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REPORT

# PROGRESS TOWARD EDUCATION FOR ALL IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Regional Preparatory Meeting 2011  
United Nations Economic and Social Council  
Annual Ministerial Review  
ECOSOC - AMR

Buenos Aires, Argentina, may 12 - 13, 2011



The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations. Global preparatory meetings, regional consultations and national reviews are essential to prepare the Annual Ministerial Review and Development Cooperation Forum, which ensures a comprehensive, qualitative review of progress in implementing the MDGs.

This is an internal working paper for the Regional Ministerial Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean, 12-13 may, 2011, Buenos Aires.

Prepared by the Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/UNESCO Santiago).

Design  
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## COUNTRY ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS REPORT

This report covers the 41 member countries and territories of UNESCO in Latin America and the Caribbean, which are listed below with their identifiers (used in graphs and tables).

LATIN AMERICA		CARIBBEAN	
AR	Argentina	AI	Anguilla
BO	Bolivia	AG	Antigua and Barbuda
BR	Brazil	AW	Aruba
CO	Colombia	AN	Netherlands Antilles
CR	Costa Rica	BS	Bahamas
CU	Cuba	BB	Barbados
CL	Chile	BZ	Belize
EC	Ecuador	BM	Bermuda
SV	El Salvador	DM	Dominica
GT	Guatemala	GD	Grenada
HN	Honduras	GY	Guyana
MX	Mexico	HT	Haiti
NI	Nicaragua	KY	Cayman Islands
PN	Panama	TC	Turks and Caicos Islands
PY	Paraguay	VG	British Virgin Islands
PE	Peru	JM	Jamaica
DO	Dominican Republic	MS	Montserrat
UY	Uruguay	KN	Saint Kitts and Nevis
VN	Venezuela	VC	St. Vincent and the Grenadines
		LC	St. Lucia
		SR	Suriname
		TT	Trinidad and Tobago

## Other abbreviations used<sup>1</sup>

<b>ECCE</b> -	Early Childhood Care and Education
<b>ECLAC</b> -	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>ECOSOC</b> -	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>EFA</b> -	Education for All
<b>ICT</b> -	Information and Communication Technology
<b>ILO</b> -	International Labour Organization
<b>ISCED</b> -	International Standard Classification of Education
<b>LAC</b> -	Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>LAMP</b> -	Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme
<b>LLECE</b> -	Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality Education
<b>MIC</b> -	Middle-Income Country
<b>OAS</b> -	Organization of American States
<b>OECD</b> -	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OEI</b> -	Organization of Ibero-American States
<b>OREALC</b> -	Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO Santiago)
<b>PISA</b> -	International Student Assessment
<b>PREAL</b> -	Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>PRELAC</b> -	Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the abbreviations are used according to their original names in Spanish

- SBM -** Self-Benefiting Modality
- SIRI-** Regional Information System
- SERCE -** Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study
- SEN -** Special Educational Needs
- TVET -** Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- UIS -** UNESCO Institute for Statistics
- UN DESA -** United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- UNESCO -** United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNESS -** UNESCO National Education Support Strategy
- UNICEF -** United Nations Children’s Fund
- UPE -** Universal Primary Education
- WFP-** World Food Programme





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document was prepared for the Regional Preparatory Meeting 2011 of the United Nations Economic Council Annual Ministerial Review, ECOSOC AMR, to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is based on the progress review towards EFA goals in Latin America and the Caribbean, identifying remaining challenges in education in this particular region, as well as to give inputs into strategic and pragmatic initiatives to address these challenges in order to provide quality education for the whole population towards 2015 and beyond. The main topics of this report can be resumed as follows:

1. Latin American and Caribbean states move towards the EFA goals, however not all at the same pace. It can already be said that a lot of countries of the region will not be able to achieve all EFA objectives by 2015, especially in terms of quality of education in its broadest sense.
2. The improvement of ECCE is highly important, as it affects both educational achievement and attainment. Net enrolment rates in pre-primary education reflect a consolidation of ECCE available in LAC region.
3. Most countries have reached gender parity in pre-primary education enrolment. However, major disparities in pre-primary enrolment rates exist among countries, as well as among different socioeconomic groups and geographical locations (rural versus urban areas). That means that pre-primary education is often not available to who need it most, on a large scale. Moreover, many countries still have a shortage of qualified pre-primary teachers.
4. With some exceptions, mainly in Central America, UPE appears to have been or about to be reached. However, the issue of children who still cannot access or complete primary education needs to be urgently addressed.
5. Repetition of the first grade is still a problem in LAC countries. Both repetition and dropout are complex phenomena that are often related to poor quality in education. The establishment of public policies to address this problem would be well placed in any follow-up to the EFA initiative.
6. As secondary education completion rates show, much work is still needed to promote this level of education, as, on average, little than half of the youngest generation (20-24) finishes secondary school, and these rates are even lower among older age groups. Besides this, there are strong differences in access to and completion of secondary education among LAC countries.
7. Most of the region's countries have achieved gender parity in access to and completion of pre-primary and primary schooling, and concerning literacy rates, especially in the younger population. Nevertheless, it should be noted that secondary school completion rates in many countries show an increasing tendency in favour of girls. All countries in the region have improved primary education parity for place of residence, income level and ethnicity, but inequalities among certain social groups continue to pose a tremendous challenge for the region. It needs to be stressed that no country has achieved parity in secondary education completion, and major disparities still exist in all age categories among the aforementioned population groups. Many of the region's countries have high levels of economic inequality. It is therefore not surprising that major disparities exist in the completion of primary and secondary education among different income groups. There is more parity among socioeconomic groups in the younger age range than in the older, but the gaps remain extremely large. This makes it clear that the issue of equity must be included in any post-EFA

educational agenda for the Latin American and Caribbean region.

8. There are still severe deficits in terms of the academic achievement of the students. Educational achievement in most countries is poor and represents a real threat to the pursuit of quality education for all. The employment of duly certified teachers, better teacher training, more flexible curricula with student-centred approaches and a better use of ICT are directly related to this issue. School organization, infrastructure and materials are issues that are recognized as being related to quality education and must therefore be urgently improved, especially in low-income and rural areas.
9. It is empirically proven that a positive social climate at school, a feeling of community, and respect for diversity all favourably affect learning outcomes. In this sense, it is important to strengthen the educational leadership and managerial capacities of school principals in order to ensure a healthy institutional atmosphere.
10. Access to post-secondary education is still low in almost all countries of the region, however a comparison of enrolment rates between 2000 and 2008 shows some improvement.
11. In all the countries studied, the percentage of the population deemed fully illiterate is lower in younger segments than in older population cohorts. The expansion of primary and secondary education in recent decades has lowered illiteracy rates. Gender parity has also improved recently.
12. Violence in schools is an ever-increasing problem in the region and threatens EFA progress and gains. Effective initiatives and policies are urgently needed to address this problem.
13. New funding modalities for education could be explored through smarter financing of education in the Region, as the South-South Cooperation trend, and the fact that an increasing number of Middle-Income Countries (MICs) in LAC region are becoming donors in their own right, affords interesting opportunities for sourcing additional funding.





