-hosting locations, incorporating refugee data into the EMIS, providing scholarships for refugee students to attend university, and increasing access to digital technology and other educational materials in refugee hosting schools (GoSS, 2023a). Moreover, the GoSS committed to expanding job opportunities for refugees, which have implications for the refugee teaching force. Notably, they have pledged to remove policy barriers that currently prevent refugees' identifications from being recognized, which would enable them to access financial and other services (GoSS, 2023a).

#### *Djibouti Declaration and Plan of Action on Refugee Education (2017)*

As a member state of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), South Sudan is a signatory on the Djibouti Declaration, a non-binding legal agreement that supports the integration of refugees into national education systems in East Africa. The accompanying Plan of Action aims to ensure the declaration's mandates are integrated within national education sector plans and policies. It supports refugee teachers specifically by affirming cross-border recognition of teaching accreditations, harmonizing remuneration and conditions of work between refugee and host communities, supporting pathways for certification, as well as facilitating professional development, career progression, and gender parity opportunities.

#### *General Education Act (2012)*

Produced by the Government of South Sudan the year after independence, the General Education Act (2012) serves as the country's foundational education law. The act outlines the purpose, goals, and structure of the education system; standards for educational quality; structures for financial management, teacher management, and school types; the rights of learners, and school disciplinary procedures. Moreover, it affirms that all citizens in South Sudan have the right to "free and compulsory" primary education (p. 7).

#### *Public Financial Management and Accountability Act (2011)*

This foundational act outlines procedures for the management of government finances in South Sudan. It sets forth processes for budget preparations; regulations and appropriations; conditions for borrowing; and procedures for transferring funds to state governments. Specific to education, this act governs the mechanisms for how the Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoFP) prepares and distributes the education budget, the processes for coordinating education funding between the national and state ministries, and the procedures of auditing/accounting for the use of funding throughout the education system.

### Select projects

#### *Global Partnership for Education and the Republic of South Sudan Ministry of General Education and Instruction: Partnership Compact (2024)*

This partnership compact, written by a task team composed of MoGEI coordinators, development partners and civil society representatives, outlines reform priorities for South Sudan's education sector. Component 1: Improved teaching practices and better implementation of the curriculum builds from an evidence base that acknowledges inadequate teacher management systems and low remuneration rates as barriers to quality education within South Sudan. Subsequently, GPE will fund the development of a comprehensive teacher management system, prioritize mechanisms for school inspection, and provide MoGEI with technical assistance to deliver capitation grants to public primary schools to ease the burden on community education contributions. Notably, the compact includes a top-up trigger for 80% Salary Execution Target, meaning if the MoGEI executes 80% of the allocated salary budget for FY 2024/2025, they will receive an additional $5 million from GPE.

#### *Building Skills for Human Capital Development in South Sudan (2023-2028)*

Implemented jointly by South Sudan's MoHEST and MoGEI, this World Bank project aims to strengthen the capacity of the country's education system, support the development of teaching (among other skills), and improve educational access for refugees and host communities. To support teachers, the project works to strengthen pre- and in-service training opportunities, as well as professional development programs (World Bank, 2024c). Additional financing for this project (approved as of September 3, 2024) has earmarked $10 million for the recruitment of approximately 1,600 qualified teachers in 200 re-operationalized schools within refugee-hosting regions. The World Bank aims to finance the salaries of these teachers for 2-3 years before they are transferred to the government payroll (World Bank 2024d; World Bank 2024e).

#### *IMPACT South Sudan (2017-2020)*

The European Union, in partnership with the South Sudan government launched the IMPACT project in 2017 under the wider EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (Cambridge Education, n.d.; EUETFA, 2023). Aiming to strengthen overall access to and quality of education in South Sudan, IMPACT recognized the connection between achieving these objectives and providing monetary support to teachers (EUETFA, 2023). Notably, the project paid quarterly incentives at a rate of $40 to over 30,000 volunteer teachers throughout the country (Cambridge Education, n.d.).

# Methodology

Please refer to Appendix A for a detailed methodology

This study draws on data collected from a literature review, key informant (KI) interviews, and teacher interviews to understand the current landscape and assess the adequacy and sustainability of payment systems in South Sudan (see Figure 1 for visual overview of the data collection phases and methods).

### *Phase 1: Literature and policy review*

The research team reviewed 47 documents related to teacher compensation in South Sudan, focusing on three key areas: (1) global literature on the teaching profession, teachers' compensation, and education finance mechanisms; (2) literature on teaching and learning in emergency contexts, and (3) literature on the South Sudanese context, focusing specifically on the education sector and teachers' experiences. This review informed the development of interview protocols and provided essential contextual insights.

### *Phase 2: KI interviews*

The research team conducted 16 semi-structured KI interviews with 20 participants from civil society organizations, donor agencies, government offices, INGOs, NGOs, and UN agencies. Participants discussed their engagement with teacher compensation policies and practices, the impact of current payment practices on education quality, and key challenges. They also provided recommendations for sustainable strategies to improve teacher compensation systems and policies in South Sudan.

### *Phase 3: Teacher interviews*

The research team conducted interviews with 45 teachers in five primary schools across four states: Central Equatoria State, Eastern Equatoria State, Lakes State, and Jonglei State. The teacher sample included: 24 government teachers, 6 government school leaders, 12 national volunteer teachers, 3 refugee "incentive" teachers (including a deputy head teacher). These interviews examined teachers' experiences, the impact of compensation on their lives, and recommendations for system improvements.

Figure 1: **Overview of data collection protocol**

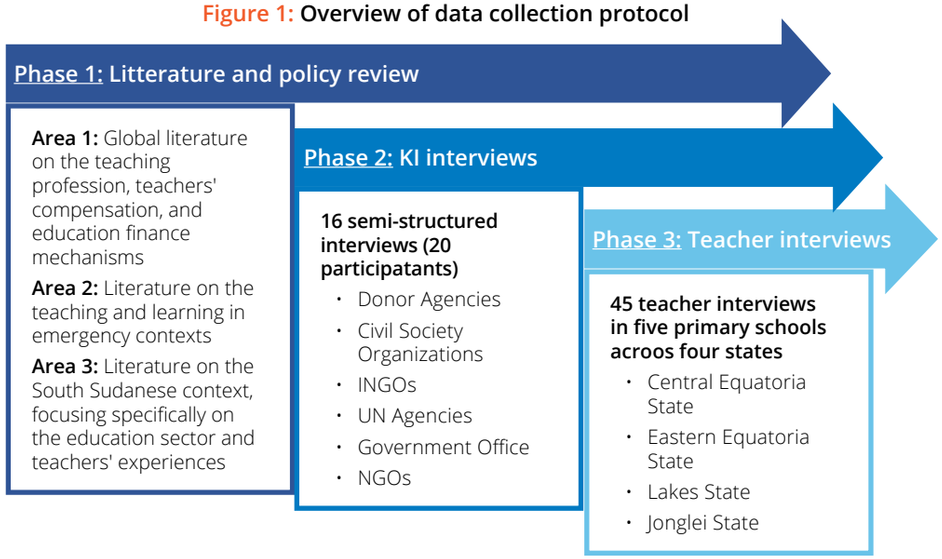







Figure 2: **Overview of KI data analysis**

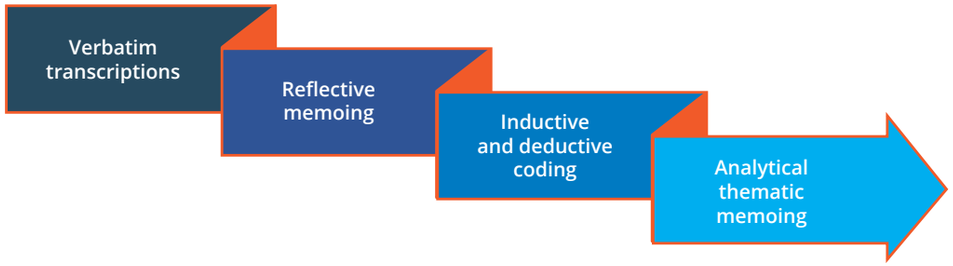



Figure 3: **Overview of teacher data analysis**


## *Data analysis*

We analyzed KI interviews in four phases (Figure 2):

1. transcribing interviews verbatim;
2. reflective memoing documenting the emerging themes, tensions, and paradoxes that emerged in KI interviews;
3. inductive and deductive coding; and
4. analytical thematic memo writing.

Teacher interviews were analyzed in three phases (Figure 3):

1. listening to interviews and coding key insights;
2. compiling and curating teacher testimonials; and
3. analyzing data to identify patterns of convergence and divergence across teacher profiles, particularly regarding teacher compensation.

## *Study limitations*

1. **Study timeline:** Data collection occurred during a period of extreme economic instability (June-September 2024), which has had a drastic effect on school operations and has resulted in school closures and teacher strikes in South Sudan due to multiple months of unpaid teacher salaries.
2. **Language barriers:** Most interviews were conducted in English, which was not always the preferred language of teachers.
3. **Teacher sample:** None of the teachers interviewed for this study reported being paid volunteer incentives from Education Cluster partners.
4. **Key informant sample:** We were unsuccessful in our attempts to secure an interview or receive input from the MoGEI, limiting this study's insights on government perspectives regarding teacher compensation.
5. **Government surveillance:** Government surveillance in one school may have influenced teacher responses.
6. **School selection:** The study focuses on the experiences of teachers in primary schools supported by the South Sudanese government, INGOs, NGOs, PTAs, and UNHCR, excluding private, faith-based, secondary schools, and accelerated learning programs.

Although the study focuses on primary education teachers, the vast majority of the conditions and challenges of the current system also apply to secondary education teachers.

# How are Primary School Teachers Paid in South Sudan?

Figure 4: **Map of South Sudan**


Map Source: United Nations Geospatial, 2020.

## *Governance structures for government teachers: Financial flows*

South Sudan has a decentralized governance structure, where the national government in Juba oversees 10 administrative states that are further divided into county, payam, and boma levels (UNESCO, 2023). [1] The country's education system is likewise decentralized; the National MoGEI is responsible for overall governance, while State Ministries of Education (SMoEs) oversee operations at a state-level and coordinate with County Education Departments. Payam Education Officers ultimately liaise with schools and report back to the county-level (UNESCO, 2023).

Dictated through South Sudan's national policies, financing for teachers' compensation flows through the decentralized education system, beginning with the MoGEI in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoFP) and the Ministry of Labor (MoL) (UNESCO, 2023; Ministry of Justice, 2011). MoFP is responsible for setting an annual budget ceiling and ensuring funds are distributed to the MoGEI, which the MoGEI subsequently determines how to allocate for education priorities (UNESCO, 2023).

In an effort to streamline the flow of finances, the MoGEI began transferring money for teachers' salaries and other education expenditures directly to the SMoEs in 2021, bypassing the State's Ministry of Finance (SMoFs) (MoGEI, 2023b). Despite this reform, several system inefficiencies remain, largely due to capacity constraints within South Sudan's financial and governance institutions (as will be noted below). For a visual representation of governance and flow of financing for teachers' compensation in South Sudan, see Figure 5 (next page).

1 The 10 states include: Central Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Western Equatoria (CIA, 2024). Payams are the equivalent of districts and bomas are the equivalent of villages in other settings.





## *Salary scales*

While the MoGEI is responsible for setting the education budget, MoL sets the scale for teachers' salaries, in accordance with civil servant pay grades. Civil servant salaries are divided into Grades 1-17, where Grade 1 is the highest paid (UNESCO, 2023).[2] For FY 2023/24, Grade 1 civil servants were allocated monthly segments of 160,212–167,712 SSP ($56-58)[3] while those in Grade 17 were allocated 9,512–14,512 SSP ($3-5) per month (MoPS, 2023). The majority of primary teachers interviewed for this study fall in Grade 12, which was officially allocated 47,712–55,312 SSP ($16-19) per month for FY 2023/24 (MoPS, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). However, Grade 12 teachers themselves reported receiving between 51,000–58,000 SSP ($18-20) per month, which could be due to salary increases over the past year. According to one KI, these grades are awarded according to teachers' qualifications and the years that they have been teaching (NGO KI, 2024). Teachers are eligible to advance to the next level after working for four years in a given grade (Government KI, 2024). Yet, advancing through the grade system is not automatic and requires that teachers are on the government payroll, which accounted for only 30% of teachers in the national system as of 2023 (MoGEI, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

A large percentage of South Sudan's teaching force is composed of volunteer teachers who are not accounted for in the government system.[4] There are two additional systems for paying these teachers (apart from the payment system for government payroll teachers):

1. volunteer teachers who are paid by Education Cluster organizations supporting humanitarian responses to internal displacement; and
2. volunteer and refugee "incentive" teachers working in refugee camps/ settlements paid by UNHCR, NGOs, and/or other entities.

