

# The key role of Youth and Adult Education in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

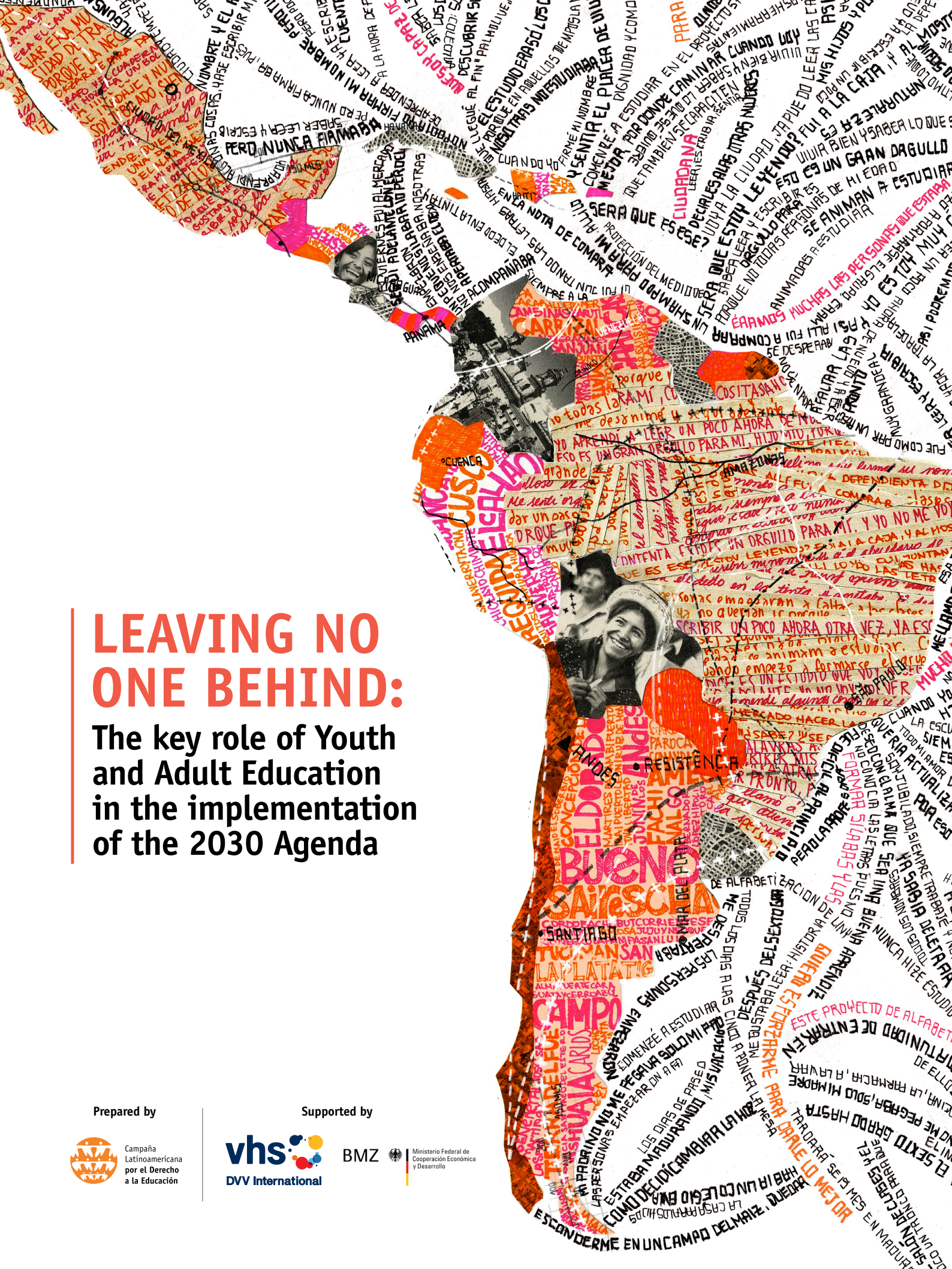


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# LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND:

## The key role of Youth and Adult Education in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda



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*The Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education would like to underscore the structural, facilitating and critical role of youth and adult education in the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

The Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE, by its Spanish acronym) in partnership with other networks and civil society organizations, has been engaged, for years, in a sustained advocacy process, reasserting the commitment and importance of strengthening the right to youth and adult education (YAE) at national, regional and international level. This document precisely sets forth the importance and the impact of a consolidated YAE, with allocated budget and policies, for the promotion of other human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the full implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the same time, this document highlights our special commitment towards SDG4: *“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”*

## A. CURRENT SCENARIO

Three years have passed since the approval of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (2015) and more than eight years since the adoption of the Belem Framework for Action (2009), a key outcome of CONFINTEA VI, and in the regional context there are clear challenges in terms of human rights, including YAE, and an urgent need to move forward in the consolidation of this right which, if realized, would strengthen the rest of the political, civil, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights.