# INTRODUCTION

The following report on Education for All (EFA) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) was prepared for the Regional Preparatory Meeting 2011 of the United Nations Economic Council Annual Ministerial Review, ECOSOC AMR, to be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The main objective of the Latin America and the Caribbean preparatory meeting is to examine progress in achieving the education agenda in the region and the related challenges, especially those that may best be addressed through regional cooperation.

During the first decade of the XXI century, the Latin American and Caribbean region underwent a major period of sustained economic growth. Since 2000, the living conditions of the population have improved in most countries, along with literacy rates and completion rates of all educational levels, especially primary education. Nevertheless, the main concerns, problems and obstacles to fulfilling the EFA quality standards have remained basically the same over the years.

Social inequalities in the region persist in the form of complex structural problems that are rooted in the region's geography and history. This legacy has entrenched socioeconomic, territorial, ethnic and gender inequalities that impact primary and secondary education completion rates.

On the whole, quality of education, and especially access to and quality of secondary education and TVET, are emerging as key challenges in the lead-up to 2015 and for the post-2015 scenario. Therefore, strategic interventions and redesign of public policies are critical in addressing these challenges.





## 2. INTERNATIONAL AGENDAS FOR EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

In recent years, countries of the region have agreed upon some important international education agendas and programmes that support and complement EFA. Here are some examples:

The Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC) was adopted by the region's education ministers in Havana, Cuba in 2002, and is intended to promote substantial changes in educational policies and practices by implementing initiatives in five focus areas (contents and practices; teachers; school culture; management; and social responsibility) deemed to be strategically important for achieving EFA objectives in the region. UNESCO serves as the Executive Secretariat for PRELAC.

At the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago de Chile in 1998, the 34 heads of member states and governments of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted a Plan of Action in which education was identified as a regional priority. This led to the approval of a programme with three key goals for 2010, which include universal access to quality primary education; access of at least 75% of all young people to quality secondary education; and the availability of lifelong educational opportunities to the general population<sup>2</sup>. Like EFA, the Summit of the Americas plan of action emphasizes the necessity of making quality education available to everyone, especially children and youth whose participation is limited by reasons of gender, marginality, rural and/or indigenous status, disability and other disadvantages.

Another programme was launched in 2008 by the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) during the 18<sup>th</sup> Ibero-American Education Conference in El Salvador. The Educational Goals 2021 programme has 11 objectives that cover virtually every aspect of education. Here again, quality education in combination with parity and a special concern for reaching the most marginalized population segments is considered critically important.

In conclusion, we can affirm that over the last decade the region was very active in developing international policy agendas and common educational goals. This reflects increasing recognition that education is a key factor in human development and the fight against poverty, as well as a deep concern for improving countries' educational systems.

<sup>2</sup> La UNESCO participó en el monitoreo de la búsqueda de estos objetivos. Véase UNESCO-OREALC/OEA (2011), Panorama Educativo 2010: desafíos pendientes. UNESCO participated in the monitoring of these goals. See: UNESCO-OREALC/OAS. 2011. Educational Panorama, 2010: remaining challenges. Santiago de Chile, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago, OAS, SEP Mexico.



### 3. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND DONOR SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION

According to the World Bank Classification, most countries of the LAC region are middle-income countries (MICs); nine are low middle-income countries (Belize, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay) and only one, Haiti, is classified as a low-income country.

The situation regarding technical and financial development cooperation in the region shows signs of both continuity and change<sup>3</sup>. A lot of external funding for education still tends to take the traditional form of soft loans and grants. Development Banks, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), bilateral agencies, and international foundations all operate in this way. At the same time, however, the past decade has witnessed a shift in thinking about the structure of development itself and its funding, particularly in the area of education.

Concurrently, several middle-income countries are emerging as donors and development partners across the LAC region. There has been a move away from so-called 'horizontal', country-specific programming towards 'vertical', often issue-based sub-regional, regional and even global programming. In fact, the region currently has a mix of these two modalities, with donors and development agencies still pursuing bilateral, country-based programming while becoming increasingly interested in implementing multi-country programming.

The focus of the EFA/PRELAC in regional educational programming lends itself to the latter format. This type of vertical programming would ensure the same standards for all programming, while also making implementation more efficient, which in turn would speed up the achievement of goals.

Alongside this, there is more interest in better identifying and evaluating the results of development work in line with international commitments. These changes have created both challenges and opportunities for UNESCO and point to a need for all development partners to evaluate and revisit their goals and practices.

In their funding of education programmes, in addition to their own government budgets, some Middle-Income Countries in the region use a mechanism called the Self-Benefitting Modality (SBM). As the name implies, the SBM is aimed mainly at national projects and interventions. It is an attractive mechanism for countries that have the requisite funds for education programming, but lack the capacity to implement them. Here they turn to UN Agencies not only to manage funds, but also to provide technical expertise, experience and advice about programming.

It is believed that as countries develop and their capacities become more robust, the SBM may become increasingly redundant. As a result, other innovative funding options need to be considered. Lately, interest has grown in the region for other (non-SMB) education funding mechanisms – such as South-South Cooperation, Endowment Funding, Public Private Partnerships, and Debt Swaps.

An issue that overshadows the development agenda is obviously the impact of the global economic slowdown, the effects of which could be significant: common sense suggests that it will reduce available funding from donors, force governments to redirect spending away from areas like education, and reduce the availability of private sector capital and other resources for development.

<sup>3</sup> The UNESCO office in Santiago de Chile organized a roundtable on 'Emerging Donors for Education Funding in Latin America and the Caribbean Countries' conference, which took place on 16–17 December 2009 in Mexico City and resulted in the following paper: UNESCO-OREALC, 2010. Emerging donors for Education Funding in Latin American and the Caribbean Countries: An Overview and Issues Paper. Document prepared by Daniela Di Lorenzo and Elizabeth Mills.



## 4. TOWARDS EFA BY 2015: THE REGIONAL STATE OF AFFAIRS

The following section describes the state of education in the region in relation to each EFA goal.

(*parvularia*), “initial” (*inicial*) or “infant” (*de la infancia*) education <sup>4</sup>.

