



# Teacher Absenteeism in Papua and West Papua

Tina dan Mama membuat rencana.  
"Ayo Tina, kita memasak sebelum Bapak pulang!  
Stefan, ambil kue di rumah Tante Sini!" perintah  
Mama.

RESEARCH BRIEF  
JANUARY 2024





The content of the report does not necessarily reflect the policies or views of the Government of Indonesia or UNICEF.

Designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.

The copyright for this report is held by the United Nations Children's Fund.

For further information, please contact:

Anissa Elok Budiyan

United Nations Children's Fund

World Trade Centre 2, 22nd Floor

Jl. Jend. Sudirman Kav. 29-31

Jakarta 12920, Indonesia

Email: [aebudiyani@unicef.org](mailto:aebudiyani@unicef.org)

# Contents

## 4

Executive Summary

## 5

### Findings

School ..... 5

District ..... 6

National ..... 7

Gender, Disability, and  
Teacher Absenteeism ..... 8

The Political Economy  
of Absenteeism ..... 9

## 10

### Recommendations

National ..... 12

Districts, Provinces ..... 13

Principals, Schools, Communities ..... 14

Four Case Studies provide deeper  
insights into specific aspects of  
absenteeism ..... 17

### Figures

Figure 1: Our conceptual model for understanding absenteeism in context ..... 10

Figure 2: A conceptual model for addressing absenteeism holistically:  
Factors and conditions necessary to address teacher absenteeism ..... 18

**Research Partners**



**Australian Government**

**unicef**   
for every child

# Executive Summary

This research brief draws upon a qualitative research which took place in five primary schools in a coastal lowland district in West Papua province, and five primary schools in a highland district in Papua province, from July 2022 to January 2023. The research used a political economy and gender analysis to understand teacher absenteeism in national, district and school contexts, based on data collected from in depth interviews, focus group discussions as well as from a policy and literature review.

This research used the UNICEF 2012 Teacher Absenteeism Research and the Education Sector Analytical and Capacity Development Partnership's (ACDP) 2014 Teacher Absenteeism research as reference points.

The research was produced through a collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT), UNICEF and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).



# Findings



*"If the teachers do not come, the children will lose. The children are at a loss, because from home, they are tired of going to school, sometimes walking, there is no teacher, the spirit is broken. They come looking for knowledge. So, we have to set a good example for these children."*

- Male, Indigenous People's Association member



## SCHOOL

- **Teacher absenteeism persists**

In the schools visited, teachers were absent for a wide variety of reasons, including but not limited to, illness, lack of transport, poor weather, administrative reasons, caring responsibilities, lack of suitable accommodation near the school, attendance at traditional ceremonies, professional development and participation in other income generating activities. Some schools reported chronically absent teachers who had either not attended, or regularly missed large parts of the school day for continuous periods ranging from six months to three years.

- **Absenteeism in schools is managed where it occurs, by individual school principals, with individual teachers, in individual communities, each within their own village contexts.**

School principals use a range of strategies to manage teacher absenteeism. This includes reminders, warnings, reporting absent teachers to district officers, monitoring systems such as attendance books, and informal strategies in discussion with community members. Principals negotiate and address absenteeism often using informal personal and social skills as well as more formal procedures. Schools that effectively address absenteeism have active and engaged principals who are personally effective and have good relationships with the local community, village leadership and district office



## DISTRICT

- **The effectiveness of district offices to support and challenge schools, and the effectiveness of school principals to manage teacher absenteeism at the school level is at the heart of the solution to address the issue of absent teachers.**

A district's ability to monitor and support schools that most need assistance in tackling this issue is critical, but remoteness and a lack of human and financial resources make this challenging. In one of the districts, officers reported only a single school supervisor currently active, due to a lack of resources for travel, and long distances to remote schools to undertake supervisory duties. In the second district, the five schools reported reasonably frequent visits from school supervisors.



## NATIONAL

- **Policy changes since 2012 have effectively addressed some key drivers of absenteeism.**

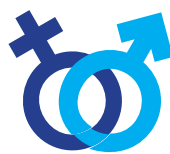
These include a relaxation of the requirement for a minimum number of teaching hours required to maintain teacher certification; a change to school operational funding (*Bantuan Operasional Sekolah - BOS*) formula, establishing a higher minimum payment to remote (often smaller, and more expensive to operate) schools; and more accurate targeting of special allowances for remote schools.

