

Organising within Privatised Education

Survey Results



Introduction

Over the past two decades, policies that involve some form of education privatisation, such as contracting out services, vouchers, or charter schools have acquired more centrality in education globally.

The phenomenon of privatisation has generated a lot of interest amongst researchers who are looking at the effects of privatisation policies in terms of students' achievements, school access, or educational inequalities.

The privatisation phenomenon has also generated a lot of interest among teachers - and teachers' unions in particular – because it generates the

intensification and casualisation of teachers' labour and undermines equal access to quality free public education¹.

Nevertheless, many questions remain about the extent to which particular privatisation policies are spreading globally, in which type of contexts privatisation is manifesting more in-depth, and the particular responses and strategies of teachers and teachers' organisations to these policies. Specifically, the main objectives of the survey, whose results are presented in this document, were to:

1. *Map the scope and scale of the ongoing processes of privatisation in education systems internationally.*
2. *Analyse how privatisation affects teachers and teachers' unions.*
3. *Explore the level and the nature of the responsiveness of teachers' unions to privatisation trends.*

The survey was responded to by a sample of 40 teachers' unions' representatives from both the South (51 per cent of the total) and the North (49 per cent), and by unions that only represent teachers in the public sector (28.1 per cent) and in both the public and the private sector (71.9 per cent) (see Appendix 1). It has been designed and implemented by Education International (EI) throughout 2013 and

its main results have been systematised and analysed by the Globalisation Education and Social Policies (GEPS) research centre. This document focuses on three main aspects of the main results:

- a. *General privatisation trends;*
- b. *effects of privatisation on educators and education unions; and*
- c. *responses from unions to privatisation.*²

¹ See for instance UNESCO (2009), EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009.

Overcoming inequality: why governance matters. Paris: UNESCO; Waslander, S., C. Pater and M. Weide (2010).

Markets in education: an analytical review of empirical research on market mechanisms in education.

OECD Education Working Paper 52: 1-92.

² The GEPS members who participated in the analysis and briefing of the survey results are Clara Fontdevila, Adrián Zancajo, and Antoni Verger.

Trends

Education privatisation is expanding around the world under a range of different policies and programmes. Among them, the creation of new private schools and the outsourcing of the management of public schools to private providers stand out. *Figure 1* shows the perception of teacher unions (TUs) about the expansion of

both types of private schools (totally private and privately managed schools). Approximately two in three TUs affirm that, in the last five years, private schools have expanded in their territories (71 per cent), whereas the situation has remained the same for the remaining 29 per cent.

Figure 1 Has there been a particular expansion of private schools or state schools managed by private providers in the last five years?