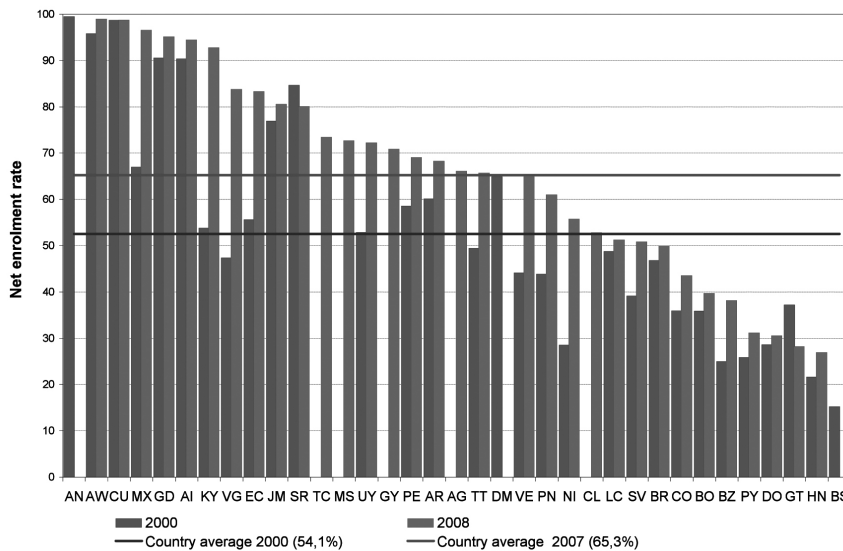
### 4.1 Expanding and improving Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

ECCE is incorporated into the education laws, policies and programmes of almost all countries in the region. It is normally defined as education targeted to children between the ages of 0-3 months and 5 to 6 years, depending on the age at which basic education begins in each country. Early education is referred to by different names in different countries but, like primary education, it is generally divided into two or three cycles. The later cycle is usually referred to as “preschool” (*preescolar*) or “pre-primary” (*preprimario*) education, and the earlier is known as “nursery”

Owing to the lack of statistical information on early childhood care and education provision, the following analysis refers only to pre-primary education and addresses enrolment and attendance rates, parity, and teacher certification at this educational level.

Though enrolment in pre-primary education in the region has gradually increased over the last few years, the numbers reflect an ongoing need to expand coverage. Average net enrolment in countries<sup>5</sup> for which information was available stood at 54.1% in 2000, and at 65.3% in 2008, an increase of around 10 percentage points over that period. Six countries have enrolment rates lower than 40%, and only ten have rates above 80%.

GRAPHIC 1: Evolution of net enrolment rates for pre-primary education, 2000- 2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

4 UNESCO/OREALC. 2010. Early Childhood Care and Education. Regional Report. Latin America and the Caribbean. Report prepared for the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education. Moscow. September 2010. Santiago de Chile, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago.

5 To obtain reference values with which to compare national averages and rates, we average national figures without weighting them by population. The results are thus not regional averages, which would require weighting national figures according to the relevant reference populations before averaging them. The decision to use unweighted averages of country figures rather than regional averages as reference values reflects a desire to give the same importance to each country’s situation in the different dimensions analysed, regardless of its demographic weight within the region. The “country averages” mentioned at various times in this document are thus unweighted averages of the various countries’ national figures.

In regard to gender, school attendance rates for girls and boys one year younger than the official primary school entry age are relatively equal in most countries.

However, there are significant gaps between the highest and the lowest income quintiles and between urban and rural populations in almost all of the countries for which data are available, pointing to major disparities in access to this level of education across socioeconomic strata.

## 4.2 Achieving universal primary education

The following section refers to the second EFA goal of universal primary education (UPE) and includes

information on access, as well as repetition and completion rates.

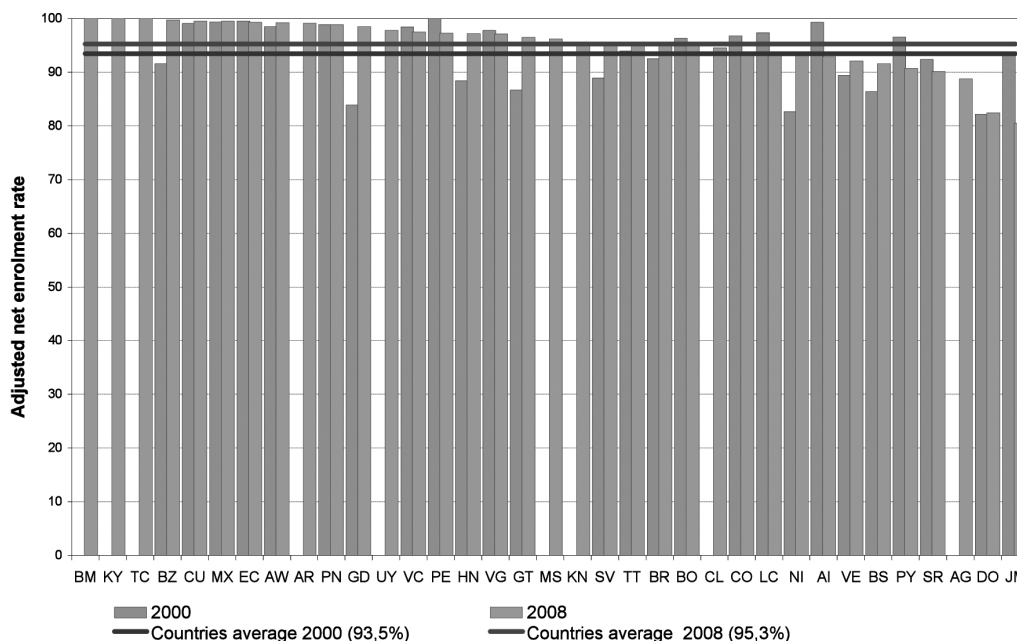
### 4.2.1 Access to primary education

One indicator that measures access to primary education is the adjusted net enrolment rate (ANER), which represents the percentage of children of official primary school age who are actually enrolled in either primary or secondary school.

Graph 2 shows countries in descending order of adjusted net enrolment rates for primary education in 2008. The figures indicate that, on average, the region has been highly successful in this area. However, the average rate remained virtually constant from 2000 (93.5%) to 2008 (95.3%).

As these figures show, most children in the region begin primary education at some stage; however, the

GRAPHIC 2: Evolution of adjusted net enrolment rates for primary education, 2000-2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).



