



The report “The right to education in Latin America and the Caribbean: the present is the past of the future” has sought to contribute to a better comprehension of the current state of this right in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). It identifies advances, challenges and possibilities for the realization of this right and for the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): to guarantee inclusive, equitable and quality education, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The document corroborates estimates that indicated that compliance with SDG 4, scheduled to be achieved by 2030, was not assured before 2020, and much less is it now, after the pandemic exacerbated educational inequalities, especially among the most vulnerable groups. In addition, it highlights the persistence of historical challenges - such as public financing, working conditions of teachers and educational inclusion - that are now intensified by emerging issues: the use of digital technologies for educational purposes, complexification of privatization trends in education, climate change, emergency contexts, conflicts and multiple violence, as well as attacks on democracies, the rise of authoritarian governments and conservative trends in the region.

In the early 2020s, several agreements were signed both globally and in LAC, through which governments committed to recover, reactivate and transform education. These include the Transforming Education Summit, the Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action to Transform Early Childhood Care and Education, and the CONFINTEA VII Marrakech Framework for Action: Harnessing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning and Education. CLADE welcomes the renewed commitments, recalling that they must be oriented from a rights perspective and in favor of strengthening of public education systems. At the same time, these commitments must serve to promote an emancipatory education and a horizon of social, economic, gender and environmental justice, thus contributing to overcoming inequalities.



On the meaning and content of the right to education

1. Emancipatory education for democracy and human rights

The meaning of education and what is prioritized in terms of content and pedagogical political project do not coincide in the different current discourses and policies, especially those oriented towards the recovery of post-pandemic learning. In general, a narrative focused on human rights, peacebuilding, promotion of active and participatory citizenship, and the development of critical thinking, which recognizes the different worldviews of peoples, is promoted. However, this remains in dispute with the neoliberal, functional and utilitarian narrative.



The region is dominated by discourses, policies and practices that reduce education to technical and basic learning outcomes, linked exclusively to the development of human capital, and that are measurable through international standardized tests. This trend devalues and delegitimizes another set of knowledge, as well as the conditions and processes of teaching-learning.

Likewise, the impact of the rise of conservatism and authoritarianism on the orientation of the education is noted, promoting regressive measures, especially in relation to the gender approach and the promotion of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). This occurs in a region where, according to most recent data, about 10 million girls and adolescents become pregnant every year. On the other hand, particular progress was made, such as the ruling of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which recognizes the link between prevention of sexual violence against girls and adolescents and the right to CSE.

2. Non-discriminatory education

The report demonstrates how educational opportunities vary according to conditions such as socioeconomic, ethnic-racial, gender, age, origin or geographical location, as well as the countless obstacles faced by people with disabilities or those on the move. Thus, it is essential to strengthen public policies, curricula and educational materials, teacher training processes and concrete practices aimed at inclusion and the promotion of diversity, with the availability of adequate funding for the removal of obstacles to the exercise of the right to education. Non-discriminatory education includes more than access; it implies interculturality, a rights perspective and gender approach as starting points of the entire pedagogical political project, in addition to recognizing the historical roots of discrimination and racism in the region, and committing to overcoming them.



3. Lifelong learning

The right to education encompasses, in addition to compulsory primary and secondary education, early childhood care and education, vocational and technical training, youth and adult education, capacity training and retraining, as well as higher education. This implies accessing transformative possibilities of education at all stages of life, within a system that integrates formal, informal and non-formal education. However, there are still many outstanding challenges and particularities at each educational stage.



Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE): The gross enrollment rate for a year of pre-primary education decreased from 93.18% in 2019 to 89.73% in 2022, while the gross enrollment rate in early childhood education, in the same period, dropped from 46.37% to 44.98% (UIS, 2023). In other words, instead of moving towards universality, it moved backwards. It is vital to make progress, in line with the Tashkent Framework on ECCE, towards an equitable and inclusive offer, with quality curricula and pedagogies, and allocate at least 10% of the education budget to pre-primary education. Progress must be articulated with policies related to care, health and nutrition, in addition to the protection of children against all forms of violence.

Primary and secondary education: It is crucial to address gaps in access and completion, with the urgent implementation of actions focused on most vulnerable populations, and paying special attention to inequalities by quintile or income level of families. As the most recent figures show, inequalities remain very wide: while, in the highest income quintile, 84.6% of the population manages to complete secondary education, this proportion falls to 44.1% in the lowest income quintile.

Higher education: Although the data indicate a growth in opportunities, this is marked by a deepening of inequalities. The access gap between indigenous population and non-indigenous or Afro-descendant population exceeds 30%; similarly, it occurs with the gap between rural and urban populations. It is crucial to expand opportunities in higher education for historically excluded sectors, with an intercultural and intersectional perspective. To this end, affirmative action policies that guarantee access, and intersectoral approaches are relevant to ensure the permanence of these groups in education. It is also vital to preserve university autonomy, address the precariousness of teaching conditions in higher education institutions, and reverse the process of commodification of this educational stage.

Adult Learning and Education (ALE): The figure of 27.5 million LAC young people and adults in conditions of absolute illiteracy reflects the immense challenge faced by ALE in the region. This is aggravated by the loss of visibility in the educational agenda itself and, therefore, the lack of institutionality and public financing for ALE. It is urgent to continue advocating for the full recognition of this modality as a fundamental human right, on equal terms with other educational levels, thus overcoming the current residual, remedial and compensatory approach. Full implementation of the Marrakech Framework for Action, as a new manifestation of the global commitment to ALE, is critical.