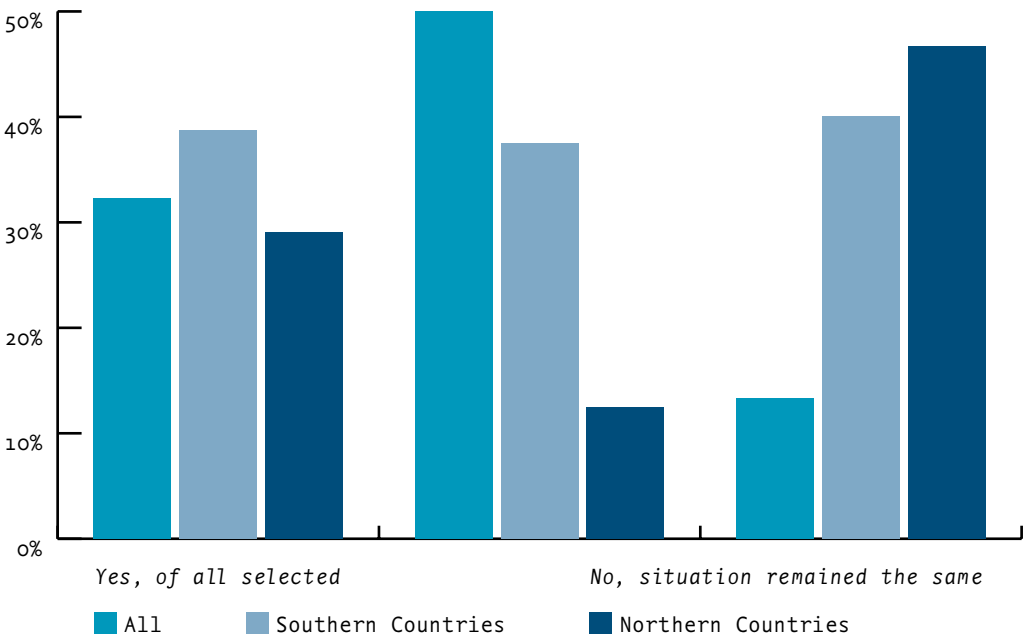


Figure 1 also shows that the expansion of privately managed schools is greater in Southern than in Northern countries.

According to 87.5 per cent of the TUs located in Southern contexts, private schools have expanded in their countries (or in certain areas

of their countries). This compares to 53.3 per cent, 34 points less, in Northern countries. This difference may be related to the growing phenomenon of the so-called low-fee private schools, which, according to several authors, is growing particularly in low-income countries, where governments are usually economically and administratively constrained in facing directly the increasing education demand.³

Independently of these differences between Southern and Northern countries, the data presented evidence of an expansion of education privatisation policies globally. Nevertheless, for TUS, what are the main factors that explain this changing situation in their countries? *Table 1* lists the main factors that, according to TUS, explain the expansion of privatisation in education in their own territories.

Table 1 Factors that have contributed to the expansion of education privatisation

	All (%)	Southern countries (%)	Northern countries (%)
Perceived failing public education system	63.6	76.5	50
Systemic underfunding of public education	54.5	64.7	43.8
Profit-seeking entrepreneurship	54.5	70.6	37.5
Perception that private schools will be more autonomous	36.4	17.6	56.2
Privatisation of other public services	30.3	29.4	31.2
Political will to undermine teacher unions	27.3	17.6	37.5
Demand for religious segregated schools	24.2	17.6	31.2
Demand for education in minority languages/culture	18.2	11.8	25

³ Srivastava, P. (2013). *Low-fee Private Schooling. Aggravating Equity or Mitigating Disadvantage?* London: Symposium.

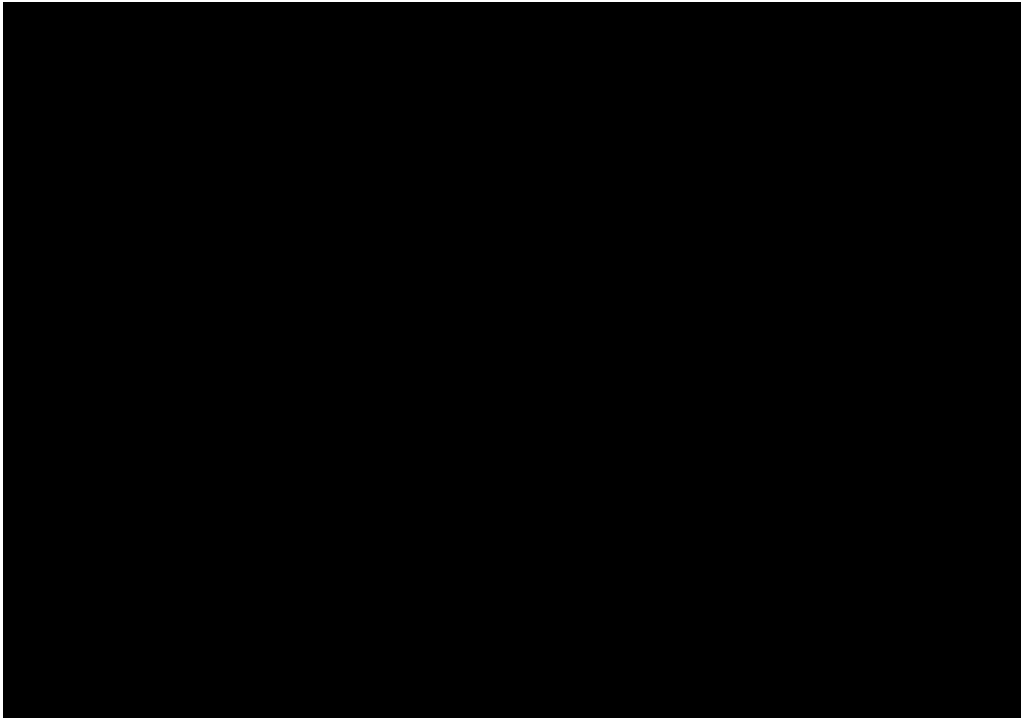
	All (%)	Southern countries (%)	Northern countries (%)
Demand for socioeconomically segregated schools	15.2	17.6	12.5
Demand for safety and security	15.2	23.5	6.2
Closure of public (state) schools	15.2	0	25
Pressure by donors/International Financial Institutions	6.1	11.8	0
Demand for schools segregated by gender	3	0	6.2