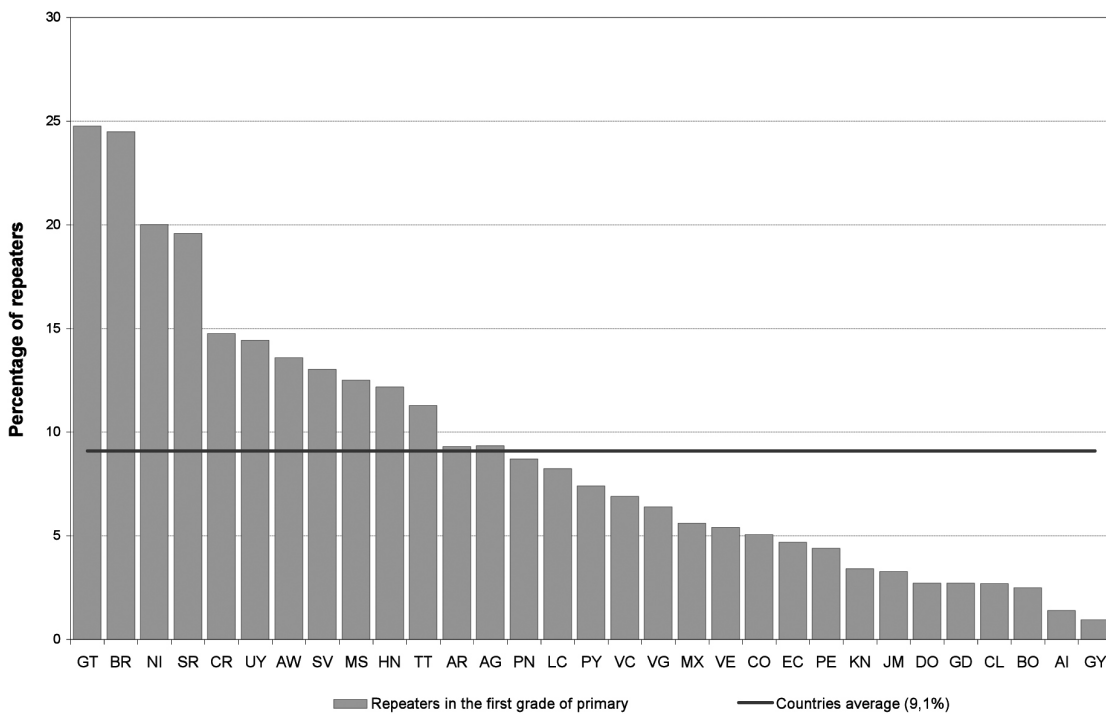
net intake rate for first grade in 2008 was only 72%. This first grade net intake rate is a way of measuring the extent of timely entry into school<sup>6</sup>. This finding suggests that the region may face challenges in meeting the second EFA goal, since children who lack access at the appropriate age and enter school later than they theoretically should are more likely to drop out before completing primary education.

**4.2.2 Problems with repetition and early school leaving**

Delayed access to primary education, and repetition of grades, affects a child’s ability to complete primary education and advance to higher levels.

Graph 3 shows the percentage of children who repeat first grade in each country. The average rate among countries for which data is available is 9.1%.

**GRAPHIC 3:** Percentage of repeaters in the first grade of primary education, 2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

This indicator, while it reflects a system’s efficiency, may be influenced by a country’s particular policies and educational models. Some countries have automatic grade promotion policies, while others promote students on the basis of age. Furthermore, the relationship between grade repetition and

academic performance becomes somewhat tenuous when one considers that learning assessment criteria vary greatly from one country to another, and even within individual countries that have no national criteria for repetition. As repetition is rarely correlated with better performance and indeed can lead to early

<sup>6</sup> This represents the number of children entering primary school during a given year at what is theoretically the appropriate age, as a percentage of the total number of children of that age.

school leaving, the percentage of children enrolling in the same grade for two consecutive years can be considered an effective and direct indicator of wasted resources.

#### 4.2.3 Completion of primary education

Primary education completion rates measure the percentage of adults who have finished primary education. This indicator measures the educational performance of individuals above the age at which they would have finished primary education. It uses sociodemographic data and primary school completion reports for different age groups.

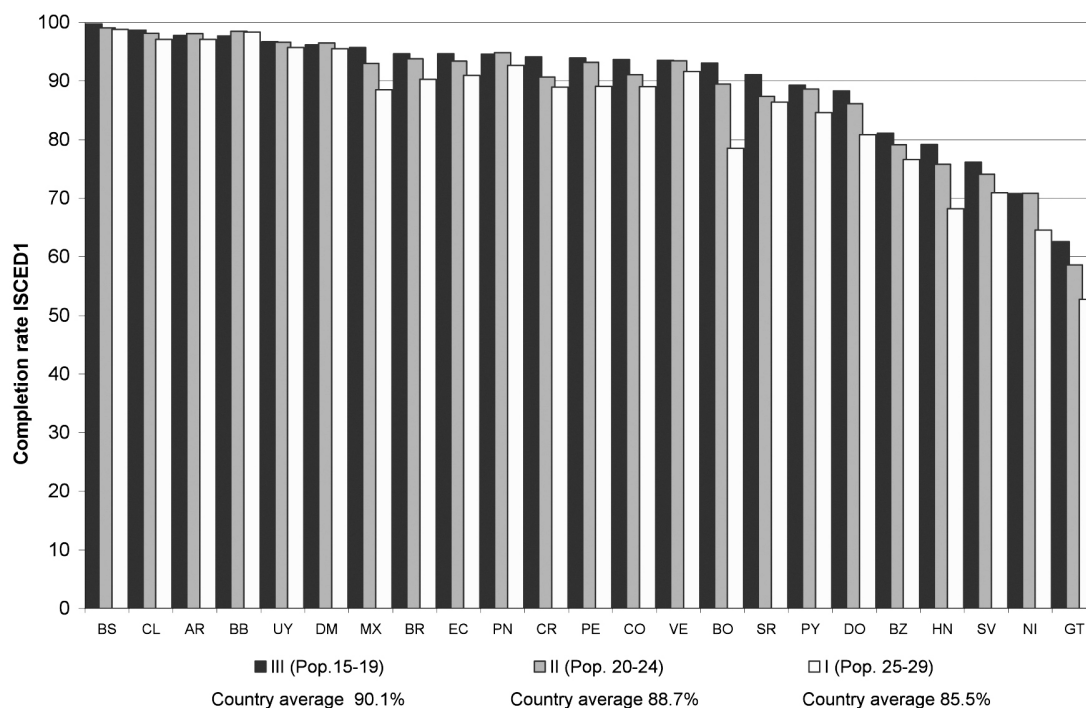
The graph below presents data on completion rates for three age groups: 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 years of

age. Comparing the completion rates of these three groups shows the evolution of these rates over time.