Amidst budgetary shortfalls, parents and communities inevitably make up a de facto payment system.

## *Teachers working amidst internal displacement*

For volunteer teachers, the current agreed incentive amount is $40 United States Dollars (USD) (INGO KI, 2024). This $40 is usually paid in the equivalent of South Sudanese Pounds (SSP), and is based on the UN, Bank of South Sudan, or individual organization exchange rate (Education Cluster, 2024).

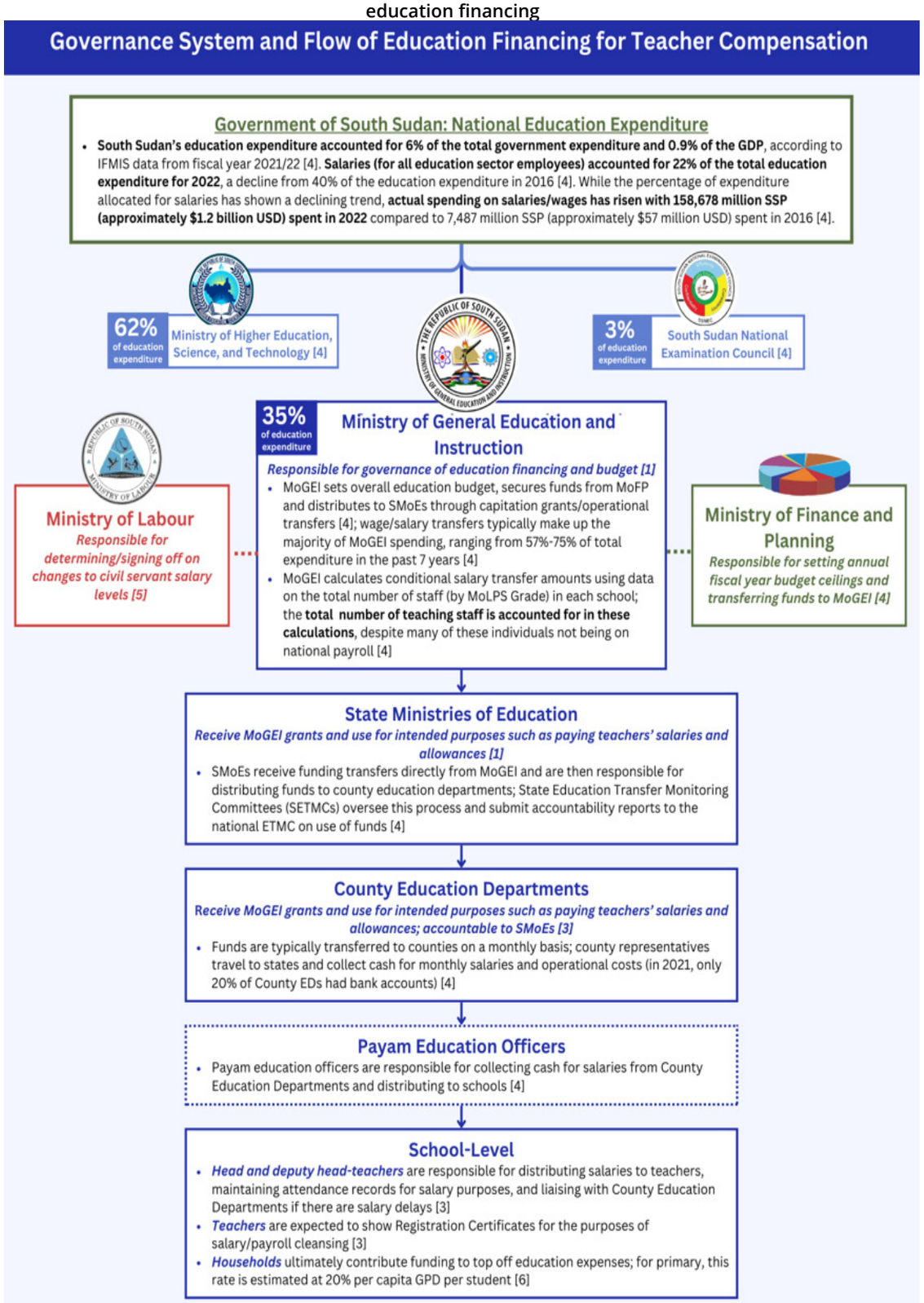
The $40 USD is a uniform rate, regardless of qualification, number of years teaching experience, or training (INGO KI, 2024). The amount has been harmonized across organizations involved in the Education Cluster (INGO KI, 2024), and is coordinated by the MoGEI. The Education Cluster reassesses the rate quarterly to adjust for inflation and shares the new rate with education partners to guide the amount they are supposed to pay teachers for that period. State-level cluster focal points further encourage consistent implementation. As a result of these practices, volunteer teachers are also paid quarterly. Most volunteer teachers do not receive any other additional allowances, such as housing or transportation.

2 The literature is unclear as to whether teachers occupy all levels of the civil servant pay scale. According to UNESCO, the majority of primary teachers fall within Grade 14 (UNESCO, 2023).

3 USD approximations were calculated on September 8, 2024 at the UN Operational Exchange Rate of 1 USD = 2,878.94 SSP (as of September 1, 2024) (United Nations, 2024). The UN Operational Exchange Rate was chosen for consistency with the South Sudan Education Cluster, which uses the UN rate to determine volunteer incentive payments. Due to rapid fluctuation, price conversions may no longer be accurate at the time of report release.

4 KIs provided varying reports on the percentage of volunteer teachers in South Sudan's education system. According to one UN KI, 38% of all teachers in the system are volunteers. In hard-to-reach areas, two NGO KIs reported that 52-75% of teachers are unqualified, while another UN KI shared that in refugee contexts, approximately 74% of teachers are unqualified.

Figure 5: **Visual representation of the governance and flow of education financing**




1] The General Education Act (2012); [2] The General Education Strategic Plan (2017-2022); [3] The National General Education Policy (2017-2027); [4] Education Sector Analysis (2023); [5] Public Financial Management and Accountability Act (2011); [6] MoGEI and GPE Partnership Compact (2024)





***Box 2:* A note on "incentives"**

It is important to recognize that education actors often use varying terms for teacher compensation in an effort to navigate national employment regulations and their own internal human resources policies. Terms like "volunteer teachers," "community teachers," or "incentive teachers" are used to describe individuals receiving funding support through channels other than government payrolls, but they also mask education actors' efforts to pay less than the national minimum wage (in some contexts), address challenges related to the right to work (in the case of refugee teachers), and/or bypass their own internal human resources policies. In the case of refugees, the use of incentives is regularly justified by the provision of other resources and services (e.g. food rations, shelter, access to healthcare), despite the limitations and regular reductions of these provisions. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention and problematize the ways in which teacher pay is handled in crisis and displacement settings (Ginn et al., 2022; Mendenhall, 2024).

## *Teachers working in refugee camps/settlements*

Within refugee camps/settlements, teachers are paid through an incentive system that is governed by UNHCR and distinct from the Education Cluster (see Box 2 for a note on "*incentives*"). The majority (~99.5%) of these teachers are refugees themselves and are classified as 'incentive teachers.' National teachers are occasionally recruited to work in settlements based on needs, however, they are not classified as incentive teachers due to South Sudan's labor laws (UN KI, 2024). Approximately 26% of incentive teachers meet the professional qualification requirements to teach at the primary level, while 25% meet the requirements for the secondary level (UN KI, 2024; REMIS, 2024). UNHCR provides support for teacher incentives through agreements with its implementing partners, who are then responsible for paying teachers working in settlement schools on a monthly basis. However, not all NGOs that pay teacher incentives necessarily receive funding from UNHCR (UN KI, 2024). There is no uniform incentive rate set across refugee settlements; amounts are determined by qualifications and available budget

Table 5: **Comparison between teacher payment systems**

| Teacher Payment System | Official Rate[5] | Range Reported by Teachers (n=45) |
|---|---|---|
| **South Sudanese Government Payroll** | SSP 9,512 - 167,712 (approximately $3-58) | SSP 15,000 - 100,000 (approximately $5-35) |
| **Volunteer Incentives (Determined by Education Cluster)** | $40 | No data to report[6] |
| **Refugee Incentives (Determined by UNHCR)** | $100-150 (teachers)<br>$250 (head teachers)<br>Amount varies depending on location and available budget | $40-500<br>On average, the high end of this range is $250, but 5 teachers in this study reported compensation between $300-500. |

5 As set by the Ministry of Labor and Public Service for the government system, and Education Cluster for the volunteer incentive system, and UNHCR within refugee camps/settlements (MoLPS, 2023; Education Cluster, 2024; UN KI, 2024).

6 None of the teachers interviewed for this study reported being paid volunteer incentives from Education Cluster partners.

across locations, ranging from $100-150 for teachers, and up to $250 for head teachers (UN KI, 2024). For example, a deputy head teacher reported that within the settlement where he works, untrained teachers earn $130, trained teachers earn $200, and school leaders earn $230 (Refugee Deputy Head Teacher, 2024). Additionally, teachers reported varying incentive amounts within the same school, based on the NGO that contracted them. For instance, one teacher reported earning $40 a month, while his colleagues who were paid by a different NGO received between $130-325. Despite variation, teachers' incentives within refugee settlements end up being far greater than amounts paid to volunteer teachers in national schools and teachers on the government payroll. (See Table 5 for a comparison of teacher payment by system.) Ultimately, teachers' incentives account for the majority of UNHCR's education budget, with over 80% allocated towards incentive payments for teachers and additional staffing costs (UN KI, 2024).

### *Salary harmonization efforts for volunteer teachers*

In South Sudan, discrepancies in teacher incentives previously led to conflicts due to varying payment amounts. An ECHO/EU-funded initiative aimed to standardize these rates, which resulted in the $40/month incentive used today in the Education Cluster.

Despite efforts to harmonize incentive rates, there is still variability across cluster organizations due to exchange rate fluctuations and available operating budgets (CSO KI, 2024; NGO KI, 2024). One NGO reported paying $20 per month for teachers, while another cluster member shared that they pay $50-60 per month for "club facilitators" and after school tutors. There is also no unified agreement on pay scales among donors. The debate continues about which currency (USD or SSP) and exchange rate to use, with prevailing guidelines calling for SSP conversions over USD payments.

KIs also noted that although they might want to pay volunteer teachers higher incentives (provided funding was available), they cannot increase the incentive much because they need to ensure that the amount they pay is aligned to some degree with the national teachers. This is both to avoid conflict between teachers, and also so that if the government takes over paying volunteer teachers in the future, it will not be so difficult to do so (UN KI, 2024).

It is unclear if similar payment harmonization efforts will be pursued for teachers working in refugee camps/settlements. It is also unclear if refugee teachers would be considered if and when the government can assume responsibility for the large number of volunteer teachers currently working in South Sudan.





# What are the Challenges for Paying Primary School Teachers in South Sudan?

Predicated on the idea that education is a public good, responsibility lies with a national government to compensate its teaching force. In South Sudan, numerous issues complicate this notion and contribute to a reality where the government has not paid teachers regular salaries in over a year. KIs outlined several factors behind the current challenges for paying teachers in South Sudan, including constrained resources, government technical capacity, and the absence of political will to enact education reforms. Moreover, KIs revealed how the effects of South Sudan's current economic crisis further complicate payment for government and volunteer teachers. These themes are explored in greater detail in the sections that follow.