TUS identify three main groups of reasons that explain why education privatisation is expanding. The first one corresponds to reasons that relate to the characteristics of the public sector. They include the perceived failure of the public education system (63.6 per cent), the systemic underfunding of public education (54.5 per cent), and the privatisation of other public services (30.3 per cent). The second group of reasons relates to aspects of the private sector involvement in education. Here, the for-profit motivations behind the establishment of private schools (54.5 per cent) and the perception that private schools are more autonomous (36.4 per cent) stand out. Finally, the third type of reasons is related to demand-side motivations; they include pressures for segregated schools based on religion (24.2 per cent), linguistic or cultural diversity (18.2 per cent), or socioeconomic differentiation (15.2 per cent). In terms of the factors that explain education privatisation, there are also important differences between Southern and Northern countries. For example, the perceived failure of public education, profit-seeking entrepreneurship, or systemic underfunding of public education are significantly more important in

Southern than in Northern countries. In contrast, the political will to undermine TUS, the perception that private schools will be more autonomous, or the demand for religious segregated schools are more frequent privatisation drivers in Northern countries, according to TUS. This shows that 'material' or 'economic' factors – which inevitably affect the quality of public education – are more important drivers of privatisation in the South, whereas factors of a more political and educational nature seem to play a bigger role in the privatisation trends in the North.

Finally, TUS were asked why they thought their governments were embracing education privatisation measures. *Figure 2* reflects their responses and shows important differences between the reasons articulated by governments in the North and in the South. According to TUS, the reasons enunciated by Southern governments are more pragmatic in nature; they include improve access to education (52.9 per cent) or budgetary limitations (52.9 per cent). In the Northern countries, the reasons seem to be more ideological, including the promotion of school choice (68.8 per cent), competition (50 per cent) or efficiency (50 per cent).

Figure 2 Reasons stated by government(s) for promoting private provision of education, according to TUS



Effects

Most TUS (76.7 per cent of the survey respondents) consider that privatisation has a negative effect on their education system. Only 3.3 per cent consider that effect to be positive. However, what are the specific types of effects privatisation is having on schools' dynamics and on educators' work?

Table 2 specifies the main effects attributed to the privatisation policies that have been implemented in the different countries of the surveyed TUS. It shows that the most frequently adopted policies affecting public schools have been:

- a. *the introduction of standardised testing (42.4 per cent of the respondents pointed to the presence of this policy change);*
- b. *increasing competition between schools to recruit students (33.3 per cent);*
- c. *a decrease of professional development measures for teachers (33.3 per cent); and*
- d. *introduction of teacher evaluation mechanisms that are tied to students' learning outcomes (27.3 per cent).*

Some of these measures have also affected the private schools sector, with the most referred implications being those related to teachers' labour conditions, including:

- a. *individualised employment contracts (39.4 per cent);*
- b. *an increase in the teachers' working time (36.4 per cent);*
- c. *alterations in teachers' pay and other working conditions (36.4 per cent)*