The following graph shows the youngest group first, since members of this group would have completed primary school most recently.

The countries with the lowest completion rates for the youngest group have made significant progress among the youngest members of their populations, and their current figures are as follows: Dominica 69.3%, Dominican Republic 53.5%, Honduras 42.5%, Mexico 41.7%, Paraguay 38.9%, Nicaragua 35.6% and Surinam 29.7%.

GRAPHIC 4: Primary school completion rate (ISCED 1) among three age groups, 2008.



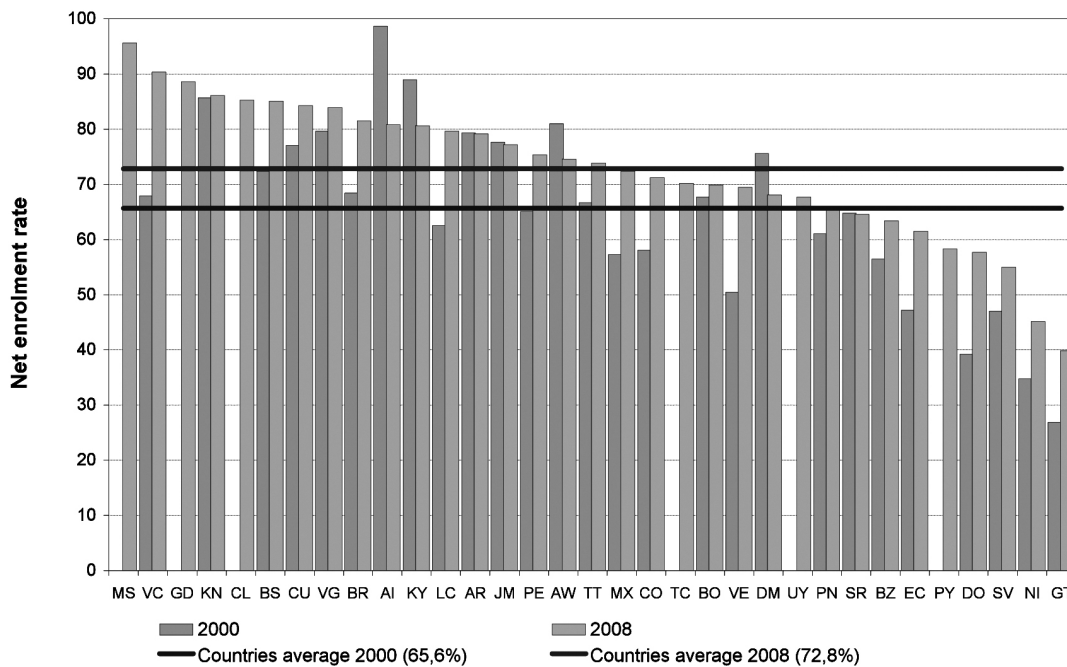
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Despite these shortcomings, it should be noted that even countries with lower primary school completion rates in the oldest age group have made significant gains: Guatemala 18.8%, Bolivia 18.5% and Honduras 16.1%.

### 4.3 Responding to the learning needs of all young people and adults

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)<sup>7</sup>, the completion of at least 12 years of schooling – the length of time required to complete secondary education in most of the region’s countries – is the minimum educational capital required for well-being. This is because with that amount of schooling, an individual has a greater than 80% chance of securing a job at a salary that provides an adequate standard of living<sup>8</sup>.

GRAPHIC 5: Evolution in net enrolment rates for secondary education, 2000-2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

7 ECLAC. 1997. Social Panorama of Latin America 1997. Santiago de Chile, ECLAC.

8 This concept involves an “educational threshold”. Operationally, one can measure the threshold necessary for staying out of poverty, which is currently 12 years of formal education. See ECLAC. 2000. Social Panorama of Latin America 1999-2000. Santiago, Chile, ECLAC.

Secondary education is also the key to accessing tertiary education, which is associated with even better work opportunities and a much higher probability of remaining above the poverty line.

The following section provides information on access to and completion of secondary and tertiary education, and addresses highest educational attainment among populations.

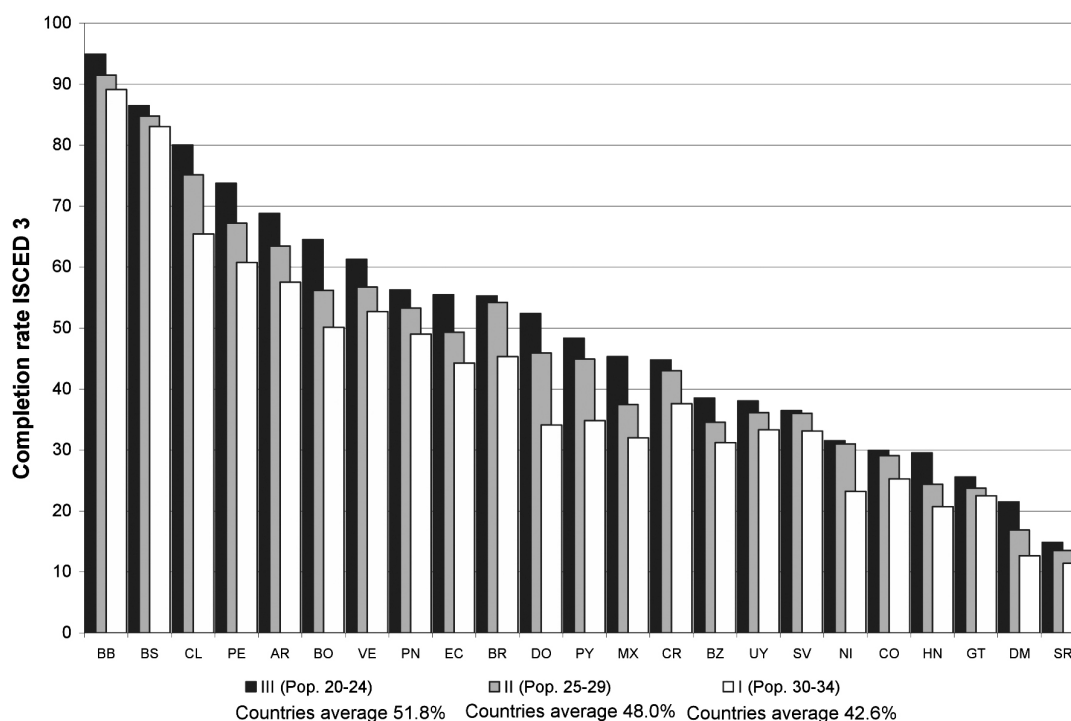
#### 4.3.1 Access to secondary education

The net enrolment rate (NER) in secondary education is an indicator of access to this level of education. It is a proxy measure for the participation of adolescents and young adults of official secondary-school age in both secondary education levels (ISCED 2 and 3).