- **Rural and remote teacher initiatives have strengthened the system**

to address absenteeism in Papua and West Papua. The 'Frontier Teacher' (*Guru Garis Depan*) and 'Motivating Teacher' (*Guru Penggerak*) programmes were spoken of positively by respondents but coverage in Papua and West Papua is limited. The 'Emancipated Learning' (*Merdeka Belajar*) reform movement contains several elements that address school management, teaching quality, remote schooling and improved education system performance.

- **Provincial and district education policies on teacher absenteeism exist in various forms but are not implemented to their fullest extent.**

The policy framework for managing teacher absenteeism at the provincial, district, and local level is generally in place, however, the implementation of these policies remains challenging.



## **GENDER, DISABILITY AND TEACHER ABSENTEEISM**

- **The research was set within the broadly patriarchal Indonesian and Papuan cultures, where men hold decision making roles and control resources more frequently than women.**
- **Female principals in the schools visited, negotiated access to resources within their schools from largely male-led community councils**

Village funding can be a significant source of resource for schools, but access to this resource is often predicated upon a good working relationship between the village head and the school principal. Since village leaders are frequently male, female school principals are often at the mercy of a power dynamic where they are at a disadvantage.

- **Female teachers in the schools visited faced greater challenges than male teachers.**

Female teachers were disproportionately exposed to personal risk, particularly in highland schools, because of the lack of secure accommodation near the school, because of the distances required to travel, if not locally resident; and because of the risk of violence from local community members. Married, female teachers face community and cultural expectations to not be away from their husbands or young children.



- **A range of factors influence how school principals respond to absenteeism, with female principals more exposed to consequences and retaliation than male principals.**

This includes aspects of fear for personal safety; frustration that the system will not back up a threatened sanction; participation in low-level corruption; a principal's position as an insider/ outsider in the community; a principal's personal management style and problem-solving approach; disillusion that the sanction will not have any effect; gender relations between (largely male) superiors and (largely female) subordinates.

- **Female, indigenous teachers in remote rural areas with little existing education infrastructure, poor communications and weak to non-existent cash economies are in daunting situations.**

The historical context of violence, colonialism, forced displacement, and resource extraction in Papua and West Papua, create extremely challenging situations for young, indigenous, female teachers.

- **Disability-related factors were almost invisible in fieldwork data.**

Very few data points regarding schools, teachers, students, and disabilities emerged. Addressing the ways in which disability intersects with absenteeism requires raising the profile of disability significantly.



## THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TEACHER ABSENTEEISM

- **At the national level, teacher absenteeism takes place in the context of decentralisation and the historical political settlement between national and regional governments.**

Decentralisation gives space to district governments to enact their own education policies, such as honorary teacher recruitment, placement, and (the lack of) reward and punishment, not necessarily bound to central government policies.