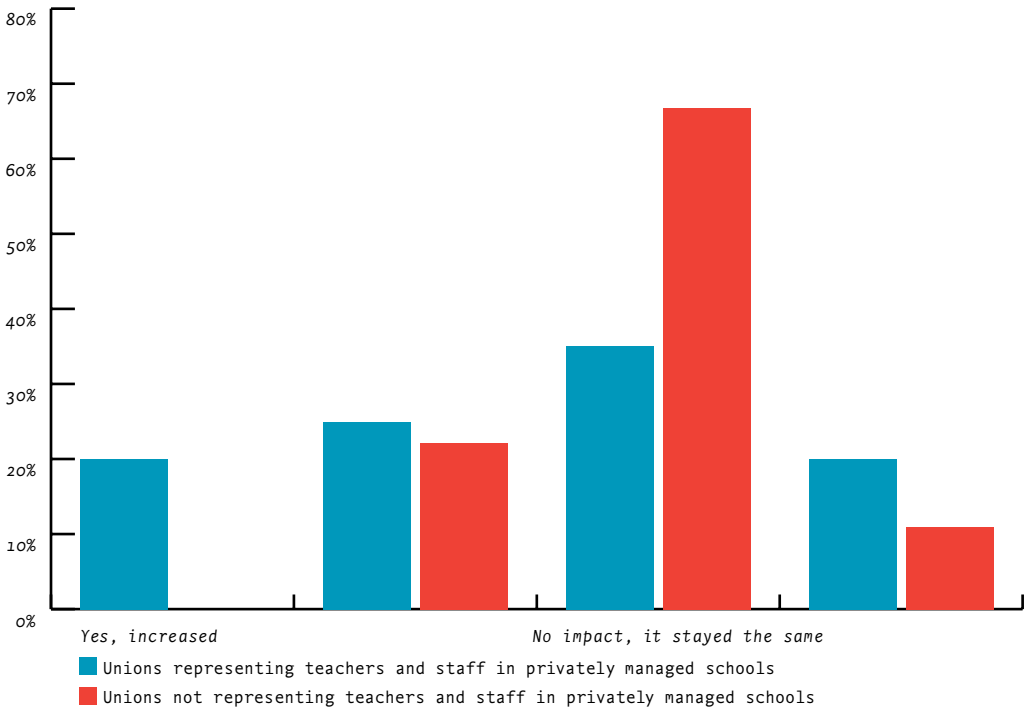
Table 2 Privatisation effects in public and private schools

	Public schools (%)	Private schools (%)
Standardised student testing as the measure of accountability for schools	42.4	36.4
Competition between schools for students	33.3	54.5
Reduction of professional development for teachers	33.3	24.2
Teacher evaluation tied to student test scores	27.3	24.2
Increased school choice options	24.2	42.4
Teacher salary or other incentives tied to student test scores	21.2	24.2
Closure of “underperforming” schools	21.2	15.2
Introduction of league tables	18.2	18.2
Removal of the requirement to employ qualified teachers	18.2	18.2
Increases to the length of the school day	18.2	24.2
Increases of teacher working time	15.2	36.4
Restrictions of collective bargaining for teachers and school staff	15.2	30.3
A narrower school curriculum	12.1	12.1
Increases to length of the school year	12.1	15.2
Ability to vary nationally agreed teacher pay and conditions	9.1	36.4
Copyrighting of school resources including teachers’ lesson plans	6.1	15.2
Individual employment contracts for teachers and school staff	6.1	39.4

Somehow, paradoxically, some TUS would 'benefit' from privatisation trends. This is the case for the 20 per cent of unions representing teachers in private schools that consider that the presence of privately managed schools has contributed to an increase in the number of affiliates (see *Figure 3*). However, it should be noted that a slightly higher percentage of TUS (including both those with members in the

private sector and those with members exclusively in the public sector) declare that the effect has been the opposite, with a decrease in their membership due to the increased presence of private schools. Nevertheless, most unions say that they have not perceived any impact in their affiliation because of the education privatisation trends.