### *Inadequate compensation: Low, irregular payments and hyperinflation*

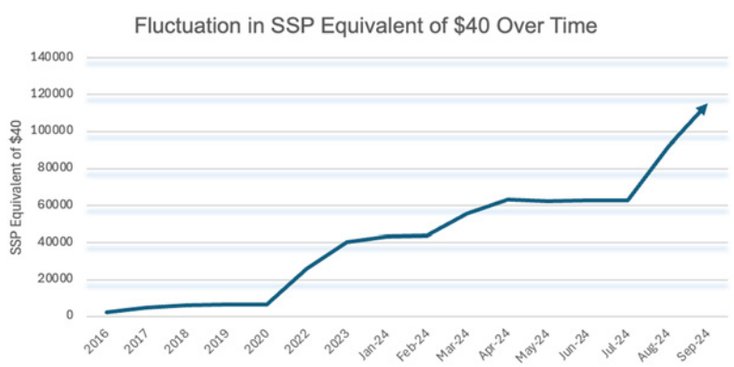
The financial system described previously (see Figure 5: Governance Structures for Government Teachers) does not operate as intended. Study participants consistently cited two major challenges related to teacher compensation:

1. low payment amounts, and
2. irregular payments (particularly for government teachers).

As a result of these challenges, approximately 93% of teachers interviewed in this study expressed dissatisfaction with their compensation.

#### *Box 3: The effects of currency fluctuation on teacher incentives*

Volatility in the exchange rate between the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) and USD has a notable impact on teacher payments. Particularly in the past year, the SSP has rapidly lost value against the dollar (UN Treasury, 2024). Actors paying teachers need to regularly account for exchange rate fluctuations, or risk paying teachers less than they are owed. The following graph illustrates fluctuations in the SSP equivalent of the $40 Education Cluster incentive rate.




Calculated using the UN Operational Exchange Rate (UN Treasury, 2024).

Both KIs and teachers expressed concern that the actual amount that teachers receive (when they receive it) is heavily affected by hyperinflation, which caused the SSP to lose significant value against the dollar over the last year. When factoring in inflation, the majority of government teachers (Grade 14) make the equivalent of about $10-13 USD per month. For an illustration of USD/SSP exchange rate fluctuation, see Box 3.

While there have been several attempts to increase government teacher pay, and there have been incremental increases, inflation is so bad that "*even if you are being paid around 100,000 pounds, you can finish it in one day as a person alone*" (CSO KI, 2024). A Donor KI stated: "*It's very little, really, and yet, the cost of living is very high. And even with that little amount that they are supposed to receive, it's been nine months since they received their last pay. So, how does a teacher survive? That's the question that everyone should really…try to find answers for*."

Due to delays in teacher compensation, many teachers are also living on loans (Donor KI, 2024). Even if the government pays one month's salary, the teacher may need to use it to pay their loans, which may not cover the full loan due to changing prices in the market. As summarized by a Donor KI, "I *think a teacher is the most disadvantaged person in the entire workforce of South Sudan. I think it's a very difficult situation, and that really is attributable to several challenges within the education sector, within the system that is supposed to disburse this funding to them. It goes to whether these funds are available or not. It goes to whether the system that is supposed to disburse these funds is functional and efficient at all*."

* All teachers' names are pseudonyms

***Teacher Testimonial: Deng Loku* , A government teacher working in Jonglei state***

*Since I started teaching in South Sudan in 2006, my salary has seen significant changes. Back then, I earned 300 SSP, which was enough to cover my basic needs and made me proud of my country and government. By 2013, my salary increased to 1,500 SSP, but inflation has drastically reduced its value. Today, 75,000 SSP doesn't go as far as 300 SSP did back then.*

*Since 2018, after the new peace agreement was signed, I've faced severe issues with delayed payments. My salary has been delayed for 10 months now, and the reasons for these delays remain unclear. I can't even borrow money because no one trusts that the government will pay. When the money doesn't come I have a lot of issues, I have trouble providing for my wife and my home. In the classroom, my students do not receive lessons on time or at all. This instability has left my family without enough food and forced me to leave school to search for something to eat. This situation impacts my teaching, as my students miss out on lessons while I try to meet my family's needs.*

*In addition to these financial struggles, there have been issues with allowances. When the government promised a 400% salary increase, we never saw the payment, leading to strikes and ongoing disputes with the Ministry of Education. These strikes show the issues and the lack of trust in the government's ability to keep its promises.*

*Even with these challenges, I remain hopeful. I believe that if the government becomes strong and operational, it can address these issues and improve our situation. Education will bring love and harmony to the country, if there is no education, the peace will not be implemented. I urge both the government and NGOs to prioritize education and work together to build a better future for all.*





Volunteer teachers are also impacted as their incentives have lost half of their value in the past year, as demonstrated in Box 3. The incentive payment amount is not being updated frequently enough to keep up with the ever-changing inflation rates (CSO KI, 2024).

## *Irregular, delayed, or stolen payments*

All teachers are supposed to be paid monthly, but the majority of KIs (13/16) reported that teachers do not receive their payments regularly. This observation was further confirmed during interviews, whereby the majority of teachers (36/45) reported experiencing delays in payment. As one Donor KI stated: "*the system of paying salaries is a disaster*."

During this study, salary arrears for government teachers were already 9-10 months past due. The last salary that teachers received was for September 2023 (NGO KI, 2024), and the situation has yet to be remedied. KIs explained that the most recent delay is due to the lack of revenue from oil, and the government's lack of alternative revenue sources, but these challenges pre-date the Sudan crisis that has impacted the oil pipeline. One Donor KI referred to the "*paradox*" in South Sudan between volunteer and government teachers, noting that: "*in South Sudan, the incentive from humanitarian and development partners… are more important in terms of money than the salaries, because the salaries are very low, they are not paid. But even if they are paid, the amounts are quite ridiculous. So the paradox of South Sudan is that the [$40] incentives represent more than the salaries of the teachers*."

Salary delays largely affect government teachers. However, incentive teachers also face some delays. For instance, civil society organizations will be ready to pay incentives, but there are delays in getting the regularly revised circulars from the Education Cluster, which dictates the updated incentive rate, limiting the timely delivery of teacher payments (NGO KI, 2024).

## *Additional challenges for teacher pay and benefits*

### *Flat payment rates*

Overall, volunteer teachers receive flat payment amounts, regardless of their qualifications or years of teaching experience (with some exceptions made in refugee camps/settlements). Whereas government teachers are paid according to grade levels, there is no difference in payments for volunteer teachers regarding their qualifications (INGO KI, 2024). As one concrete example shared during this study, a volunteer teacher with two years of teaching experience received the same monthly incentive as a volunteer teacher with over 14 years of teaching experience at the same school.

KIs shared that, in their conversations with teachers, the teachers emphasized that in addition to an increase in salaries, they want to ensure that their payments are based on their contributions and years of experience, and not qualifications alone. According to the KIs, differentiating payments, offering hardship allowances, and providing opportunities for volunteer teachers to become qualified teachers and join the government payroll would further motivate them. Despite payment delays in the government system, joining the national payroll is still seen as a long-term strategy to improve teachers' conditions (CSO KI, 2024).

In refugee camp/settlement settings, one KI's organization improved its recognition of qualified teachers by paying them slightly higher than the unqualified teachers (UN KI, 2024). There is still variation across qualified (and unqualified) teachers working in different refugee-hosting areas, but there are plans to harmonize incentives given significant disparities with health and other sectors. The low number of qualified teachers working in the camps/settlements may make this differentiated approach more feasible.

### *Limited long-term financial security*

Apart from not being able to collect their salaries to cover current expenses, let alone save for the future, government teachers are also unable to count on support in retirement. Teachers on the government payroll contribute to the National Pension Fund, which is deducted from their salaries and received upon retirement, but KIs highlighted that government teachers do not always receive their pensions (NGO KI, 2024; MoJ, 2012b). Although there is an autonomous government body overseeing this fund and continually processing these deductions when salary payments are made, they are not issuing payments (CSO KI, 2024).

Volunteer teachers who are paid by NGOs and UN agencies should benefit from the National Social Insurance Fund Act (2023), but it is unclear if these organizations are paying into this fund on behalf of their teachers and whether or not they will be able to access this resource in the future (GoSS, 2023b). Teacher incentives and benefits paid by education partners in South Sudan, including UN agencies, international organizations, and donors are also unsustainable in the long-run for various reasons such as programmatic timelines, donor fatigue, and shifts in global priorities. Relying on external funding creates uncertainty, as support from partners may diminish over time, leaving a high population of the teaching workforce in South Sudan without any form of compensation or benefits.

## *Teachers are not receiving their payments*

Another challenge includes money not reaching the teachers at all. One CSO KI reported that in Jonglei state, as one example, teachers experienced "theft of their monies," with money from the national level never even reaching the local levels to be able to pay teachers. KIs identified several challenges and barriers leading to low and inconsistent teacher payments. While some challenges, including government capacity and resource constraints, corruption, and limited banking systems may impact civil servants more broadly, KIs generally noted that these factors affect the education sector more severely due to government deprioritization of education and limited technical capacity specifically in the MoGEI.

## *Limited resources, technical capacity, and disconnects between ministries result in poor budget execution*

Approximately half of the KIs voiced skepticism about the government's fundamental ability to pay teachers due to financial constraints, limited technical capacity, and a lack of coordination across ministries. Teachers also highlighted these issues, with one teacher stating: "*We know very well that education is the backbone of any country. It's the key. So we need to ensure that the government should look at the education sector and inject enough [money] so that the Ministry should be able to provide services to all teachers*." Unfortunately, this is not the precedent in South Sudan. Historically, the education sector has seen low rates of budget execution, resulting in a significant loss of financing for education expenditures such as teachers' salaries. For the past four years, MoGEI's budget execution rate has fallen below 50% of MoFP allocated funds, illustrating a need to strengthen accountability and management within the education finance system (UNESCO, 2023; GPE & MoGEI, 2024).

One Donor KI attributed these challenges to MoGEI's lack of administrative infrastructure and effective systems needed for budget management, while others pointed towards South Sudan's economic context and disconnects between ministries. According to one Donor, low budget execution is prevalent across all public sector domains due to macroeconomic challenges that constrain MoFP's ability to disperse full budget commitments to the line ministries, notably the disruption of oil exports due to conflict in Sudan in recent months (Donor KI, 2024). An NGO KI explained: "*we have a very good Ministry of General Education… but the biggest challenge is whether they will get the money…from the Ministry of Finance, because we have a very poor execution rate of the basic services sectors—health, education, water. The [MoFP] barely spent 20% of the budget that they've been allocated*." Another Donor shared that the Ministry of Education does not have much influence in terms of the teachers' salaries because the money comes from the Treasury, and high turnover rates in the MoFP have hampered lobbying and implementation efforts (Donor KI, 2024).

KIs also described a lack of clarity around what happens in the flow between the MoFP and the MoGEI when salaries go out to teachers. According to an NGO KI, South Sudan has experienced some improvement in terms of the way money is channeled by MoGEI to the states and counties. However, according to several KIs, the money is still not being distributed in a timely fashion. KIs were unclear as to whether the delays are due to the money not being allocated, being allocated but not approved, or being allocated and approved but ultimately not disbursed (Donor KI, 2024). In part, these issues are exacerbated by institutional constraints within the banking system, elaborated on further in the following section.

## *Limited banking systems and costly alternatives due to insecurity*

Limitations in South Sudan's banking system often prevent available funds from reaching teachers in a timely and efficient manner. Only 5.83% of the population has account ownership at a financial institution or mobile-money service provider, and as of 2021, only 20% of county education departments had bank accounts (World Bank, 2024b; MoGEI, 2023). Subsequently, electronic payments to teachers are nearly impossible, and financial transfers between the decentralized levels often occur through in-person means, which are costly, timely, and potentially dangerous (MoGEI, 2023; NGO KI, 2024).

According to one KI, when payments are delivered, they are typically managed in cash via a third party. In some cases, the third parties charge high commissions to deliver the cash, which increases the cost of paying teachers regularly (NGO KI, 2024). KIs also highlighted that physically carrying and delivering the cash to teachers in hard-to-reach areas may be very risky due to issues like road ambushes or intercommunal conflicts: "looking at the infrastructure in South Sudan and talking about access is one of the biggest challenges in delivering teacher salaries. Some of the areas are not easily accessible, even by vehicle. We are working in very difficult areas and sometimes the road network is limited, especially areas in Upper Nile" (NGO KI, 2024). The insecurity causes some agencies to rely on planes to deliver the cash, which is expensive and logistically complicated (UN KI, 2024). Because of these security challenges and costs associated with paying salaries, rather than being paid monthly, as many teachers prefer, institutions are paying teachers quarterly in some areas (Donor KI, 2024). While reforms have been discussed, previous attempts to introduce mobile banking also encountered challenges related to poor network connectivity in some states and digital illiteracy (CSO KI, 2024).