Currently, there are 758 million illiterate adults worldwide (115 million of them are between 15 and 24 years of age), two-thirds of whom are women<sup>1</sup>. The latter has been recently confirmed by the UN Human Rights Council<sup>2</sup> alerting that women are highly represented among illiterate adults due to different forms of discrimination, among other things, as well as gender stereotypes, patriarchal social norms and for economic reasons when education is not free. At global level, literacy rates among young people and adults have increased an estimated 4% between 2000 and 2015 (UIS, UNESCO).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, 36 million young people and adults, aged 15 or over, are considered illiterate (UIS UNESCO, 2010 data), representing 9% of the population in this age range. The regional average has shown little variance during the past years, indicating that, still, there hasn't been enough progress. If we consider functional illiteracy as the lack of skills and competence that individuals require to cope with different situations in daily life, this figure would increase remarkably.

The commitment made to implement the SDGs, particularly SDG4, becomes an opportunity to settle the historical debt with populations deprived from their most basic rights, ensuring their full right to learn as adults.

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1 UNESCO. Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III, 2016)

2 A/HRC/38/L.13, Resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on the Right to Education (2018): [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/S/HRC/d\\_res\\_dec/A\\_HRC\\_38\\_L13.pdf](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/S/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_38_L13.pdf)

Furthermore, fulfilling the promise to “leave no one behind” made by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, implies recognizing the importance of YAE not only as a human right in itself but also for the achievement of all goals and interrelated targets.

We must acknowledge that education is the thread that runs through the implementation of all 17 SDGs, that the world map of illiteracy coincides with maps of poverty, malnutrition, ill health, and high infant and child mortality and that education and lifelong learning are the prerequisites for poverty reduction, gainful employment and decent jobs, while are also crucial for sustainable growth, to build social cohesion, achieve prosperity, and promote human rights and equality (Popovic, 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

## B. YAE AS PROMOTER OF OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS

The interrelation, interaction and interdependency between the right to education of young people and adults, and progress in the realization of all human rights, have been extensively recognized.

The **Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education**<sup>4</sup> underscores the contribution of YAE to the development of democratic values, pacific coexistence and community solidarity, the promotion of sustainable development and more just societies, with more active and informed citizens. Likewise, the report acknowledges that YAE is linked to better jobs and access to labor market, apart from making fundamental contributions in the face of challenges concerning migrations, inequality, environmental sustainability and technological changes.

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<sup>3</sup> Popovic, Katarina, Presentation within the framework of the HLPF meeting held from July 9 to 18, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO. Third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III, 2016) This report is based on the monitoring surveys completed by 139 UNESCO Member States on the global situation of adult learning and education. It analyzes the progress of countries concerning the fulfillment of the commitments made.

At the same time, it stresses the special contribution of adult learning and education in the fight against poverty and environmental degradation, leading to changes in environmental behaviors. It also puts under the spotlight, factors related to the improvement of living standards, with an impact on resilience, but also related to transformations that promote tolerance and value diversity, individuals more concerned about issues related to sustainability and more aware of arts, ethics and cultural heritage.

In the field of health, the impact is clear and significant, revealing how education contributes to the prevention of problems and the adoption of healthier lifestyles, behaviors and mindsets, contributing to the general well-being and resulting in the reduction of diseases derived from lifestyles. Furthermore, concrete impacts are underscored such as “fighting against advertisements of food that is harmful to human health, and against hazardous environmental pollution.” It also stresses the potential effect of promoting maternal breastfeeding and infant nutrition in the reduction of child mortality.

The above clearly reveals the interrelation and significance of YAE for the achievement of the goals related to the fight against poverty and hunger, food and nutrition issues, sustainable agriculture, healthy lifestyles and well-being of all age groups (SDGs 1, 2, 3), its contribution to all the goals related to different dimensions of sustainability (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15), employment (SDG 8) and, in particular, with the goals linked to the reduction of inequality and the promotion of more pacific and inclusive societies as well as the access to justice (SDG 10 and 16).

Finally, the transformative role of YAE and its contribution to the achievement of gender equality must be fully recognized. The achievement of the SDG<sup>5</sup> and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women depends on this, particularly considering its potential to enable the empowerment and autonomy of women in all their diversity, especially rural, indigenous, disabled, Afro-descendant and migrant women, as well as LGBTI people.