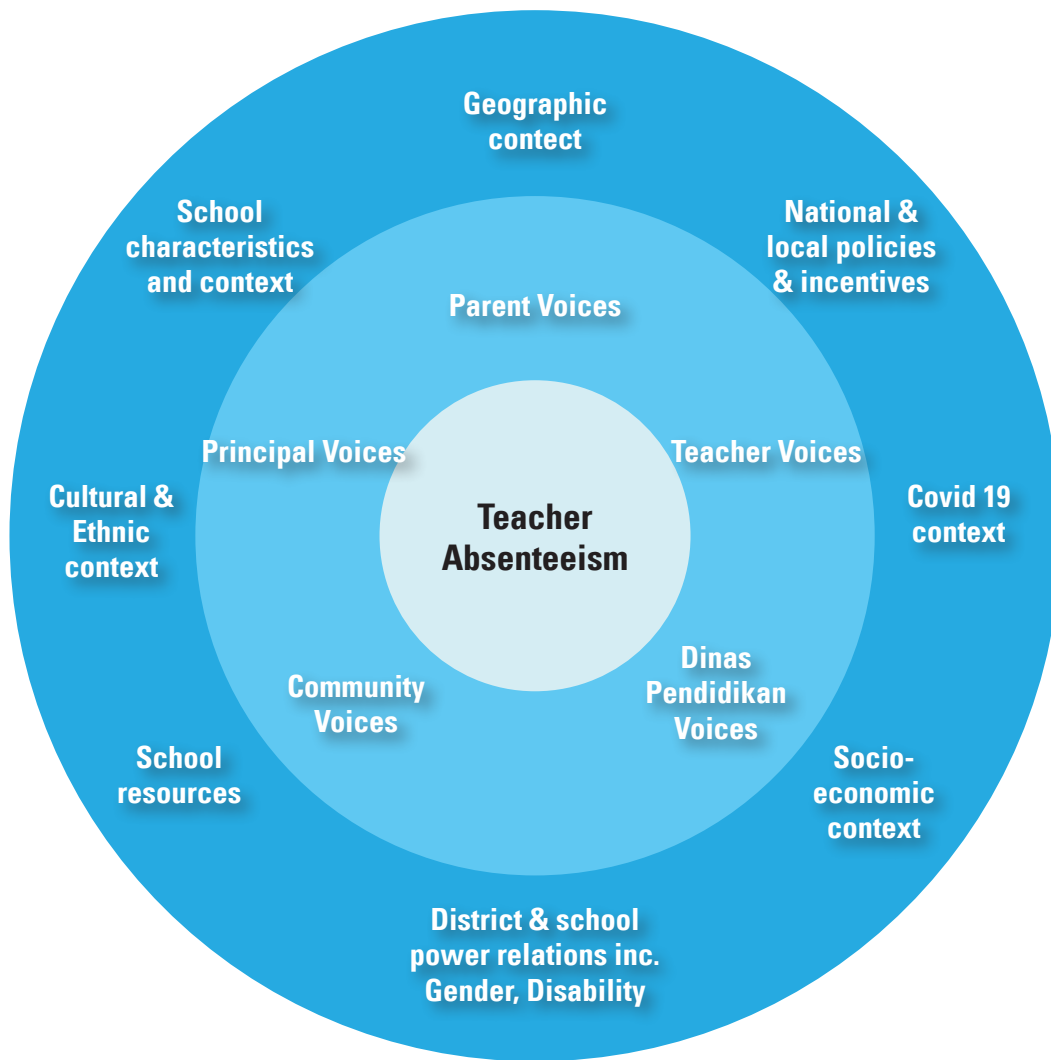
- **At the district level, geography and the effectiveness of district leadership play an important role in how teacher absenteeism is addressed.**

Effective district leadership or lack of it, was commonly cited by research participants as critical for addressing absenteeism, because of the significant control over resources that is afforded to Papuan and West Papuan districts, particularly in the context of special autonomy funding (Dana Otonomi Khusus - OTSUS).

### **Personal, community and tribal relationships matter in schools and with the district government, and influence access to school and village funding.**

School principals may be reluctant to report absent teachers to the district education office, due to personal relationships; and local communities 'protect' absent teachers when they are members of their tribe. Physical access to schools remains a challenge for many teachers, particularly those living in a different village or town. This often entails higher expenses to commute and security concerns, often linked to the use of alcohol.

Schools that can maintain a positive relationship with the local village communities can receive extra support from village funds and other in-kind assistance, such as accommodation and food.



**Figure 1: Our conceptual model for understanding absenteeism in context**



# Recommendations



*One problem is [...] that many teachers complain to me that they are lazy' to go to school because of the principal problem. They said that the principal is not transparent with BOS funds."*

**- Female, District Officer**

**There is no simple blanket solution for solving teacher absenteeism -it requires a holistic approach, resulting in the provision of an ecosystem of support for and amongst principals, teachers, and students - which is different at every school.**

Effectively addressing teacher absenteeism, requires not only consideration of the root causes of absenteeism and identifying solutions to get and keep teachers in schools, but also supporting and rewarding those teachers who are present in schools as they deal with the consequences of absent colleagues. Understanding why teachers who are present do attend may be another line of inquiry.