## *Deprioritization of education: Lack of political will, the absence of accountability, and corruption*

Aside from system inefficiencies and resource constraints that prevent salaries from reaching teachers, KIs emphasized how the government's historic deprioritization of the education sector further compounds teacher payment issues. Lack of political will to enact necessary reforms, the absence of accountability to citizens (particularly students and teachers), and allegations of corruption were all themes that KIs drew upon to emphasize why the GoSS is not adequately compensating its teaching force.

Many KIs (9/16) highlighted a lack of political will from the government to prioritize the education sector as a factor affecting teacher salaries. According to KIs, the government's priorities lie with sectors such as defense and security, rather than social services, for which they are comfortable with donors taking responsibility. One Donor KI stated,

"*they [the government] are very happy that the donors are supporting these sectors because they don't need to*." These issues have been ongoing throughout South Sudan's history. Following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), education sector employees held "*very big expectations*" for the government to support education, which were never realized (INGO KI, 2024).

Moreover, KIs highlighted a significant lack of accountability from the South Sudanese government to its citizens, citing instances of unfulfilled promises and policy-to-practice gaps as evidence. For example, KIs did not trust the MoFP to follow through on financial promises. One Donor KI outlined a past scenario where the MoFP made certain financial commitments to the MoGEI, which were not actualized when the final budget was announced. This lack of accountability also manifests locally in cases where states and counties are told by the central government that salary payments are coming and to check their bank accounts to then find nothing (Government KI, 2024). According to KIs, some schools are entirely unsupported by the government, and there is a notable absence of official communication or solutions for ongoing issues, reflecting a broader concern about the government's accountability and its engagement with civil servants.

Ultimately, the government's failure to fulfill its responsibilities, particularly in terms of teacher support and timely pay, contributes to a broken social contract with its citizens. In the most severe instances, KIs noted explicit examples of how government corruption prevents payment from reaching teachers. One Donor KI argued that, "*we can't talk about teachers' salaries and ignore discussions on PFM [public finance management] and discussions on corruption, where a governor takes teacher salary and just uses it. It's crazy*." Similarly, a CSO KI recounted scenarios where the money for teachers' salaries is "*eaten by officials in Juba and it never really reaches the grassroot*." One government KI provided a specific corruption example related to ghost teachers, who exist on payroll documents, but are not teaching within school. According to this KI, people in positions of authority inflate ghost teacher numbers in order to siphon funds from the government, at the expense of civil servants. Additionally, he described how it is an open secret that MoFP distributed funds are looted by officials, yet nothing can be done about this given their positions of power (Government KI, 2024).

Both political will and accountability are necessary to enact meaningful change pathways. In South Sudan, the absence of both and the presence of corruption not only exacerbate current challenges, but could prevent needed reforms from taking hold (UN KI, 2024; INGO KI, 2024). A UN KI emphasized: "*We have a beautiful plan [ESP 2023-2027] but implementing those recommendations requires commitment, goodwill, political goodwill*." There was a resounding agreement by KIs that the government does not possess this will.





# Implications of Inadequate & Irregular Teacher Compensation

Teacher compensation is a critical factor that influences teacher well-being (Falk et al., 2019). Positive teacher well-being is crucial to student well-being and learning, and plays an essential role in advancing policies and programs that aim to enhance the quality and sustainability of education systems (Falk et al., 2019). KIs consistently expressed the negative impact of the state of teacher compensation on individual teacher well-being and the wider teaching profession. At an individual level, low, inconsistent, and stagnant compensation demotivate current and prospective teachers. Teachers struggle to meet their own and their families' basic needs. Many are forced to take on additional jobs, which increases stress and burnout. These individual effects on teachers manifest at scale across the broader teaching profession, ultimately leading to poor retention of teachers and deprofessionalization of the field. The impact of this results in consequences within and beyond the education system, including parents shouldering the burden of education payments, poor student learning outcomes, and child protection risks in the classroom and community.

## *Poor teacher retention*

Poor teacher retention resulting from low salaries, inconsistent payments, and poor teaching conditions has a significant impact on the teaching profession in South Sudan. KIs cited shared explanations for poor teacher retention including: payment (in)frequency, the amount they take home, and the low value put into teaching. While in some cases KIs spoke of the lack of individuals wanting to enter the teaching profession, many others emphasized that there is a sufficient number of trained, qualified teachers in the country, but they have left the teaching profession to pursue other work in order to sustain themselves.

KIs highlighted that teachers have "deserted the profession" (NGO KI, 2024). Another CSO KI explained: "*The majority that are actually professional have run out from the profession due to different reasons, in terms of pay, in terms of poor teaching conditions, whether it's in terms of the accommodation issue, for example, whether it's in terms of poor education facilities, whether it's in terms of lack of teaching, teaching materials, all those different factors contribute to the living of the professional teachers. So that leaves a vacuum that needs to be filled*."

One CSO KI indicated that very few entrants are entering the colleges of education. Those students who do graduate from colleges of education try to join private institutions, where they earn more and the conditions are better (CSO KI, 2024). Alternatively, they leave the teaching profession entirely, preferring to work with national or international NGOs which offer consistent payment, higher wages, and payment in US dollars (NGO KI, 2024; Donor KI, 2024). Outside of NGOs, many teachers also choose to work instead as clerical staff in medical facilities, join the police force, join the army, or become boda boda (motorcycle taxi) drivers because the teacher compensation package is not sustaining them (INGO KI, 2024). An NGO KI shared that boda boda drivers raise in one week what teachers make in one month. When asked why teachers leave the profession, an INGO KI emphasized: "*really survival, especially now with the economy struggling, it's really about surviving*."

As a result of teachers leaving for private schools or other professions, there are significant teacher shortages (UN KI, 2024). In some public schools "*you find that*

*maybe one or three teachers are the only ones who are running the whole school*" (CSO KI, 2024). One Donor KI highlighted that teacher shortages are particularly prominent following waves of external financing because qualified teachers are attracted back to schools, but then leave the profession again following the end of their contracts if the government is not able to match what the donors paid them.

## Demotivation of in-service and prospective teachers

Demotivation due to salary issues leads to significant challenges for teachers in South Sudan. KIs noted that both in-service teachers and prospective educators are affected. Fifteen out of 16 KIs cited low or inconsistent salaries as a major factor diminishing teacher motivation. While some KIs noted that even a small, timely salary could help, the current lack of payment leaves teachers "*frustrated*" and "*demoralized*" (NGO KI, 2024; CSO KI, 2024). One teacher described the impact of these conditions, saying: "*You come to the school, you are sitting under the tree, without any interest in going to the class. It's like somebody has...angered you, but it was nobody. It was the condition that you were in that makes yourself not be ready to go to the school*."

Prospective teachers are also discouraged by the profession's unattractiveness due to low salaries. KIs remarked that "the teaching profession in the country is no longer attractive" and that "*teachers don't see the benefit to becoming teachers*" (multiple KIs, 2024). For instance, despite

***Teacher Testimonial:* Loka Chol, a government school leader working in Eastern Equatoria state**

*I came to South Sudan in 2008 and have been a head teacher at my school for the past five years, with a total of 21 years in education. I haven't received a promotion or salary increase. My salary is 40,000 SSP ($13.98), but it comes after 10 months. I just received a salary for September 2023 in July 2024.*

*The government pays 10 out of the 26 teachers at my school; the remaining 16 are volunteers supported minimally by the PTA. We rely on a capitation grant for things like repairs and buying supplies. I use some of this grant to support vulnerable students by buying uniforms and helping with school materials. However, the payments are insufficient to support my family, especially with school fees, medical expenses, and food. I depend on my garden for additional food.*

*Many teachers are leaving due to the lack of pay, making it very difficult to run the school. We sometimes have to close the school if there are not enough teachers. I really appreciate the teachers who do come, as they have a deep love for the students despite the little incentive they receive. The feeding program helps sustain student attendance, but it's a challenge to keep the school running without proper teacher support.*

*I need to be absent from school to go to my garden and provide for my family. The government needs to address these issues now. My school is becoming vulnerable because of no payment. They should lobby for better support for teachers, both in the city and in rural areas. I think the capitation grant should be reviewed so that parents don't have to contribute as much. No salaries show a lack of concern for teachers, and the government should work with education partners to improve the situation.*

*We really need support from partners to help both teachers and learners. Sometimes, it's hard to keep coming to school, but our love for our country and its children keeps us going. Imagine if this happened in another country—children would be without food all day, and parents would be running up and down. We've been patient long enough, and the government needs to address these issues before our patience runs out.*





offering full scholarships, the National Teachers Training Institute (NTTI) attracted only 12 applicants, and the College of Education is considered the least desirable option for secondary school graduates (INGO KI, 2024). In 2021, there were only 189 teachers enrolled in three TTIs spread out across the country, indicating a significant shortfall for meeting the needs of both in-school and out-of-school children and youth in South Sudan (Windle Trust, 2022).

## Teachers struggle to meet basic needs

KIs repeatedly noted the intersection between teacher demotivation and stress to meet teachers' needs and those of their families. Multiple KIs highlighted that the salary for Grade 12 teachers on the government pay scale, as well as incentives for volunteer teachers, are insufficient to buy basic goods, such as maize (corn) flour, to sustain a family. As a result, teachers are often coming to the classroom hungry and unable to perform their roles and responsibilities at a high standard. One KI specifically highlighted the dual issues of low salaries and payment delays, asking pointedly, "*With an empty stomach, how can you teach?*" (UN KI, 2024). Over half of the teachers interviewed specified directly that their compensation is insufficient to feed themselves and their families. A Donor KI elaborates: "*So, you ask yourself, how are teachers surviving? And whether their commitment to [their work] will remain at 100% because they also have to... they are humans, they have families*."

Another KI underscored the gravity of the situation, stating that teachers are not merely looking for extra income to improve their lives—they are fighting to survive: "...*I am not saying they have to live life. They have to survive. And this means that they have to find other sources of funds. And so this means that sometimes they cannot attend the schools. So there is a kind of high absenteeism of teachers if there is no salary payment*" (Donor KI, 2024).

***Teacher Testimonial:* Nyawira Ladu, a volunteer teacher working in refugee settlement**

*I am a national teacher working in a refugee settlement. I have been teaching for 10 years. Currently, my salary is $439, but after taxes and converting it into local currency, I'm left with around $300 per month. It's difficult to live on this, especially with children. I have two children in Uganda. Their school fees are 5000 SSP, and it costs 8000 SSP just to travel home to see them. My salary doesn't cover all these expenses, and sometimes I have to borrow money just to pay for their fees.*

*At my current school, I focus all my time on preparing for my lessons, so I don't have time to make extra income by selling food like I used to in Juba. I do grow vegetables near the accommodations for food. We were told there is no budget, and every time someone from the office comes, they say the same thing: "**no budget**." We are struggling because there's no way to express our concerns or ask why the money isn't coming. We tried to come together as a group, but nobody listens, and if we speak up, we risk losing our jobs. It feels like "**when the elephants are fighting, the grass suffers**"—and we are the grass.*

*By the end of the month, I have no money left. I need at least $500 net pay to save a little for emergencies, but right now, I even have to borrow. I only have $5 in my account. The NGO I work with used to be a great organisation—they would send teachers for training, and they would provide materials like sanitary towels for the girls, but that has stopped. They say it's because of budget issues.*

*I don't blame them entirely, but I believe they are blocking other partners who want to come in and help. My colleagues in government schools think I'm in a better position because they haven't been paid at all, but honestly, this situation is still very hard.*

One KI highlighted that as teacher well-being is being negatively impacted by insufficient and delayed payments, a teachers' humanity remains increasingly overlooked in education interventions and programming in South Sudan. Instead, interventions remain narrowly focused on upgrading skills. They noted:

"[Stakeholders] *mentioned the only consideration for teachers is that teachers need skills...and then it appears like the only thing that teachers need is skills, and that's...boom, we are good to go, but the teacher is a human being. The teacher needs to dress, the teacher needs to eat before they go to class, actually, before they acquire the skills, they need to eat. So any support to the education system should take into consideration support for teachers first [...] But when we look at the interventions of partners today, they seem to have forgotten that human nature in a teacher*." (CSO KI, 2024).