4. Education from an intersectoral perspective

One of the lessons of the pandemic was the importance of advancing intersectoral public policies. The promotion and adoption of educational policies, articulated and integrated with other areas – such as health, social protection, employment, child protection, youth, gender and the environment – and the inclusion of various governmental, social and community actors, necessarily implies concrete impacts on the realization of the human right to education.

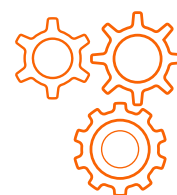




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On the conditions for the realization of the right

1. Strengthening public systems

From a human rights perspective, States are obliged to strengthen public education systems as epicenters of the realization of the right, offering free and inclusive education, and avoiding segmenting them in ways that generate inequalities. A series of threats to public systems are identified, notably the expansion of policies that introduce commercial logic in the educational field. This includes new business models and profits generated by the entry of ed-techs into the education sector, along with the growing participation of technology corporations in the definition of educational policies. These factors negatively affect public education systems, deteriorating working conditions of teachers, democratic management and adequate financing of education.



2. Fair Financing

Sufficient public funding for public education is an imperative under the regulatory and policy frameworks assumed by States. As of 2022, of 14 countries with available data, only two had complied with the regional agreement to allocate 6% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to education (CLADE, 2022). Regarding investment in education as a percentage of public spending, the regional average was 14.20% (UIS, 2021). The availability of resources is very limited compared to what is needed per school-age person, a key indicator. Transformation of tax systems, in this context, emerges as a concrete possibility to expand the national tax base,



recovering important resources for the financing of public policies. It is estimated that around 5.6% of the region's GDP is lost through both tax evasion and avoidance. The region stops collecting approximately 500 billion dollars annually for tax avoidance, plus 320 billion dollars annually for tax evasion (CEPAL, 2020). The recovery of these funds would be equivalent to the commitment made by States since the Incheon Declaration to advance adequate public financing of public education systems.

3. Teaching conditions

The interconnection between the human right to education and the rights of teaching professionals requires, at a minimum, attention to some fundamental issues. First, it is crucial to address the global staff shortage. In LAC, in particular, there is a marked slowdown in the recruitment of new professionals, as well as high dropout rates. Likewise, in the region, 1 in each 5 teachers does not have the training required for teaching. In recent years, the need to address the impacts of increased digitization and to implement protection mechanisms against undue restrictions, limitations on autonomy or situations of control and coercion has been highlighted. In addition, there is still a lack of recognition of teachers as legitimate actors in the definition of educational policies, with a place and voice in governance structures.



4. Community participation and democratic management

It is urgent to assess safe and funded participation spaces and mechanisms that allow the widest participation in the processes of definition, management, implementation and accountability of educational policies. It is crucial to involve educational communities, with an emphasis on the vision of diversity of groups, and to recognize the participation of students – girls, boys, adolescents, young people and adults. In addition, it is concerning the restrictions the serious processes of criminalization that the educational communities have been experiencing in the region.

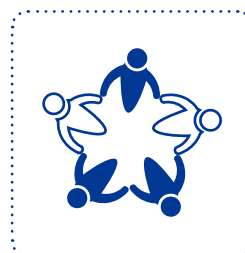


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On Emerging Issues

1. Emergency contexts

The special importance of educational continuity in emergency situations, conflicts, disasters and crises caused by structural and systemic violence is underlined. This is not only crucial for its implications in terms of the human right to education, but also for the recognition of the educational field as a space for the protection and realization of other rights. Thus, education becomes an environment of containment, physical and psychosocial support, and risk reduction, including against violence and sexual exploitation. To this end, sustained public investment in public education systems is crucial.



2. Environmental education and climate change

Interrelation among the human right to education and the right to a healthy environment is highlighted, evidencing both the effects of environmental damage in schools and the role of education in the preservation of life on the planet. Although there is a proliferation of initiatives and campaigns, few countries have a specific policy with emphasis on education and communication for climate change: only 30% of them have a public budget allocated for this purpose. In addition to scaling up actions, the focus on environmental and climate justice is vital, seeking to level the balance between the sectors of society that contribute the most to emissions and those that suffer the most from their impacts. Finally, it is crucial to integrate the vision of the diverse indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples of the region into environmental education, whose worldviews and narratives propose a different relationship with nature, which is essential for the development of comprehensive policies and programs.



3. Digital technologies for education

The adoption of commercial “digital solutions” for schools during the pandemic has evidenced the proliferation of opaque contracts with governments, new business models with unprecedented profits, in addition to the exacerbation of inequalities and the extraction of data from educational communities. Although access to connectivity is recognized as a necessary dimension for the realization of the human right to education, the way in which technologies are incorporated into educational systems must be subject of careful ethical-pedagogical reflection. Instead of opting for immediate solutions from commercial providers, it is recommended to encourage a deep debate that includes alternatives to preserve digital sovereignty, ensure democratic internet governance, and develop technological solutions that strengthen education and public schools, their educators and the entire educational community.



Executive summary

REGIONAL REPORT

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