Graph 5 ranks countries of the region from highest to lowest in terms of secondary NER for the school year 2008, showing recent levels in the region ranging from 39.9% (Guatemala) to 95.6% (Montserrat) and averaging 72.8%. The average increase in net secondary enrolment from 2000 to 2008 in the region was 7.2%.

As the graph shows, there was an upward trend in access to secondary education in most of the countries for which information was available. The greatest increases were seen in Guatemala (48.5%) and the Dominican Republic (47.2%). Four countries in the region display a substantial decrease in secondary NER.

GRAPHIC 6: Upper secondary education completion rates (ISCED 3) among three age groups, 2008.



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

**4.3.2 Completion of secondary education**

The following information shows upper secondary education (ISCED 3) completion rates. The data provided for three age groups (20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 years of age), shows changes over time.

Graph 6 is organized to show completion levels of the youngest group (those who would have completed this level of education) in comparison with the two older groups (Group II and III).

Secondary school completion rates for the three age groups are as follows: 51.8% for the 20-24 age range, 48% for the 25-29 group and 42.6% for the 30-34 age range.

As the graph shows, the countries with the lowest completion rates for the oldest age group have made

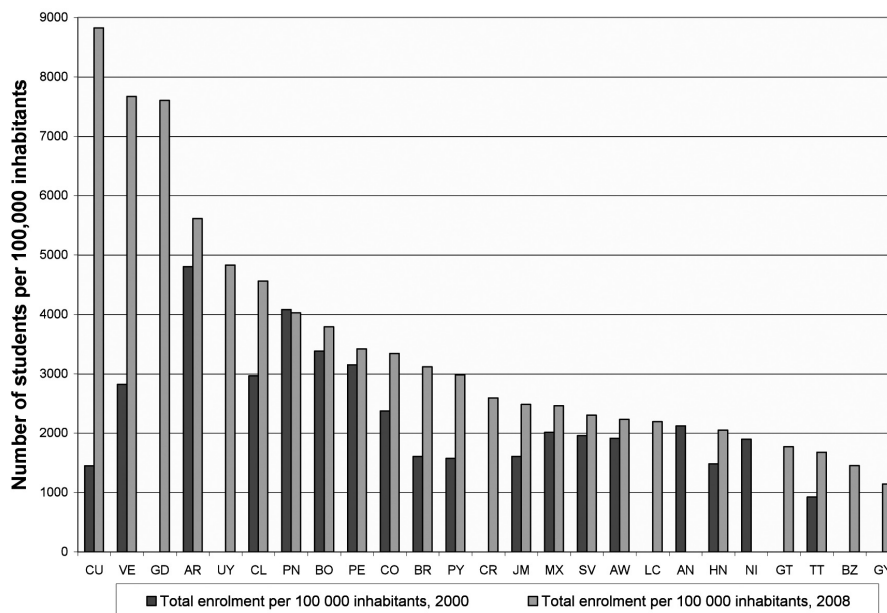
significant progress in secondary school completion among the youngest members of their populations. These countries have improved as follows: Dominica 69.3%, Dominican Republic 53.5%, Honduras 42.5%, Mexico 41.7%, Paraguay 38.9%, Nicaragua 35.6% and Surinam 29.7%.

By averaging the difference between youngest- and oldest-group completion rates, we find that countries have increased completion rates at this educational level by 25.7%.

**4.3.3 Tertiary Education**

The following graph shows changes in the number of students enrolled in tertiary education per 100,000 inhabitants for the 2000-2008 period. The data includes students enrolled in tertiary education abroad.

**GRAPHIC 7:** Number of students enrolled in tertiary education per 100,000 inhabitants (ISCED 5A-5B-6). 2000-2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

A comparison of enrolment rates in 2000 and in 2008 reveals a significant increase in access to tertiary education in most countries for which information is available. Uruguay's progress is particularly noteworthy, showing an increase of more than 2000 students enrolled in tertiary education per 100,000 inhabitants over that period.

Another important indicator of educational progress in a country is the educational attainment of the adult population. Graph 8, below, presents the highest level of educational attainment among people 25 years of age and older, as a percentage of the total population of countries in the region.

#### 4.3.4 Overall educational attainment of the population

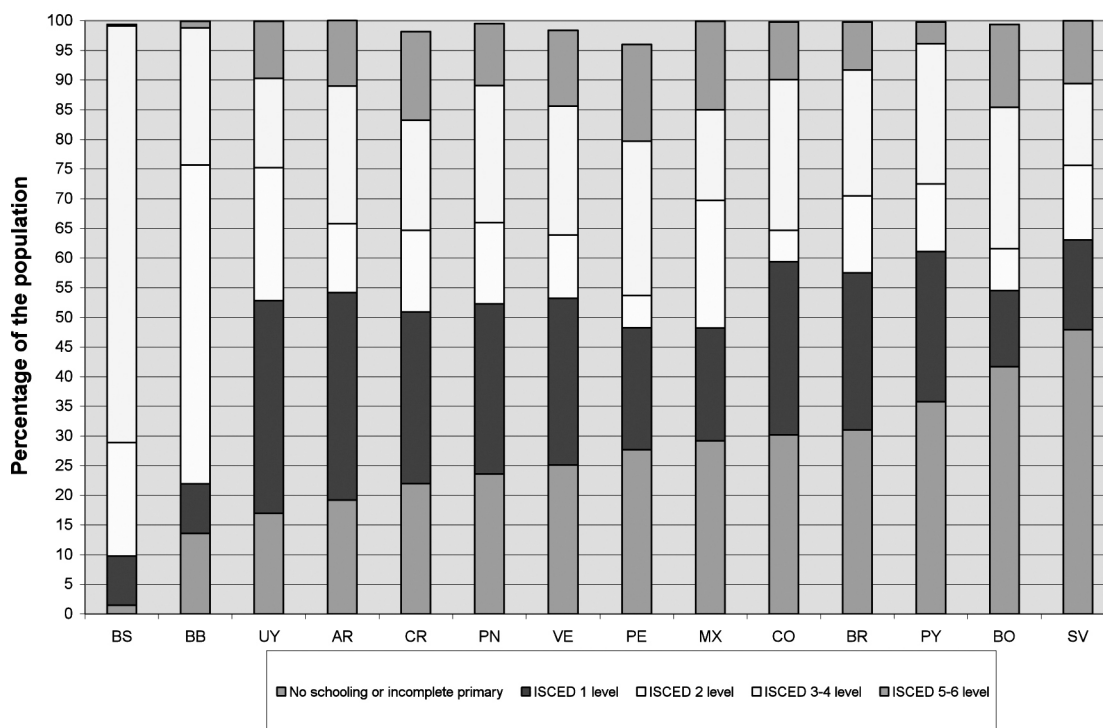
An important aspect of lifelong learning is related to the skills and knowledge provided at the level of basic education. Although there were major advances in the region in enrolment and completion at all educational levels, universal completion of primary education is not yet a reality, and secondary education coverage remains low in many countries.