Figure 3 Effects of privately managed schools on unions' membership



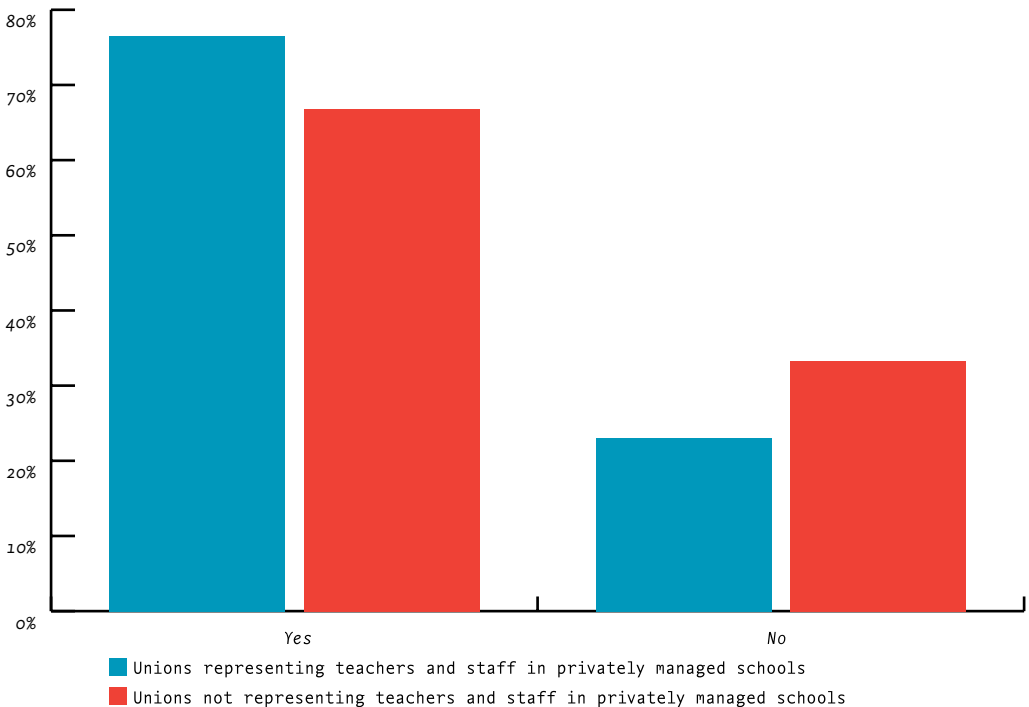
Responses

When asked about whether they have taken any action to oppose privatisation, a majority of TUS responded affirmatively (73.1 per cent) whereas only 26.9 per cent said they have not reacted to this trend. There are also differences between unions that have affiliates in the private sector and those that have not.

As *Figure 4* shows, critical reactions to privatisation policies are more frequent in the context of unions with affiliates in the private sector (76.5 per cent) than in the context of unions that do not represent teachers or staff

in private schools, with 66.7 per cent of them (10 points less) opposing privatisation. This difference may be due to the fact that privatisation trends are less present in the countries of those unions with an exclusive presence in the public sector. Furthermore, the fact that, in private schools, privatisation trends have more direct effects on teachers' working conditions (see *Table 2*) would also partially explain why unions with representatives in the private sector react more decisively.

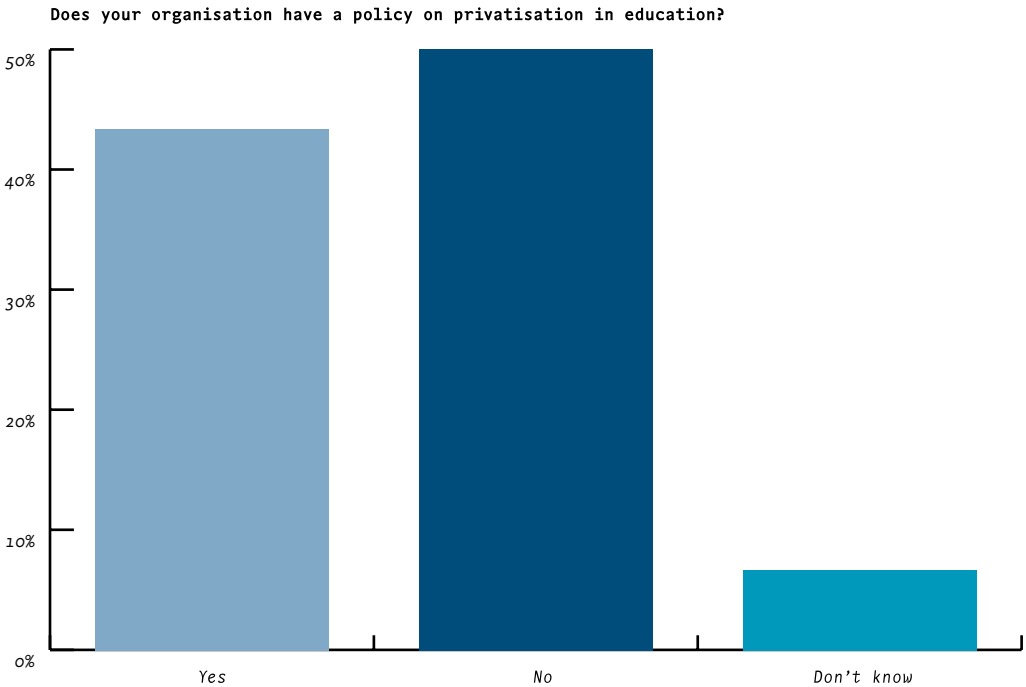
Figure 4 TUS' reaction to privatisation policies