Despite these challenges, some teachers remain motivated and committed (see Box 4).

Despite the severe impact that inadequate and delayed compensation has on teacher well-being and livelihoods, many teachers continue to fulfill their roles and responsibilities, driven by strong community ties, dedication to their students, and hope for a better future. One NGO KI highlights: "*It's a very unfortunate situation that teachers have not been paid, but they still come up to the school. I think one of the motivations is teachers feel that they are teaching their own children, even if they are not paid regularly. But they come from the same community, so it's also like giving back to the community, and they still continue to volunteer [...] They show up to the school. They come with the hope that things are going to improve... even in a dire situation where they [are not] paid for months*."

## *Turning to additional livelihoods and the impact on their work*

The only option for teachers "*to survive*" while continuing work as a teacher is to find additional sources of funds if there is no salary payment (Donor KI, 2024). If they do not leave the profession altogether, many, if not all, teachers seek additional livelihood opportunities to sustain themselves while working as teachers, in order to make ends meet. Per one NGO KI: "*a teacher, just like any of us has a family to feed, has a child to send to school, has a medical bill to pay, and... family and household related expenses that they have to pay for, and the absence of that, naturally, every human being will look for alternative ways to hustle and get something on the table*." The majority of KIs mentioned that although many teachers take on additional work to support themselves and their families, it is insufficient.

One KI highlighted the struggle teachers face in trying to balance their responsibilities in the classroom with the need to also support themselves and their families financially, ultimately impacting

**Box 4. Many teachers are motivated despite the odds**

*Despite the severe impact that inadequate and delayed compensation has on teacher well-being and livelihoods, many teachers continue to fulfill their roles and responsibilities, driven by strong community ties, dedication to their students, and hope for a better future. One NGO KI highlights: "It's a very unfortunate situation that teachers have not been paid, but they still come up to the school. I think one of the motivations is teachers feel that they are teaching their own children, even if they are not paid regularly. But they come from the same community, so it's also like giving back to the community, and they still continue to volunteer [...] They show up to the school. They come with the hope that things are going to improve... even in a dire situation where they [are not] paid for months."*





the quality of education. Teacher absenteeism is increasing as educators prioritize other income-generating activities thereby affecting the level of educational quality (Donor KI, 2024). One KI explained: "*And as such, teaching is not going normally in most of the schools because teachers prefer going to do work to earn money for their livings. So they can go to the school once or twice...in a week*." (NGO KI, 2024).

In teacher interviews, 34 teachers reported working one or more jobs to supplement their salary due to insufficient and irregular payment. The most common additional source of income reported by teachers was farming, but teachers also reported pursuing additional work in construction, healthcare, private school teaching and tutoring, the police force, the military, administration, sports coaching, and small business ventures. Teacher absenteeism from the necessity to find supplemental work has led to school closures; almost 28% of schools have closed because teachers were not there (NGO KI, 2024).[7]

## *Payment discrepancies create inequality and conflict between teachers*

Due to funding constraints, donors who support teacher incentive payments are unable to provide incentives for all of the volunteer teachers at schools, leading to significant disparities in compensation. In two KI interviews, it was emphasized that this shortfall exacerbates inequality among teachers, highlighting additional funding to support the large population of volunteer teachers in South Sudan and the need for solutions to prevent conflicts among teachers if this funding gap continues. One KI highlighted that, despite efforts to compensate volunteer teachers, only a few at each school receive funding: "*But of course, we don't have enough resources to pay all the teachers, sometimes in one school where you have maybe 12 to 15 teachers. [Our NGO] can only pick those few volunteers that are not on government payroll, which also creates some bit of inequality in the incentives they see*" (INGO KI, 2024).

In some school communities where teachers on the government payroll are not being paid, teachers may voluntarily agree to split volunteer teachers' incentives to ensure everyone receives some financial support. While this strategy helps mitigate conflict between different profiles of teachers, the already limited funding meant for one teacher may be spread across three or four people (UN KI, 2024).

This gap in funding reveals a complex and troubling reality: while the intention behind incentive payments is to support teachers, the lack of sufficient funding for all teachers creates unintended consequences that can undermine the stability and positive teacher well-being they are meant to foster. This situation not only creates financial inequities but also undermines relationships between teachers.

## *Deprofessionalization of the field*

The poor retention and compensation of teachers has created a scenario where most teachers in South Sudan are volunteer teachers. One NGO KI notes that volunteer teachers "*are not only in one region. They are not only in one county. It is all over because of the workforce crisis in the education sector*." Volunteer teachers are especially prominent in hard-to-reach areas, such as Eastern Equatoria, the Upper Nile, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Lakes State, and Jonglei (INGO KI, 2024).

Many volunteer teachers are unqualified. A UN KI reported that 74% of the 800 refugee teachers working with UNHCR lack qualifications, and a Donor KI confirmed most teachers they support lack training in pedagogy or professional training. In hard-to-reach areas, 52% to 75% of teachers are unqualified, with many being secondary school graduates or dropouts (INGO KI, 2024).

7 Recent reports from UNICEF indicate the situation continues to worsen. In August alone, 46 schools closed due to their inability to pay teachers' salaries (UNICEF, 2024a). This trend continued in September, and UNICEF was able to facilitate incentive payments for 195 teachers in the Upper Nile State to help schools remain functional (UNICEF, 2024b).

**Box 5: Spotlight - Lack of Female Teachers**

*South Sudan faces significant gender disparity in its teaching workforce, with historical and societal factors limiting opportunities for women in education (UNESCO, 2023). Fewer girls complete their education compared to boys, with the gender parity index declining from 100 at pre-primary to 82 at secondary levels. Early marriage and pregnancy are major barriers, contributing to high dropout rates, especially among girls (MoGEI, 2023b). Over 40% of female dropouts at the secondary level are due to pregnancy or early marriage, and many female learners did not return to school post-pandemic due to pregnancy (UNESCO, 2023). The lack of female teachers is further compounded by the fact that only 15% of teacher training instructors are women. In response to the challenges, the MoGEI has introduced strategies to increase female participation in the teaching force, including scholarships for prospective female teachers. The government's Education Policy (2017-2027) also outlines plans to develop an affirmative action policy for female teachers, aiming to address gender disparities and create more opportunities for women in education. These challenges, coupled with the implications of inadequate and irregular teacher compensation discussed in this report, however, do not bode well for bolstering recruitment and retention of female teachers in the near future.*

A Donor KI outlined one major dilemma for the broader teaching profession of having such a prominent number of unqualified teachers: "*If the majority of the workforce of the teacher core are not qualified, how do you then pay them? How do you get them on the government payroll and have them receive regular pay when they don't have the right qualifications for any of the grading for teachers?*"

To remedy the challenges presented by the large number of qualified and unqualified volunteer teachers, several KIs pointed to the need to institutionalize continuous professional development, to establish a teacher competency framework, and to create pathways for volunteer teachers to join the government payroll. As one CSO KI notes, there needs to be an "*exit strategy*" in order to break the cycle of heavily relying on unqualified volunteer teachers and to lure the qualified teachers to come back into the profession.

## *Parents, families, and communities are holding up the education system*

In South Sudan, the public education system relies heavily on community involvement through PTAs, SMCs, and other initiatives due to insufficient government support. While the 2012 Education Act mandates cost-sharing, "*the government support that was supposed to be coming in is not there*," leaving parents to bear most educational costs (CSO KI, 2024). One key informant stated, "*All the government schools, at the moment, are surviving, are having students going to class just because of the efforts of the PTA*" (CSO KI, 2024). As another key informant emphasized, "*If you have to support the livelihood of the teacher in your area, then it's not free*" (UN KI, 2024).

PTAs support teachers not only financially but also with various in-kind contributions. Community members may dig farms, work in teachers' gardens, or build houses for them (NGO KI, 2024). They sometimes provide food rations or small amounts of money (Ibid). However, "*the model puts a lot of burden on the parents*" (CSO KI, 2024). This heavy reliance on parent contributions props up a system where government responsibility is lacking, making free education an "*illusion*" (CSO KI, 2024; UN KI, 2024). Not all families can contribute to filling the gaps, leaving many children unable to continue their studies. One CSO KI observed, "*When I visited a school, students were picked from class because they hadn't paid*." He explained that parents are taking on the entire cost of education, and in times of crisis—whether due to floods, insecurity, or displacement—children stop attending school because families cannot afford it. "*Your cattle have been raided, you're no longer able to sell, and your children will not go to school because the government isn't supporting the system*," he added.

Several KIs emphasized the positive impact of PTA and community support for teachers, praising the resilience and dedication of these communities. They highlighted that these contributions are essential for keeping teachers motivated and schools functioning, particularly in underserved areas. One NGO KI noted, "*This kind of small community contribution makes the difference, and that keeps the teachers going*." Another added, "*That spirit of voluntarism is one of the things that have also kept some of the teachers to continue to teach*." Without these efforts, they warned, "*you will not have schools, and the next generation will be uneducated*."

While these community contributions are admirable and have played a critical role in sustaining education, the burden placed on families is overwhelming. As one NGO KI pointed out, this reliance on communities reveals a deeper issue: "*the government is not doing its part*." Despite the recognition of these sacrifices, there is a pressing need for greater political commitment to ensure sustainable improvements in the education system.

## *Threats to wider system*

Teacher salaries in South Sudan are critically impacting the education system. One UN key informant summarizes the concern: "*How long will they (teachers) continue to show up? It can't last forever like this. [...] We don't know what level of frustration will be necessary for the whole system to collapse, but we're probably not far from it*." They stress that without intervention, the system is at risk of collapsing entirely. Another key informant echoes this concern, stating, "*The system is already collapsed. [...] If the government continues to do the same thing it is doing now, of course the system will just collapse and nothing will happen*" (CSO KI, 2024). Without action, the collapse of the education system seems imminent.

KIs also emphasized consistently how declines in the education system have broader ramifications on other sectors and the country as a whole. Without teachers, they note, the country will not be able to get qualified healthcare workers, public civil servants, or workers in the finance ministry, the government, or any other sectors. So the "*education is a sector that needs to be looked at as a factory that generates human resources that supports the entire country*" (INGO KI, 2024).

### *School closures*

All of the KIs spoke about the impact on education and society more broadly of not sustaining the teaching profession, in many cases specifically labeling it a "*crisis*." School closures are an ongoing issue in South Sudan, stemming from conflict, environmental crises, and teacher shortages. According to MoGEI NES data, 13% of pre-primary, 16% of primary, and 18% of secondary schools, along with 26% of accelerated education (AE) programs across the country were closed in the year 2023; approximately 46% of all closed schools cited a lack of teachers as the primary cause (MoGEI, 2023a). The current crisis has exacerbated these pre-existing conditions; according to one government official KI, teachers are now deciding to close schools on their own due to frustrations over lack of payment. One consequence of school closures is a decline of learning because "*schools cannot work without teachers*" (Donor KI, 2024). A CSO KI noted the ripple effect of school closures on student learning, emphasizing that school

closures lead to: incomplete and/or delayed coverage of the curriculum within the academic year, long-term academic performance issues of students, and overall loss of morale among students and parents leading to mass dropout.

## National and international education goals remain out of reach

Another consequence of inadequate teacher compensation is the failure to achieve certain national education goals like providing free and high-quality education. Low teacher salaries in South Sudan have severely degraded the quality of education due to high teacher absenteeism, attrition, and demotivation (Donor KI, 2024). The majority of KIs highlighted that teacher motivation, adequate teaching materials, and proper learning spaces are fundamental to ensuring educational quality. Demotivated teachers, specifically, affect educational outcomes across South Sudan, making proper remuneration and support crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UN KI, 2024). Reflecting on the demoralized state of teachers, a CSO KI stated: "*without a teacher, you can have...children in class, you can have textbooks, you can have a very beautiful class infrastructure, but if you don't have a teacher, then absolutely you are not going to produce anything*."

Teacher absenteeism also results in overcrowded classrooms, poor learning outcomes, and high dropout rates, further undermining the country's educational progress. As noted by one INGO KI: "*The issue of teachers' motivation and salary payment has been reflected in the learning outcomes*" (INGO KI, 2024).

Multiple KIs emphasized that disjointed teacher qualifications and the high ratio of unqualified teachers also negatively impact educational quality. As highlighted by one Donor KI, "*Based on the teachers that I've interacted with, I would say it's really affecting teacher performance, and ultimately, students' outcomes*" (Donor KI, 2024).