**Teacher absenteeism is best managed between a principal and their teachers at the school level, with the support of the local community, and with whatever support the district office can provide.**

Setting aside the importance of the national and provincial policy context, the reality on the ground is that school principals are best placed to deal with teacher absenteeism on a day-to-day basis. Notwithstanding chronically absent teachers, it is the principal who faces in-the-moment decisions, on each school day when a teacher does not arrive. This speaks to the importance of qualified and supported principals, who are equipped with the resources, problem-solving and negotiating skills to resolve the people-factor issues they face each day.



## NATIONAL

- **Address teacher recruitment and distribution at the national and district level.**

Teacher distribution and recruitment remains a key bottleneck in the supply of teachers to remote schools. Budget constraints notwithstanding, administrative changes such as creating a public system containing district and national school vacancies, may open the possibility of more remote schools being staffed, with sanctions for teachers who opt for remote schools only to leave post once in the system; and rewards for those who do stay, such as having priority when selecting future postings.

Possibilities also exist to create a 'second choice' mechanism during competitive hiring processes, so that candidates who miss out on their first choice, may opt for other schools. The limited time civil servant teacher (PPPK) system also offers an opportunity to filter the best candidates into permanent roles.

- **Promote 'Rapor Pendidikan' and 'ARKAS' as streamlined mechanism to address teacher absenteeism and performance in schools.**

Rapor Pendidikan and ARKAS are some of the technological solutions to facilitate Merdeka Belajar reform. Rapor Pendidikan showcases the schools' national assessment (Asesmen Nasional - AN) results in the form of key learning indicators along with root cause analysis, school planning, and improvement recommendations to principals that encourage data-driven decision-making for the following year's education planning.

ARKAS offers streamlined budgeting, planning, and reporting processes of the government's funds. It is best used together with SIPLah, a procurement platform that connects schools with nine different e-commerce partners to allow for a better reach and wider selection of products.

The link between teacher's competencies in Rapor Pendidikan (i.e. Dimension C: Teacher Competency and Performance) could provide direct incentive for schools and teachers to utilize government funds and procurement mechanism to address the absenteeism issue. In Papua provinces, the uptakes for data-driven school planning and the utilization of technological solutions may still be an issue. A harmonization of policies between national and sub-national government would be needed to support this.



## DISTRICTS, PROVINCES

- **Prepare (pre-service) or support (in-service) teachers with the necessary skills to teach literacy and numeracy to large, multigrade and multilingual classes.**

Absenteeism is a reality in almost every school, and when it happens, teachers are required to compensate for colleagues by juggling classes or increasing their own class sizes. Preparing teachers for these scenarios would allow teachers who are present, to navigate these scenarios proactively. teacher (PPPK) system also offers an opportunity to filter the best candidates into permanent roles.

- **Engage district leadership in advocacy for education and prioritising education budgets.**

District leadership matters immensely because of the access to discretionary budget resources that are available to them.

- **Prioritise the appointment of indigenous Papuan teachers in Papua and West Papua.**

Affirmation policies exist and have been used successfully to prioritise the appointment of indigenous teachers who live in the area of the school. At the same time, consider accountability mechanisms linked to communities, who may be able to use social pressure to address absenteeism if it happens.





## PRINCIPALS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES

- **Support students to attend school so that teachers have a reason to be present.**

This might include early childhood interventions, chaperoned school transport, or walking groups for girls to reduce gender-based violence, school meal programmes, community outreach to parents and local leadership, and the adaptation of the school calendar, in line with family agricultural practices and seasons.

- **Support female principals to engage constructively with village leadership.**

Village leadership can be a significant source of funding for school resources or teacher salaries and has the potential to become a strong political ally in the community and with parents. Negotiation and conflict resolution soft skills may provide female principals with strategies to further the cause of their school. At the same time, capacity building interventions must work with and consider the important role that village leadership can play in determining the quality of schools.

- **Understand that local political economies exist, and that gender, indigeneity, and personal relationships dictate how effective a principal can be.**

No 'one size fits all' approach to addressing absenteeism in Papua and West Papua exists. Absenteeism exists in a wide range of school and village specific contexts - and programme interventions must take this into account. Principals navigate and respond to absenteeism using personal strategies, influenced by their own personal relationships with parents and village members, and this is overlaid with tribal, cultural and gender identities that manifest in a variety of ways.