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5 SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

## C. THE JOURNEY TO REINFORCE YAE AS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT AND AS A PROMOTER OF OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS

The **International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA I to VI)** and their mid-term reviews represented unparalleled opportunities to give visibility and to strengthen the YAE agenda, and to clearly show its importance for the realization of all human rights, and, most recently, for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The **Belem Framework for Action (2009)** adopted in last CONFINTEA, for example, recognizes that adult learning and education is not only an essential component of the right to education that is necessary to ensure a viable future, but also a key resource to tackle multiple social, economic and political crisis, and climate change. It is also essential for the achievement of equity and inclusion, to alleviate poverty and to build equitable, tolerant, sustainable societies, based on knowledge. It is vital for emancipation and personal, economic, political and social autonomy.

At the same time, the “**Declaration of Suwon-Osan on the Mid-term Review of CONFINTEA VI: The Power of Adult Learning: Vision 2030**”<sup>6</sup> (2017), recognizes lifelong learning and education as a fundamental right and a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights, as well as a public good and the state as its main guarantor. It also reconfirms the relevance of YAE within the framework of **2030 Agenda**<sup>7</sup> for the achievement of 17 SDGs, indicating that “**education and lifelong learning (LLL) lies at the heart of the SDGs**”, and stressing its structural, facilitating and critical role in promoting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as a whole, and underscoring, at the same time, the special commitment towards SDG4: “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*”

<sup>6</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002612/261223S.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/la-agenda-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>

Likewise, the **UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE, 2015)**<sup>8</sup> ratifies that the main objective of ALE is to equip people with the necessary capabilities to exercise and realize their rights, to promote personal and professional development, to encourage a more active participation, to foster inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work prospects, to alleviate poverty, improve health and well-being, and to contribute to building sustainable learning societies.

The recommendation sets forth the explicit objectives that aim at the intersectorality of ALE: to develop the capacity of individuals to think critically and to act with autonomy and a sense of responsibility; to reinforce the capacity to deal with and shape the developments taking place in the economy and the world of work; to contribute to the creation of a learning society where every individual has an opportunity to learn and fully participate in sustainable development processes and to enhance solidarity among people and communities; to promote peaceful coexistence and human rights; to foster resilience in young and older adults; and to enhance public awareness for the protection of the environment.

Finally, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, this commitment is reasserted in SDG4: *“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”*, considering several targets of SDG4 are directly linked to youth and adult learning and education, as seen below.

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<sup>8</sup> Approved at the 38th. UNESCO General Conference (2015):  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002451/245119M.pdf#page=24>



- Target 4.3** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.
- Target 4.4** By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- Target 4.5** By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- Target 4.6** By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.
- Target 4.7** By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

## D. OPPORTUNITIES TO REINFORCE YAE AS A RIGHT

The current context poses the urgent need to recognize the existence of pending challenges, but also the existence of a favorable scenario to give new impetus to the right to education of young people and adults, from an intersectoral perspective, proving the power of YAE to promote the rest of the human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In this sense, the **II Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean: “Transforming education: a joint response of Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve SDG4-E2030”**, represented an opportunity to reaffirm international commitments in terms of YAE and to set forth a roadmap for their implementation and follow-up, in full compliance with the 2030 Agenda in the region.

The UNESCO **Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE)**, to be launched in 2019, apart from measuring progress in the development of adult education in Member States, intends to especially address the way in which the concept of “participation” in education and learning has been developed within the framework of the Education 2030 Agenda. This report will assess the way in which states have implemented the 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE). There is an ongoing process of collection and systematization of data for this report and this represents another important opportunity to reaffirm the right to youth and adult education. This also lies within the framework of compliance with the agreements reached in CONFINTEA VI and the upcoming process towards **CONFINTEA VII (2021)** whereby states will report on progress in the realization of this right and the contribution of youth and adult education to the sustainable development agenda.

Other opportunities to further strengthen youth and adult education as part of the Education 2030 Framework for Action and, more broadly, the 2030 SDG Agenda, are the **Global Education Meeting 2018 (GEM)**<sup>9</sup> in December 2018, and the July 2019 **High Level Political Forum**<sup>10</sup> that will focus on the empowerment of individuals and the achievement of inclusion and equality, and will carry out a thorough review of SDG4 and SDG8 (Decent Work), SDG10 (Inequality), SDG13 (Climate Change) and SDG16 (Peace).