#### 4.4 Adult literacy

This section presents literacy rates of young people and adults in the region that reflect the achievements of primary education and literacy programmes.

Graph 9 illustrates a major improvement in literacy among young people; especially remarkable are the advancements of countries with less literate adult populations.

GRAPHIC 8: Educational attainment among individuals 25 years and older.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).



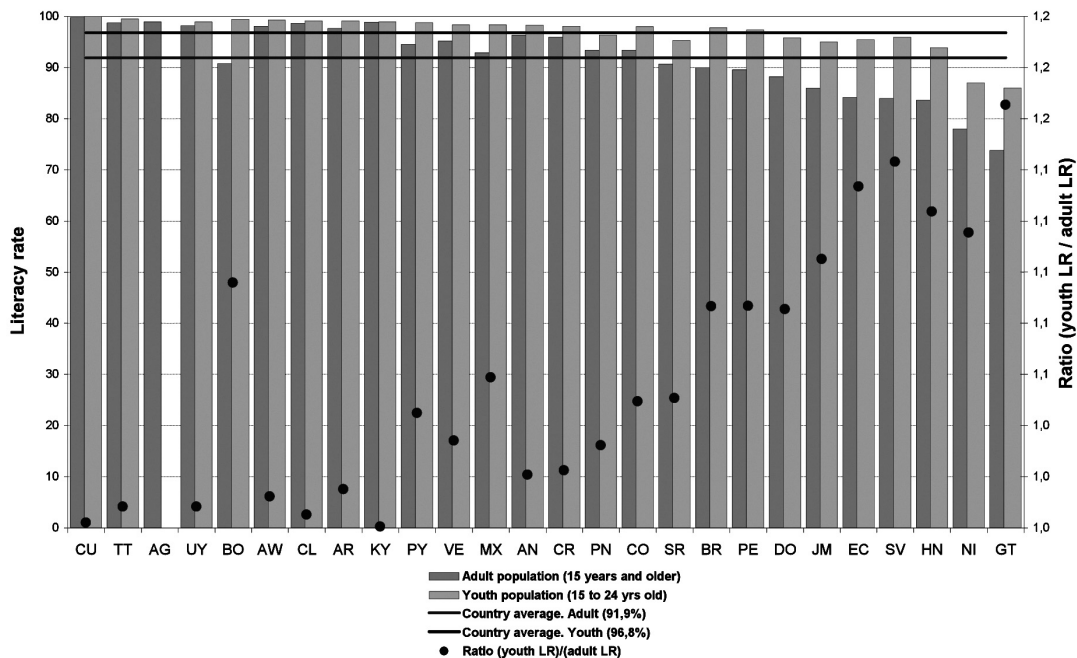
When the ratio of the literacy rate among the relatively young population (15-24) to that among the entire adult population (defined as 15+) is greater than 1, then young people are considered to be more literate than adults. In countries of the LAC region, this ratio is 1.07, an indication that progress has been made. Indeed, there has been a steady increase in the comparative literacy rates of young people versus adult populations in the region, with the average difference between the two groups standing at 4.9%.

It should be emphasized, however, that functional illiteracy remains a challenge for the region, and therefore a broader concept of literacy must be developed that takes into account changing patterns of communication in modern societies and the demands of the workplace. Rather than assuming a

divide between literate and illiterate, some researchers have proposed a continuum that includes various context-specific levels and uses of literacy. This would shift the measure from the simple notion of literacy as a skill that individuals either have or have not, to one of multiple literacies<sup>9</sup>.

This broader concept of literacy presents major methodological challenges in terms of measurement. Both the classic literate/non-literate dichotomy as well as individual self-perception as the bases for measuring literacy would have to be abandoned. The Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP)<sup>10</sup> is currently facing this challenge and is seeking to further our understanding of the occurrence and nature of illiteracy in the region.

GRAFICO 9: Literacy rates of youth and adult populations, 2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

9 UNESCO. 2008. The Global Literacy Challenge. A profile of youth and adult literacy at the mid point of the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012. Paris, UNESCO.

10 UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2009. The next generation of literacy statistics. Implementing the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme. Montreal, Canada.

## 4.5 Gender parity and equity in different areas

This section presents information on gender parity in relation to primary and secondary education and literacy. It also provides data on equity in secondary school completion rates by gender, income group, place of residence (rural/urban) and ethnicity.

### 4.5.1 Gender parity

A parity level below 0.95 in education completion rates indicates higher participation among the male population. A parity level above 1.05 indicates higher participation among females<sup>11</sup>.

For primary school education in the region the situation is almost equitable, with a gender parity index of 0.97. A similar index of 0.98 is obtained for the adult literacy rate.

However, equity is not present in secondary education in most of the region's countries, with female learners outnumbering males, giving a parity index of 1.08<sup>12</sup>.

The Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE)<sup>13</sup>, coordinated by the Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality Education (LLECE), shows that almost all countries of the region have differences in the learning achievements between girls and boys. Girls do better in reading, while boys do better in mathematics. The exceptions are Cuba and the Dominican Republic where girls show better results in mathematics too.

### 4.5.2 Parity issues in secondary school completion

Social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean is an ongoing problem. To date, there has been a consistently close relation between household income, children's educational achievement, and the kind of employment they will obtain based on their level of education.

Data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) shows parity indexes for the completion of upper secondary education (ISCED 3) for the 20 to 24 year-old population segment, which provides a picture of parity in the region<sup>14</sup>.

In regard to gender parity rates, countries of the region vary widely, from 0.88 to 1.42, with an average of 1.15. While the female population still suffers from an evident disadvantage in a small group of countries, in most LAC countries the opposite is true, with males at a disadvantage in terms of gender parity.

Differences related to place of residence (rural versus urban) and to ethnicity tend to be much more significant than gender differences. For example, rural populations are at a clear disadvantage, with parity indexes ranging from 0.14 to 0.67 in different countries, with a regional average of 0.44. People from indigenous groups suffer a similar disadvantage, with parity indexes that range from 0.20 to 0.84 in different countries, with a regional average of 0.58<sup>15</sup>.