A Donor KI indicated that improving salaries alone will be insufficient without additional interventions to enhance teaching quality. The majority of KIs underscored the urgent need to address both teacher quantity and quality to enhance educational outcomes in South Sudan.

## Child protection risks

The effects of teacher compensation also have implications for child protection risks inside and outside of the classroom. One Donor KI raised concerns about teacher absenteeism and school closures leading to increased dropout rates and increased exposure to violence, child labor, early marriage, and other unsafe activities. In addition to the connection between low teacher compensation and declining student learning, KIs emphasized the rise in stress due to inadequate compensation as a factor contributing to heightened child protection risks in the classroom and within the communities.

One KI emphasized the cascading negative effects of this heightened stress, noting that it exacerbates not only the teacher's well-being but also severely compromises the safety and well-being of students. They explained:

"*The teachers are under stress. They are unqualified in many cases. So the risk of corruption in the classroom, the risk of extortion by a teacher that has not been paid for months is increasing on the child, but on their family in the village as well. And stress levels also mean that discipline in school may get more violent and things of this sort. So it's important also to consider the impact on the whole atmosphere of the classroom, if you will, where stress levels are rising for the teachers. But you know...the economic crisis is affecting everybody. So children are stressed. Their parents are stressed. Everybody is sort of high alert at all times. So that also affects learning outcomes. So the well-being in the classroom is also deteriorating in this kind of context*" (UN KI, 2024).





## Donor fatigue

Donor fatigue exacerbates the challenges above as international support dwindles due to perceived inefficiencies and slow progress. Per the KIs, donor frustration relates to both the slow progress in transitioning from humanitarian aid to sustainable development, along with perceptions that the government is not prioritizing education.

The majority of KIs expressed concerns about the current situation, where donors are essentially propping up the government, while the government itself shows limited capacity to transition away from long-term donor dependency due to various challenges outlined in this report. One donor KI highlighted this frustration: "*We understand that nation-building takes time, but the real concern is the lack of progress*." The government's poor execution of basic service budgets and frequent delays in fund allocation have compounded this issue. Despite significant revenue from oil and other sources, donors are disillusioned by the government's inability to manage resources effectively.

While donors continue funding to prevent humanitarian crises, the Donor KIs expressed concern that the government does not share the same urgency. "*The logic is that...the government must take responsibility, because donors already are almost paying for everything from school learning materials to teaching materials, infrastructure support, and so forth. So the only thing the government is left with, ideally, is teacher salary payment*" (INGO KI, 2024).

The situation is exacerbated by the inability and/or reluctance of donors to provide direct budget support, which could ensure more consistent teacher salaries. Instead, donors are limited to implementing short-term projects and programs, which lack sustainability. As these programs end, many teachers in remote areas will lose their incentives unless new donor initiatives are introduced, highlighting the unsustainable nature of the current approach. Some donors also face restrictions from their home governments regarding funding, preventing them from providing direct support to a government entity or individuals within the government, including teachers (Donor KI, 2024).

While frustration among KIs was widespread, responses varied from doubling down on advocacy efforts to considering withdrawal from the country entirely. One INGO representative highlighted their frustration, explaining that many donors expected progress following South Sudan's 2011 independence. "*Donors believed we had arrived*," they said, expecting the government to take over the provision of basic services. Advocacy efforts continue, but there is an urgent need for the government to take responsibility for education funding and prioritize essential services to reduce reliance on external support.

# The Way Forward

Teachers of all profiles need to receive adequate and consistent teacher compensation. As education actors and advocates work with the national government to improve the shortcomings of the current system, teachers need to receive some kind of financial support urgently. One Donor KI stated: "*You know, we always say a little salary that comes regularly is better than not coming at all*." KIs identified this strategy as a pathway to keeping teachers motivated and reducing the likelihood of more teachers leaving the profession or seeking additional jobs to meet their basic needs. By ensuring consistent, if modest, compensation, this approach has the potential to retain teachers and support the focus on their roles and responsibilities.

In parallel to the short-term goal of issuing some kind of consistent payment to teachers on the government payroll, long-term strategies are needed to ensure that qualified teachers are brought back into the system and that there is ample funding to support them. The thousands of "*volunteer teachers*" working in South Sudan also need a clear entry point for completing their education and/or acquiring their teaching qualifications so that they can help fill teacher shortages and remain in the profession. Teacher compensation also needs to be based on qualifications and years of experience, as called for by the teacher participants in this study.

This will be a long-term process and the government will inevitably need ongoing financial support to strengthen its systems and fill funding shortfalls along the way. The teachers working in refugee camps and settlements will also require financial support from external sources for the foreseeable future, and compensation rates should reflect years of experience in the absence of formal qualifications to ensure teacher persistence and motivation. For teachers working in high-risk and often remote areas, hardship allowance, transportation, and housing support needs to be provided by the range of actors supporting the education sector to help teachers navigate these difficult working conditions. While these allowances are outlined in the new General Education Sector Plan 2023-2027 (see Box 1 for an overview of the sector plan), they have yet to be implemented.

There are several initiatives underway that aim to help the government move in this direction (see pathways section below). If the government does not demonstrate good faith efforts to uphold their end of the bargain, the government mistrust will continue to grow and donor fatigue will lead to the deprioritization and defunding of the education sector in South Sudan, all of which carry dire and long-lasting consequences for education in South Sudan.





# Current and New Pathways for Sustainable Solutions

## *Continued advocacy with and for teachers*

Study participants call for continued and expanded advocacy with the government of South Sudan, including with both the MoGEI and the MoFP to ensure a long-term and sustainable approach, to improve teachers' pay, their working conditions, and the quality of education in South Sudan. NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, and donors in South Sudan are already collaborating closely with each other to engage in joint advocacy efforts and to ensure that the voices of teachers are heard by government officials (multiple KIs, 2024). This work needs to continue. Education actors, and specifically donors, can further expand their assistance to the MoGEI to support and sharpen its advocacy efforts with the MoFP to ensure the prioritization of teachers and disbursement of needed funds.

The National Education Coalition, which represents more than 200 civil society organizations and NGOs working in the education sector, should continue to leverage its role elevating the concerns and needs of teachers and other civil society actors and bringing them to the attention of the government.

## *Strengthen the teachers' union*

Strengthening the functionality of the teachers' union was identified as a promising pathway to create a sustainable platform for teachers to engage directly with the government. Only four of the 45 teachers interviewed indicated they were union members, in many cases because the union had not yet spread to their state, further supporting the need to expand the union's capacity and reach. Due to financial constraints, the union is unable to provide monetary or other support to teachers, and its advocacy efforts are limited as they do not yet have enough personnel or capacity to reach and interact with teachers across the country. Nevertheless, the union seeks to establish a robust teachers' cooperative by building strong relationships with national banks to facilitate access to loans and further support teachers financially.

In the long-term, the union strives to move from dialogue to action by expanding its capacity to support all teachers and strengthen its ability to engage with education stakeholders at county, state, and national levels. One KI shared that this platform has the potential to amplify the perspectives of teachers, shedding light on the profound impact that irregular and insufficient payments have on their ability to remain in the teaching profession, deliver quality education, and advance in their pedagogical practice (NGO KI, 2024; CSO KI, 2024). Notably, the teachers' union is not part of one of the main coordination groups, the Local Education Group (LEG), but is involved in the National Education Coalition, which helped establish the union initially (see Coordination section below for more details). It is unclear why the union is not part of the LEG.

## *Continued coordination and priority-setting among education actors to amplify coverage*

Given the immense needs within the education sector, KIs raised the critical importance of coordination to help donors and implementing partners make informed decisions about what type of support should be prioritized. "*The issue*

*of prioritization is critical in terms of deciding where to provide support, because funds are dwindling at the moment, and so that means there's not a single donor that can support all the sub-sectors within the education sector*" (Donor KI, 2024). Beyond the need to prioritize, KIs did not raise other concerns or challenges related to coordination, and there appear to be a number of functional coordination mechanisms in place. See Box 6 for education coordination mechanisms in South Sudan currently.

**Box 6: Education coordination mechanisms and spaces in South Sudan**

*There are a number of coordination groups/mechanisms in place to govern the education sector in South Sudan, four of which are described in more detail below.*

- *The Education Cluster in South Sudan, co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children, works to ensure inclusive, quality education for children affected by crises. It focuses on children and youth from displaced, returnee, and host communities who are at risk of or have already dropped out of school. The Cluster prioritizes areas with high needs due to displacement, flooding, violence, or inadequate education infrastructure. The Cluster includes 49 humanitarian partner organizations and is supported by a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) of 10 national and international organizations. Coordination occurs at the state level across 10 states and two (of the three) Administrative Areas, with some coordination led by South Sudanese NGOs or ministries. Meeting frequency varies.*
- *The Local Education Group (LEG) unites civil society partners working in education to discuss and coordinate education projects and broader issues. It serves as a forum for advocating to the government for enhanced support, such as increased funding for teachers. Chaired by the undersecretary and including senior government officials, the LEG also comprises UN agencies, multilateral institutions (e.g., World Bank, African Development Bank), development agencies (e.g., USAID, FCDO, Sweden), and local, national, and international NGOs. The group meets monthly.*
- *The Education Donors Group engages with the Government of South Sudan to enhance collaboration between the MoGEI and the MoFP. It helps the MoGEI advocate for increased support from the MoFP. The group comprises 8-9 main donors, including FCDO, USAID, African Development Bank, Norway, Sweden, Canada, and the EU, and is co-chaired by the World Bank and USAID. Meetings are held bi-weekly.*
- *The National Education Coalition (NEC) is a network of over 170 civil society organizations advocating for the right to education in South Sudan. Established in 2017 with support from the GPE and currently hosted by Oxfam South Sudan, NEC focuses on issues such as school enrollment, educational quality, and management.*
- *The Refugee Education Working Group, chaired by UNHCR and co-chaired by the Commission for Refugee Affairs, works to uphold the South Sudan Refugee Education Strategy (2022-2025) and Refugee Education Strategy 2030 to ensure refugee learners have opportunities to access quality education within South Sudan. All organizations that implement education-related activities with refugees are invited to join, including MoGEI, UN agencies, and other partners. The group is further divided into thematic task teams that focus on specific issues, and meetings take place on a monthly basis (UNHCR, n.d.).*

*Many of the same individuals and/or agencies may participate in multiple initiatives (e.g. as members of the cluster, the LEG, and the NEC).*





## Bolster teacher recruitment and certification pathways

KIs highlighted that many qualified teachers have remained in volunteer positions for years without being formally enrolled in the government payroll. KIs emphasized that creating pathways for these teachers to be enrolled on the government payroll would help retain more teachers in the profession. This is a critical need as teacher shortages remain prominent in the country leading to unmanageable and vulnerable classroom environments due to high pupil to teacher ratios (UN KI, 2024; NGO KI, 2024). When government funding sustains payments, certification pathways can break the unsustainable cycle of donor-funded incentives, fostering stability.

Currently, partners are engaging teachers in training programs, with UNICEF and the World Bank supporting government initiatives to help teachers access courses for certification. The World Bank project, Building Skills for Human Capital Development in South Sudan (see Box 1 for project description), aims to add 10,000 newly qualified teachers, the majority of whom are already working in the education sector, while also training 1,000 new pre-service teachers to strengthen South Sudan's education system. The World Bank is working with the government to adapt accredited training programs to be delivered in low-resource contexts, aiming to minimize the number of teachers who must leave the classroom to participate in training. These efforts are aimed at developing a robust teaching workforce, which is essential for moving towards a quality education system in the country. Additionally, in parallel to these programs, one KI recommended the development of a teacher competency framework, which would outline essential knowledge and skills required for teachers to perform their roles effectively in specific school settings and enhance teacher quality (UN KI, 2024).

## Strengthen systems through technical and financial support

### Development of teacher education management information systems

Two KIs highlighted challenges stemming from the absence of an Education Management Information System (EMIS) or other databases that track key metrics such as teacher profiles, attendance, payroll management, recruitment, placement, and retirement (NGO KIs, 2024). Without these systems, the MoGEI lacks critical data for effective teaching management, leading to gaps in tracking active teachers, maintaining accurate records, and identifying those who have retired. This lack of information undermines the MoGEI's ability to make informed decisions and manage teacher compensation, recruitment, and hiring effectively. Currently, the World Bank project, Building Skills for Human Capital Development in South Sudan, is supporting systems strengthening within the government, and one key area of focus is the development of an EMIS system.