At the same time, this scenario of opportunities must be accompanied by a higher level of commitment from **international aid and cooperation** towards the strengthening of youth and adult education itself as well as its interplay and fundamental role for the achievement of all SDGs, overcoming the current lack of priority. Even though international aid for education has been showing some encouraging figures since 2016, priority is still given to education for children and adolescents. For example, the 2020 Strategic Plan of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) does not make reference to youth and adult education, while other cooperation agencies are gradually withdrawing the support given to this modality of education.

<sup>9</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/events/global-education-meeting-gem-2018>

<sup>10</sup> The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is a United Nations intergovernmental forum that represents the main global mechanism of follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

## E. RECOMMENDATIONS

Within this framework, concrete measures must be adopted to guarantee youth and adult education as a state policy, through a humanist and broad approach, reflected in legislation and public policies that fully recognizing youth and adults as rights holders, and of its significant contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In this sense, we recommend:

### **1. COORDINATION BETWEEN THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHT TO YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA**

Youth and adult education is an integral part of the human right to education and it has a structural, facilitating and critical role in the promotion and implementation not only of SDG4 education targets, but also of all the entire 2030 SDG Agenda. Thus, its implementation must interact and attune with the regulatory framework that supports the right to education in international human rights instruments, as well as with the contents, standards and commitments made at international level, specifically in the field of youth and adult learning and education, following the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

### **2. ACKNOWLEDGING THE MUTUALLY REINFORCING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION**

Youth and adult education plays a crucial role in the achievement of women's autonomy and empowerment as well as in the full exercise of all their human rights; hence its importance not only for the achievement of SDG5 addressing the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence that undermine women's and girls' rights, but also in terms of strengthening gender equality as a major cross-cutting issue for the achievement of all the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, based on the acknowledgment of the intersectorality and interdependence of rights, emphasis is placed on the fact that the full realization of the right to youth and adult education implies recognizing the relevance of promoting gender equality in this field of education.



### **3. ACTIVE, FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION**

Securing the right to education of young people and adults implies a broader exercise of the right to participation in all the dimensions of public and private life (social, cultural, economic, political and political-partisan); young people and adults need to see themselves as more active, free and responsible individuals, acting collectively and individually, and it is particularly relevant that they participate effectively in all decision-making processes, on equal terms, in the public sphere, contributing to the strengthening of democracy and the common good. From this perspective and considering the valuable contributions that young people and adults can make presently or potentially, we consider essential to enable participatory and intersectoral processes that incorporate the individuals from this education modality in the implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

### **4. A HIGHER LEVEL OF FINANCIAL, BUDGETARY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION COMMITMENT**

The full achievement of the 2030 Agenda will not be possible unless states commit to strengthen public funding (tax policies and budgetary policies) through adequate budget allocations, enough to guarantee an accessible, inclusive, equitable, culturally and linguistically appropriate, non-discriminatory, quality education for all, including youth and adult education. This commitment to strengthen funding must also consider, without renouncing the leadership of the Ministries of Education, an intersectoral approach, coordinating resources from other sectors such as health, work and environment. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda also implies strengthening international cooperation commitments with this field of education, acknowledging and reinforcing the transformative perspective and the crucial role of youth and adult education for the achievement of the SDGs.

### **5. ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH**

To delve into analysis and research with the purpose of identifying the consequences and costs linked to the absence of education and lifelong learning, as a decisive factor, from an integral and holistic approach, for all aspects of people's livelihood and sustainability, particularly, health, food, environment and poverty alleviation issues; also addressing issues related to strengthening democracy, autonomy and decision-making.

## 6. FULFILLMENT OF COMMITMENTS MADE

It is of utmost importance that states fully deliver on the right to education of young people and adults, according to the commitments and provisions deriving from international instruments, totally recognizing that youth and adult education is a complementary, essential and contributing factor for the implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and this implies undertaking a commitment not only at national level but also at regional and global level. Complementarity and coordination between both agendas cannot be ignored or delayed.

## 7. MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The systematic processes of monitoring, assessment and accountability concerning the implementation progress of the 2030 Agenda must incorporate and interrelate with the fulfillment of commitments related to the right to education of young people and adults, as well as with its follow-up mechanisms. The above concerns national architectures as well as the context of regional and international mechanisms that have been adopted to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda such as the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). This also implies that the field of youth and adult education has to be considered, by the Statistical Coordination Group for 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, within the process of creation and implementation of regional indicators. The monitoring framework of youth and adult education must consider and interrelate the monitoring indicators of targets and goals particularly those that are closely connected and related, such as the ones already mentioned in this document.





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