- **Strengthen accountability mechanisms.**

An important part of addressing teacher absenteeism relates to strengthening the accountability mechanisms that exists between teachers, communities, and districts. Strategies to increase accountability include the creation of performance contracts between communities and teachers; technology-enabled monitoring systems, such as fingerprint readers; school-based management techniques that increase information flows between parents and schools, or whistle-blower mechanisms to report corruption. Each strategy requires consideration of the specific location in which it might be used, and effectiveness will depend on the resources available and required to operationalise it, and the social and cultural context of the school.

- **Continue to support teachers with professional development and opportunities to share practice with colleagues.**

Teacher working groups (*Kefompok Kerja Guru* - KKGs) were frequently praised by respondents as contributing to their social and professional wellbeing. Communities of practice allow teachers to share concerns, techniques, and approaches to dealing with the consequences of colleagues being absent.



***Student Teacher (university student who would become teacher) who do not have the [strong teaching] ability when they are scheduled to teach will disappear, [...]but those who have the ability are more enthusiastic in teaching and active in school."***

**- Male, University Officer**









## Four Case Studies Provide Deeper Insights Into Specific Aspects of Teacher Absenteeism.

- **Teacher Absenteeism in Context**

District, community, church, principal, and teacher views of absenteeism in a single coastal lowland school illustrate the complex social and economic context in which absenteeism occurs.

- **Chronic Teacher Absenteeism**

Fieldwork data show several teachers in the schools surveyed having been continuously absent for months or years. Addressing this type of absenteeism often requires confronting community or political relationships, which principals may choose not to do.

- **Teacher absenteeism at religious foundation schools**

Religious foundation-operated schools are a significant part of education provision in Papua and West Papua. Foundation schools face specific challenges related to funding, accountability, and institutional politics as they try to address absenteeism.

- **Best practices to combat teacher absenteeism**

Best practices to manage absenteeism at the school, district and national level encountered during the research. These include strengthening accountability relationships and school-based options.



*'For highlanders, the most important thing is unity and cooperation. Personal approach is important. We welcome everybody, people. We have to know each other. It is important for teachers to build communication with the community. So when they have problems, we can help.'*

**- Village council member**

**Figure 2: A model for addressing teacher absenteeism holistically:  
Factors and conditions necessary to address teacher absenteeism**

	<b>Contextual Enabling Factors</b>
Students	Sufficient students who arrive at school, on time, able to learn
Teachers	Sufficient qualified teachers who arrive at school, on time, able to teach students according to their specific needs (language, level)
Teacher enabling factors	Regular and timely payment of liveable salaries, transport to or accommodation at the school building, reasonable working conditions, access to professional development necessary to meet basic competency levels and teachers' psycho-emotional-occupational needs.
Infrastructure and learning materials	Reasonable quality school building and learning materials appropriate to students needs
Principals	Competent school principals who can support and manage teachers and learning successfully, identify school needs and communicate them to districts, engage constructively with parents and community
Community	Informed and engaged parents and community leadership which supports the school, believes in the importance of education
Community and district enabling Factors	Working short and long accountability relationships between parents, schools, communities, and districts; a reasonable absence of corruption and rent-seeking
District (and sub-district) Education Office	Effective district office which can identify, prioritise, and deliver resources to schools, quality assure, be present and support schools, especially those which need it most Effective monitoring of teacher performance and application of sanctions
District enabling factors	Effective system for and facilitation of upward (from schools) and downward (from National/Provincial) information flow Engaged district leadership with an interest and vision for education
National	Coherent national and provincial laws/standards that state standards/requirements/obligations A national system that can identify and deliver the necessary resources (teachers, school funding, materials)





United Nations Children's Fund  
World Trade Centre 2, 22nd Floor  
Jl. Jend. Sudirman Kav. 29-31  
Jakarta 12920, Indonesia  
Tel.: +62 21 5091 6100  
Email: [jakarta@unicef.org](mailto:jakarta@unicef.org)  
Website: [www.unicef.or.id](http://www.unicef.or.id)