### School supervision

Working in concert with improvements to EMIS, KIs highlight the need to support supervision within local county education departments (NGO KI, 2024; CSO KI, 2024). KIs recommended increasing personnel to ensure accuracy of school records, track teacher attendance, monitor teacher payments, and observe on-the-ground conditions in schools. This enhanced oversight is essential to providing a clear and accurate portrayal of school conditions, thereby informing more effective policy response and potentially prompting government ownership, commitment, and action towards improving school conditions.

### *Governmental incentives to improve accountability and efficiency*

Furthermore, the 2024 partnership compact between MoGEI and GPE contains three top-up triggers designed as leverage points to increase financial efficiency and accountability within the South Sudanese education system (GPE & MoGEI, 2024). Two of these triggers incentivize overall system reforms by promising that the South Sudanese government will receive $2 million from GPE upon the construction of a "*comprehensive Public Financial Management (PFM) policy framework*," and an additional $2.2 million for ensuring that State Education Transfer Monitoring Committees (SETMCs) submit quarterly accountability reports (GPE & MoGEI, 2024, p. 32). If implemented, these reforms would reduce financial leakage within the decentralized system. The third trigger specifically incentivizes improved execution of MoGEI's salary budget; if the Ministry achieves an 80% salary execution target, it will receive an additional $5 million from GPE (GPE & MOGEI, 2024). While these reforms require political will, it remains to be seen whether the financial incentives could increase the likelihood of execution.

### *Build and expand digital payment platforms*

One KI highlighted the potential of a mobile payment system, previously piloted by UNICEF, to improve timeliness of payments and increase the reliability of salaries reaching teachers. However, as noted above, they also highlighted two key limitations in this strategy that would need to be targeted before pursuing digital payment platforms to remunerate teachers: unstable network connectivity and low levels of digital literacy (CSO KI, 2024).

### *Strengthen the national pension fund and social insurance fund*

Challenges such as inadequate provisions, poor record-keeping, an absence of financial and technical support from the government, and insufficient staff training and development contribute to the lack of pension disbursement for government employees, as employees are unable to track their contributions or the government's contributions towards their retirement (Lubajo Momo & Mogga, 2023; Radio Tamazuj, 2024). To address these challenges, an amendment introduced by the National Constitutional Amendment Committee in South Sudan in February 2024 aims to improve reporting mechanisms, safeguard funds, and ensure that government employees can access their pension funds promptly upon retirement (Radio Tamazuj, 2024). The concrete steps being taken to achieve these goals are not publicly available.

Additionally, the National Social Insurance Fund (2023), which is intended to provide pensions for volunteer teachers by NGOs and UN agencies, faces significant challenges including government corruption, insufficient human resources, and an inadequate legal framework (MoL, 2024; multiple KIs, 2024). These challenges lead to limited hope for volunteer teachers to receive their pensions if the fund is not strengthened.

Strengthening the human resource, technical capacity, accountability mechanisms, and legal framework within the National Pension and Social Insurance Funds, along with fostering trust between the government and employees, could greatly address the gaps in teacher financial security and benefits. Improved management and accountability within both funds would offer teachers the assurance of long-term financial stability, reducing the need for them to seek supplemental employment to support themselves and their families. This, in turn, could enhance job satisfaction and retention rates. Furthermore, the prospect of receiving reliable benefits could boost teacher motivation and attract more individuals to the profession.





## *Recommendations by Payment Mechanism and Time Horizon*

In an effort to create durable and resilient teacher compensation systems, the recommendations below (see Tables 6, 7 and 8) are organized by payment system (and which teacher profiles are being compensated through each system), stakeholders, and time horizons. They reinforce efforts already underway to support the government in assuming increasing responsibility for teacher payments. They further align with recommendations that emerged from the United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession, calling for appropriate salaries and benefits aligned with opportunities to obtain the requisite qualifications and certifications for permanent employment (ILO, UN & UNESCO, 2024). Together, these recommendations aspire to elevate the quality of public education and the teaching profession in South Sudan.

Table 6: **Recommendations for pathways to sustainable compensation for teachers supported by the GoSS**

| ***Teachers Paid by the Government of South Sudan*** | |
|---|---|
| ***Reconciling the past (unique to teachers on the government payroll)*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **Government of South Sudan (GoSS; MoGEI, MoFP)** | Pay salary arrears for all teachers on the government payroll.<br>Within South Sudan's National Budget for FY 2023-2024, MoFP allocated 50 billion SSP for "arrear funds" (MoFP, 2023). Anecdotal responses from teachers within this study, along with local news reports, cast doubts that salary arrears ever reached teachers. In a speech to the Transnational Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Finance stated that 15% (642.3 billion SSP) of the proposed FY 2024-2025 National Budget would be allocated to salary arrears for civil servants and operational forces (SSEM, 2024). Given past patterns, the GoSS should take measures to ensure that funds allocated for salary arrears reach teachers in practice. This will require coordination between MoFP and MoGEI to ensure allocated funds are transferred and distributed to teachers at the school level. |
| **Donors** | Account for salary arrears in current agreements/negotiations for supporting the education sector in South Sudan. |
| **Teachers' Union & Advocacy Groups** | Monitor the GoSS's stated promises vs. implementation efforts to address teachers' salary arrears. Engage in ongoing advocacy efforts to pressure the GoSS to follow through on promised actions. |
| ***Reckoning with the present*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **GoSS** | Resume payments now and progressively increase to a "living wage" (in coordination with the MoL) to support teacher retention and motivation.<br>According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), determination of a "living wage" is denoted as: "the wage level that is necessary to afford a decent standard of living for workers and their families, taking into account the country circumstances and calculated for the work performed during the normal hours of work" (ILO, 2024a). The establishment of these wages should be carried out in consultation with teachers and the teachers' union (ILO, 2024b)[8], in order to decrease teachers' reliance on supplementary employment (beyond their roles as teachers) to cover living costs. |

8 The ILO (2024a) further states: "The agreement says that the estimation of living wages should follow a number of principles, including the usage of evidence-based methodologies and robust data, consultations with workers' and employers' organizations, transparency, public availability, and the consideration of regional and local contexts and socio-economic and cultural realities."

| | |
|---|---|
| | Provide the technical and financial support to strengthen the management and accountability mechanisms of the National Pension Fund and National Social Insurance Fund by bolstering their human resources, technical capacity, and legal frameworks, as well as by engaging staff in relevant training to ensure that teachers receive their entitled benefits throughout their employment and into retirement. |
| | Continue to strengthen the State Education Monitoring Committees (SEMCs) and monitor their accountability reports to identify and address funding leakage/misallocations in transfers from the national to state, county, and payam levels (MoGEI & GPE, 2024). |
| **Donors** | Continue exploring transitional models to help GoSS fill salary gaps in the short-term and progressively increase teacher compensation to a living wage. |
| | Prioritize funding teacher compensation to ensure that teachers are adequately supported in their efforts to facilitate student learning and well-being, let alone implement new and innovative educational programming. If direct support for teacher compensation is not possible, provide other funding support that would allow GoSS to prioritize teacher compensation payments. |
| ***Looking towards the future*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **GoSS (MoGEI)** | Increase domestic public financing to education from 5 to 20% and fully execute the general education budget (MoGEI, 2023b).<br><br>Historic budget execution rates for the education sector have routinely fallen below 50% (UNESCO, 2023). The GESP (2023-2027) aims to incrementally increase the execution rate from a baseline of 46% in 2021 to full execution (100%) by 2027 (MoGEI, 2023b). Moreover, as noted within this report, GPE has further incentivized execution of MoGEI's salary specific budget within their partnership compact. The GoSS should prioritize meeting the 80% salary execution rate outlined by GPE in order to receive an additional 5 million dollars for the education sector (GPE & MoGEI, 2024). |
| | Implement strategies outlined in the GESP (2023-2027) to increase teachers' salaries to two times the GDP per capita on average (MoGEI, 2023b) so that teachers do not need to secure additional employment to fill financial shortfalls. |
| | Develop Education Management Information System (EMIS) to track key metrics (e.g. teacher profiles, attendance, payroll management, recruitment, placement, and retirement). |
| | Follow through on agreement with GPE to develop an MoGEI specific Public Financial Management (PFM) policy framework to ensure greater coordination, accountability, and management of public funding in the education sector (MoGEI & GPE, 2024). In the long-term, developing and implementing this policy would reduce system inefficiencies that currently prevent allocated salary funds from reaching teachers. |
| **GoSS, Donors & Private Sector** | Establish mobile banking system / digital banking platforms to facilitate teacher payments, while reducing losses related to corruption, theft, etc. along the multi-tiered and multi-touch point salary distribution system currently in place. |
| **Donors** | Help GoSS diversify revenue streams to avoid future disruptions to public sectors and civil servants, including education. |
| | Consider linking future funding to results-based frameworks that prioritize systems strengthening approaches, following the example of GPE's compact with MoGEI. |





Table 7: **Recommendations for pathways to sustainable compensation for teachers supported by education cluster partners**

| ***Teachers Paid by Education Cluster Partners*** | |
|---|---|
| ***Reckoning with the present*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **Education cluster partners, in collaboration with GoSS and donors** | Pay equitable and consistent wages across profiles, progressively increasing to a "living wage" to support teacher retention and motivation. |
| | Ensure salary harmonization across implementing partners in alignment with qualifications and years of experience (and in coordination with compensation levels offered by GoSS and UNHCR in refugee-hosting settings). |
| | Pay teachers monthly (not quarterly). |
| | Consistently monitor exchange rates and update teachers' incentive payments accordingly to ensure they receive the full amount owed amidst rapid currency fluctuation. Where possible, consider paying incentives in US dollars to account for SSP devaluation. |
| | Ensure timely distribution of circulars with updated payment rates to all implementing organizations to avoid payment delays. |
| | Provide hardship allowance for South Sudanese volunteer teachers deployed to work in remote areas (outside of their home counties). |
| **Teachers' Union** | Include all teacher profiles in advocacy efforts with GoSS, including South Sudanese volunteer teachers and refugee volunteer teachers, the latter of whom may remain in South Sudan amidst protracted crises in the region. |
| | Contribute to education sector planning among humanitarian and development actors in South Sudan. Explore opportunities to participate in Local Education Group (LEG). |
| **Donors** | Prioritize funding teacher compensation to ensure that teachers are adequately supported in their efforts to facilitate student learning and well-being, let alone implement new and innovative educational programming. |
| ***Looking towards the future*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **Donors, and implementing partners** | Increase funding for education cluster actors, and earmark funding specifically for teachers' incentives. |
| **NTTIs, in collaboration with MoGEI** | Establish alternative teacher certification pathways for volunteer teachers (both from South Sudan and other countries) with accumulated years of teaching experience.<br><br>Related recommendation: GoSS to create dedicated directorate within the MoGEI to oversee this process |
| **Education Cluster** | Align teacher data management with GoSS' efforts to develop an Education Management Information System (EMIS) to track key metrics (e.g. teacher profiles, attendance, payroll management, recruitment, placement, and retirement). |

Table 8: **Recommendations for pathways to sustainable compensation for teachers supported by UNHCR**

| ***Teachers Paid by UNHCR*** | |
|---|---|
| (Recommendations apply to both South Sudanese & refugee volunteer teachers unless otherwise noted) | |
| ***Reckoning with the present*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **UNHCR** | Pay equitable and consistent wages across profiles, progressively increasing to a "living wage" to support teacher retention and motivation. |
| | Ensure salary harmonization across implementing partners in alignment with qualifications and years of experience (and in coordination with compensation levels offered by GoSS and education cluster, as well as other humanitarian sectors). |
| | Support refugee teachers to equate their teaching qualifications (if available) in collaboration with the MoGEI. |
| **Donors** | Increase funding for refugee education actors, and earmark funding specifically for teachers' incentives. |
| | Provide support for UNHCR's funding gaps, recognizing that budget cuts (45% yearly) limit their ability to support teachers in refugee camp/settlement contexts. |
| **Donors & IPs** | Prioritize funding teacher compensation to ensure that teachers are adequately supported in their efforts to facilitate student learning and well-being, let alone implement new and innovative educational programming. |
| **Teachers' Union** | Include refugee teachers in advocacy efforts with GoSS, given that many may remain in South Sudan amidst protracted crises in the region and can contribute to teacher shortages. |
| ***Looking towards the future*** | |
| *Stakeholders* | |
| **UNHCR & IPs** | Create opportunities for salary increases based on years of experience. |
| **GoSS** | Re-engage qualified teachers in the government system once stabilized to ensure access to full benefits. |
| **Goss & UNHCR** | Develop Refugee Education Management Information System (REMIS) to track key metrics (e.g. teacher profiles, attendance, payment management, recruitment, placement, retirement). |
| **NTTIs, in collaboration with MoGEI** | Establish expedited / alternative / accelerated teacher certification pathways for refugee teachers with accumulated years of teaching experience.<br><br>Related recommendation: GoSS to create dedicated directorate within the MoGEI to oversee this process |





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# Appendix A: Detailed Methodology

This study combined data collected from literature and policies, key informant (KI) interviews, and teacher interviews in order to collect comprehensive data from a diverse range of education stakeholders on the adequacy, effectiveness, and sustainability of teacher payment systems in South Sudan. Data collection was carried out in three phases, with each phase informing the next:

- Phase 1: A comprehensive review of literature, policies, and programs related to teacher compensation in South Sudan.
- Phase 2: KI interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders engaged in the education sector in South Sudan.
- Phase 3: Interviews with government, volunteer teachers, and government school leaders in South Sudan.