Nevertheless, despite the surveyed TUS' critical reading of privatisation's effects in their educational system, and a majority of them affirm they have reacted against privatisation, only slightly over 40 per cent of the surveyed organisations have a proper policy dealing with privatisation in education (see *Figure 5*). This suggests that a variety of factors could have hindered the establishment of an explicit

and coherent strategy on the theme – which could range from the relative novelty of the phenomenon to the difficulty in establishing long-term policies in parallel to the management of more urgent issues. In fact, it is well known that, in face of unexpected changes due to privatisation, it takes unions some time to reorganise and adopt new and adjusted strategies rather than reactive action (Poole, 2001).

Figure 5 TUS' policy on education privatisation



Regarding the specific strategies employed by unions in relation to privatisation, there are some commonalities between Northern and Southern countries. *Figure 6* below shows that the organisation of teachers and other staff in individual privately managed schools is the most frequently employed strategy in both groups of countries (81.7 per cent of

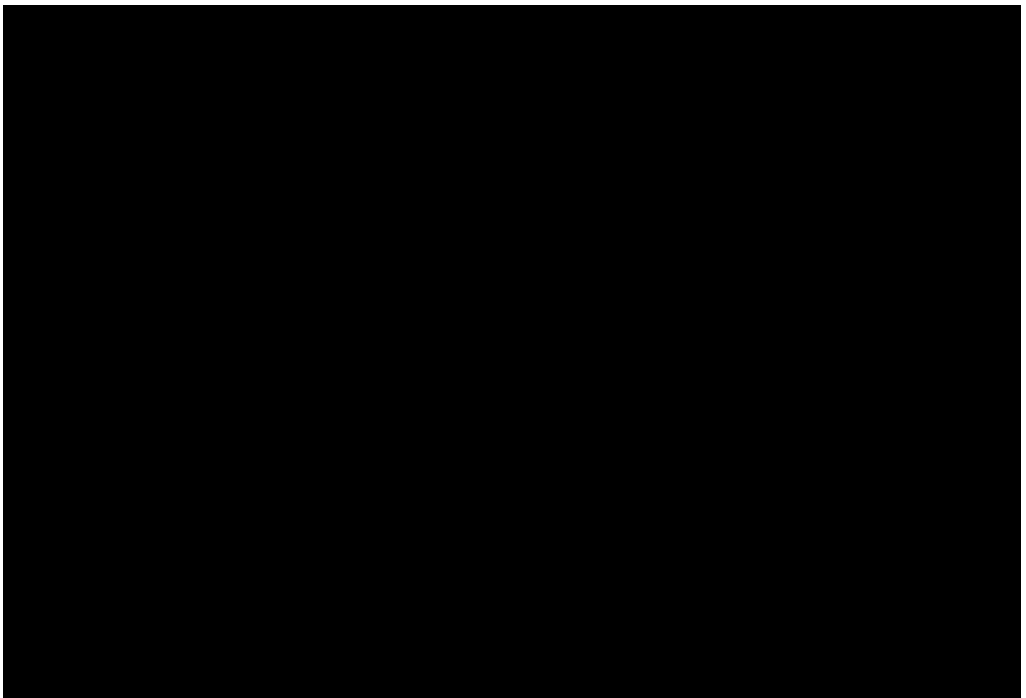
TUS in Northern countries and 58.8 per cent in Southern countries, averaging at 69.7 per cent). This points to an adaptive strategy by TUS, aimed at re-orienting their collective action in a changing scenario in which the private sector expands. In both the North and the South, advocacy efforts for policy change and the building of