This study was approved by the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission's (RRC) Ethics Review Committee and Teachers College, Columbia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB# 24-430).

## *Phase 1: Literature and landscape review on teacher management and compensation*

The research team compiled, reviewed, and analyzed literature in three primary categories: (1) global literature on the teaching profession, teachers' compensation, and education finance mechanisms; (2) literature on teaching and learning in emergency contexts; and (3) literature on the South Sudanese context, focusing specifically on the education sector and teachers' experiences. In total, our team thoroughly reviewed and analyzed 47 policies, frameworks, and advocacy reports at the international, regional, and national levels that focus on education and the refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) response. This analysis, along with the literature review, informed the KI and teacher interview protocols and provided insight into the contextual conditions in which the perspectives of KIs and teachers are situated (see Appendix B for a detailed overview of this process).

## *Phase 2: KI interviews*

### *Sampling and data collection*

Phase 2 included semi-structured KI interviews with a diverse range of education actors who are supporting teachers or the development of education policies and programming that are interrelated with teacher management and compensation in South Sudan.

The research team conducted 16 KI interviews, with 20 total participants, as some interviews included more than one member from the same organization. KI interviews engaged staff from the following types of organizations (see Appendix C for the full list of organizations that participated):

- 4 Donor agencies
- 3 Civil society organizations
- 3 International non-governmental organizations (INGOs)
- 3 United Nations (UN) agencies
- 2 Government offices
- 1 Non-governmental organization (NGO)





KI interviews were conducted using one of three arrangements:

1. A hybrid interview with an EAC researcher physically present at the KI's office (or alternate location) in Juba and 1-3 TC researchers online via Zoom
2. A fully virtually interview with both EAC and TC researchers online via Zoom
3. An in-person interview at the KI's office or an alternate location in Juba solely with an EAC researcher.

Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviewers asked participants to describe their organization's involvement in the education sector, particularly in relation to specific programs or projects that directly impact teachers. Participants were asked to share their perspectives on teacher compensation, its impact on the quality of education, and the key challenges arising in South Sudan. Additionally, participants were prompted to discuss their collaboration with other organizations working in the education sector in South Sudan to address teacher compensation challenges and to provide recommendations for sustainable strategies to improve teacher compensation systems, practices, and policies in the country.

We received consent from almost all of the KIs to record the interviews. For Zoom and hybrid interviews, the research team used Otter.ai to record interviews and facilitate the transcription process. The research team took detailed notes which were used to support verbatim transcriptions that were completed by the research team.

To protect the confidentiality of our KIs, their names and identifiable details are omitted from this report. However, in order to clearly demonstrate convergences and divergences in perspectives within the KI data, we use the organization type (e.g. NGO, INGO, UN organization, donors) when we reference data from a KI in the report.

### *Data analysis*

The research team engaged in four phases of data analysis. First, the research team completed verbatim transcriptions of 16 interviews, as one interview was not recorded. Second, each member of the research team engaged in a reflection process to document the emerging themes, tensions, and paradoxes that emerged in KI interviews. Through an iterative process, the team developed an open codebook that was refined into a closed codebook informed by researchers' notes and reflections, the study's objectives, scholarly and grey literature on teacher management and compensation, key policies in the region, and participants' perspectives. Third, each member of the research team was assigned 1-2 themes and coded the 15 interview transcriptions. Fourth, the research team wrote thematic memos outlining the key findings for each theme, highlighting the convergences and divergences in perspectives, practices, and recommendations related to teacher compensation among KIs.

### *Member checks*

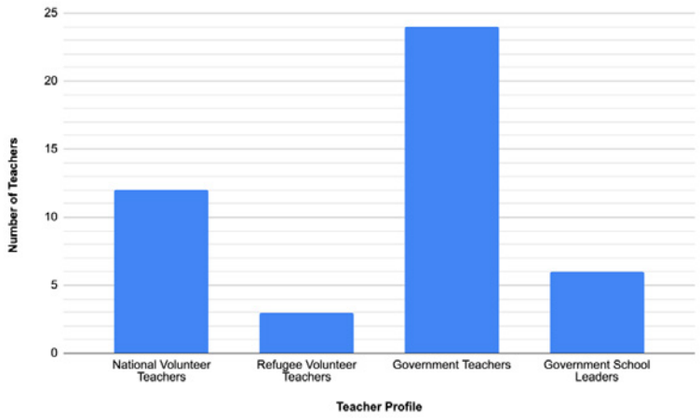
While engaging in data analysis, the research team identified key points and gaps that required further clarification from KIs. To ensure accuracy, the research team followed up with select KIs via email with additional questions and points for clarification. Additionally, we shared the draft report with KIs to obtain feedback on our interpretations of the findings and recommendations.

## *Phase 3: Teacher interviews*

### *Sampling and data collection*

To understand how challenges related to teacher compensation are directly affecting teachers in their day-to-day experiences, we conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers in five primary schools located across four different states: Central Equatoria State, Eastern Equatoria State, Lakes State, and Jonglei State. We used purposive sampling to identify a diverse population of teachers in terms of years of experience, gender (32 male,

Figure 6: **Teacher profiles included in study sample (n=45)**




13 female), qualifications, and profile. In total, we interviewed 45 teachers: 12 national volunteer teachers, 3 refugee volunteer teachers (including a deputy head teacher), 24 government teachers, and 6 government school leaders, which includes head teachers and deputy head teachers (see Figure 6 for a detailed overview of teacher profiles).

Teacher interviews were conducted by the EAC research team in-person at each school, lasting between 15 to 75 minutes. Teacher interviews discussed each teacher's background and experience, their current and past compensation, and the impact of compensation on their performance, motivation, well-being, and livelihood. Teachers also provided recommendations for improving compensation systems and policies in South Sudan.

We obtained written consent from teachers to record the interviews. To protect the confidentiality of teachers, their names and identifiable details are omitted from this report. When referencing individual teachers, we indicate their teaching profile (e.g. volunteer (national and refugee), government, or government school leaders). For teacher testimonials, we have used pseudonyms in place of their real names. This approach allows us to clearly illustrate how different teacher profiles are impacted by the challenges related to teacher compensation while protecting their privacy.

### *Data analysis*

The research team analyzed teacher data in three phases. First, the research team listened to each interview recording and created a detailed summary that captured salient data. Second, we partially transcribed teacher interviews to highlight teacher testimonials that capture the ways challenges related to teacher compensation impact their personal and professional lives. Third, we compiled and analyzed teacher data to identify patterns of consistency and inconsistency across teacher profiles, specifically in relation to teacher compensation.

## *Study limitations*

### *Study timeline*

Data collection took place over four months (June-September 2024), during a period of extreme economic instability in the country. This instability, driven by the depreciation of the local currency, high inflation rates, and foreign exchange rate volatility due to disruptions in oil production in Sudan caused by ongoing armed conflict (FEWS NET, 2024). This instability has resulted in school closures and teacher strikes in South Sudan due to approximately 11 months of unpaid teacher salaries (as of September 2024). Although the interview protocols were designed to explore both past and present teacher compensation systems, practices, and challenges, the ongoing economic crisis was inevitably at the forefront of discussions given its profound impact on the provision of quality education and the stability of the teaching profession in South Sudan.

### *Language barriers*

The majority of teacher interviews were conducted by South Sudanese members of our research team in English, with the exception of one interview conducted in Dinka. The researchers' multilingual skills did not always align with the teachers' preferred first language (not English), which may have been helpful for generating more detailed responses and reflections in some cases.

### *Teacher Sample*

This study's sample did not include any teachers who are paid incentives by Education Cluster partners. Volunteer teachers included in the sample reported being paid by PTAs, SMCs, schools, and UNHCR implementing partners. Thus, the perspectives captured in this study may not reflect those of teachers who are paid incentives by the Education Cluster.

### *Key Informant Sample*

We were unsuccessful in our multiple attempts to secure an interview or receive input from the MoGEI, limiting this study's insights on government perspectives regarding teacher compensation.

### *Government surveillance*

In one school, due to concerns that the interviews might incite further protests/activism on behalf of the teachers who had recently been striking, an EAC researcher was accompanied by an official from the SMoE while they were conducting teacher interviews. The presence of a government official may have influenced teachers' responses, potentially discouraging them from sharing candid insights on the professional and personal challenges they face due to irregular and insufficient pay, along with their reflections and recommendations for improving the sustainability and status of the teaching profession in South Sudan. Despite this potential influence, the research team did not find major differences overall when compared to teacher interviews that were not observed by a third party/state official.

### *Exclusion of private and faith-based schools, secondary schools, and accelerated learning programs*

The study focuses on the experiences of teachers in schools supported by the South Sudanese government, INGOs, NGOs, PTAs, and UNHCR. It does not include teachers from private or faith-based schools, contract teachers from other countries in the region (e.g. Kenya, Uganda), or those working in nomadic pastoralist communities. The study also focused on primary schools and did not include secondary school teachers or teachers implementing the accelerated learning program (ALP), given that South Sudan's basic formal education system is limited to primary school.

# Appendix B: Literature and policy review

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape in South Sudan, the research team conducted an extensive search using UN databases, ReliefWeb, and Google Scholar to identify global and regional policies related to topical areas such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and education. The research team carefully reviewed regional and global policies to which South Sudan is a signatory. Additionally, each policy was cross-referenced with existing policy analyses on teacher management in refugee settings across Kenya and Uganda to determine if these frameworks were applicable to South Sudan (Bengtsson et al., 2023; West et al., 2022).

For country-specific policies, the team reviewed four large institutional databases—UNHCR, OCHA, UNESCO, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)—to gather South Sudan's education sector plans, refugee and humanitarian response frameworks, and teacher related policies. The research team reviewed specific plans from the South Sudan's Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MoGEI) and cross-referenced them with searches on UN databases, ReliefWeb, and Google Scholar using keywords such as 'South Sudan,' 'policies,' 'education,' 'teachers,' 'refugees,' and IDPs.' Lastly, the team reviewed UN databases and press releases to identify resources related to teacher policy advocacy efforts in South Sudan. The most relevant, recently published peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature informed this study's interview protocols and data analysis.





# Appendix C: KI interviews

### *Civil Society Organizations*

1. National Education Coalition
2. National Teachers' Union South Sudan (NTUSS)
3. South Sudan Education Cluster

### *Donor Agencies*

1. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
2. Mission to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
3. The World Bank
4. European Union (EU)

### *Government Offices*

1. Jonglei State Ministry of General Education and Instruction
2. South Sudan Ministry of Finance and Planning (MoFP)

### *International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)*

1. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
2. Stromme Foundation
3. Windle Trust International

### *Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)*

1. Aid Link

### *United Nations (UN) Agencies*

1. United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF)
2. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
3. United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

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# Teacher Compensation in Crisis Contexts

## Problems & Paradoxes for Paying Teachers in South Sudan

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