coalitions with community and parent organisations are respectively the second and third most commonly employed strategies. This suggests that an involvement in education policy is generally sought by most of the unions, and that collaborative or non-confrontational means (e.g. advocacy efforts oriented to change, in contrast to opposing coalitions or legal actions) of facing privatisation tend to be privileged.

However, TUS in the North and South respond differently. Less than half of the TUS in Southern countries carry out advocacy efforts, compared to an overall average of 70 per cent of the surveyed unions. This shows how the role of TUS as relevant political interlocutors varies in different contexts; it could also indicate that there is more room for political negotiation

and dialogue in Northern countries. Strategic alliances with civil society are also used differently: building coalitions with community parent organisations is far more common in Northern than in Southern countries (with such strategy adopted by 56.2 per cent and 35.3 per cent of TUS respectively). Nevertheless, the most outstanding difference lies in the use of legal action to challenge private providers, a tool that appears to be rather restricted to those unions located in Northern countries, with the proportion of surveyed unions resorting to this action being nearly as twice the average in Southern countries. Again, this could indicate that the reliance on political institutions and on the judiciary in particular is lower in Southern contexts.

Figure 5 TUS' policy on education privatisation



Summary of the main results

According to teachers' unions, in the last five years, there has been a considerable expansion of private schools and privately managed schools in their countries. Such an expansion is perceived as greater in Southern countries than in Northern ones.

TUS affirm that the systemic underfunding of public education and its socially perceived failure explain to a great extent the advance of privatisation, especially in Southern countries. Nevertheless, the reasons put forward by governments to support privatisation are seen as more pragmatic in the case of Southern countries (improve access or budgetary limitations), and more ideological (choice, competition, or efficiency) in the case of Northern countries.

In relation to its effects, privatisation is seen as significantly altering the management of schools and impacting key aspects of the teaching-learning process (introduction of standardised evaluations, competition, less resources allocated to professional development). It also alters drastically teachers' working conditions and undermines teachers' professionalism, especially in the growing private sector. In fact, intensive exploitation of teachers' labour is an important element in understanding the current growth education privatisation.

Privatisation is also altering the unions' membership. For one in five TUS, the presence of privately managed schools has reduced their

membership. At the same time, however, 20 per cent of the TUS that represent members in privately managed schools have increased their membership in parallel with the education privatisation process.

Privatisation policies have generated high levels of opposition among unions' members (79.3 per cent), and the majority of unions have developed actions to oppose these policies (73.1 per cent). Organising teachers and staff in privately managed schools (69.7 per cent) and advocacy efforts (57.6 per cent) are the two main strategies employed in the face of the privatisation of education. However, only 40 per cent of the TUS admit to having a specific and consistent policy on privatisation in education.

Paradoxically, unions from Southern countries, with higher levels of privatisation expansion in the last few years, respond less frequently to privatisation policies than unions from the North. Nevertheless, and in view of the unions' general awareness of the negative impact of privatisation trends, there are reasons to consider that, in the medium term, more and more unions, both from the North and the South, will engage further and position themselves in the education privatisation global debate and, accordingly, will develop more consistent policies and strategies.

Appendix 1 Countries of the TUS that participated in the survey

Northern countries: Australia, Canada,
Denmark, France, Ireland, New Zealand,
Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden,
United Kingdom, and United States

Southern Countries: Algeria, Argentina,
Barbados, Brazil, Cameroun, Jamaica,
Hungary, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Philippines,
Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia,
and Zimbabwe



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