The most prominent disparity occurs in regard to income levels, with very clear differences affecting

11 The parity index compares the value of a given indicator for two segments of the population. When the index has a value of one, it means that both segments have the same value for that indicator, and parity is therefore deemed to exist. A value below one reflects the disadvantage of one group, while a value greater than one indicates the opposite. Values between 0.95 and 1.05 are considered to be within parity range.

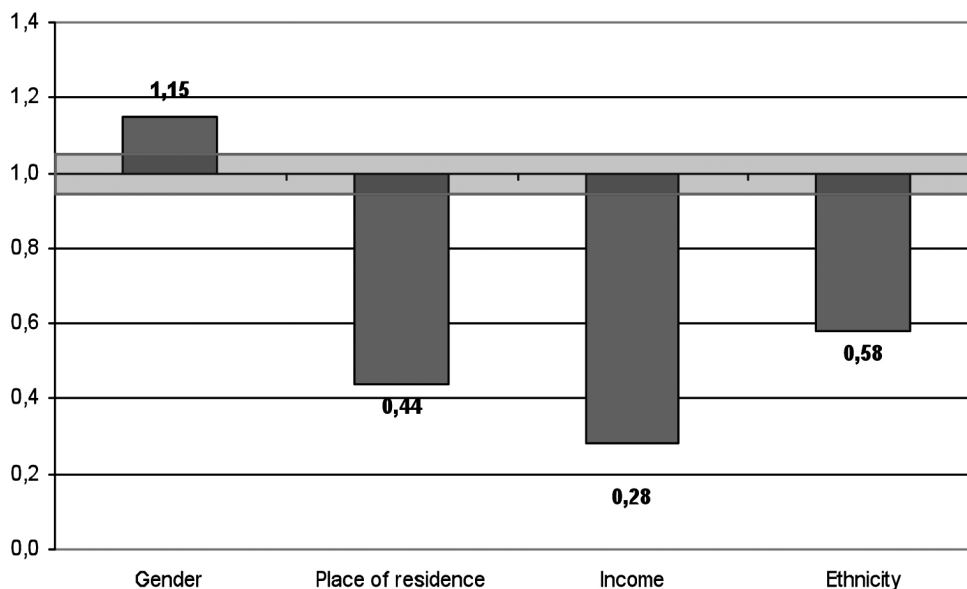
12 UNESCO. 2011. Global Monitoring Report. Regional Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean, Paris, UNESCO, p.16-19.

13 UNESCO-OREALC. 2008. Los Aprendizajes de los Estudiantes de América Latina y El Caribe. Primer reporte de los resultados del Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (SERCE). Santiago de Chile, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago.

14 UNESCO-OREALC/OAS. 2011. Educational Panorama, 2010: remaining challenges. Santiago de Chile, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago, OAS, SEP Mexico, p. 121.

15 It is important to highlight that the terms "indigenous" or "non-indigenous" are not used in an anthropological sense but in an operative way, to differentiate ethnic groups that traditionally have been at a disadvantage in accessing and completing different educational levels, and those who have been in an advantaged position, respectively.

**GRAPHIC 10:** Parity index for upper secondary education completion among adults 20- 24 years of age in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2008.



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

the low-income population in most countries of the region. Statistically, the parity index between the lowest and highest income quintiles ranges from 0.04 to 0.64 among LAC countries, with a regional average of 0.28.

Over the last twenty years, after having implemented national assessment systems, several Latin American countries joined regional and international assessment programmes. Two of these were the SERCE and PISA studies, the results of which will be presented in the following sections.

## 4.6 Improving all aspects of quality in education

Although the quality of educational systems cannot be measured by academic performance alone, learning outcomes do play a central role in evaluating the quality of education, and the findings of large scale learning assessments are usually regarded as useful proxy measures for educational quality.

### 4.6.1 Achievement in primary education – the SERCE Study

The Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality Education (LLECE) is part of the Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean, OREALC / UNESCO Santiago. Its most recent assessment was the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo, SERCE)<sup>16</sup>. The SERCE

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO-OREALC. 2008. *Los Aprendizajes de los Estudiantes de América Latina y El Caribe. Primer reporte de los resultados del Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo (SERCE)*. Santiago de Chile, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago.

study is a standardized international evaluation of achievement among primary school students in 16 Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Approximately 5,000 3rd and 6th students from 140–370 classrooms in 200 different schools are assessed in each country.

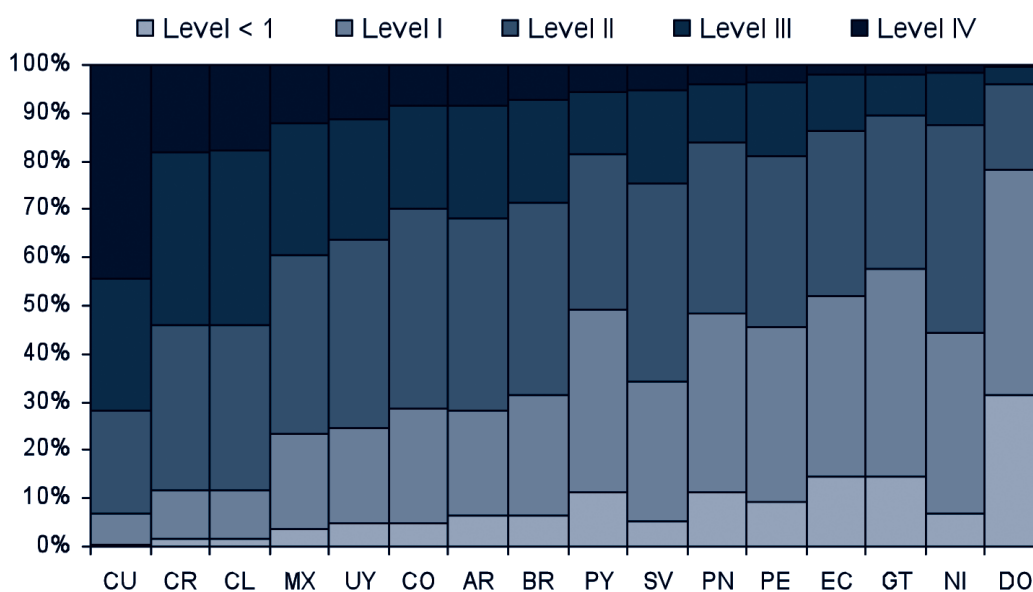
The study assessed achievement in reading and mathematics among third- and sixth-grade students. Science was also assessed for sixth-graders, in eight countries only. The study employs two kinds of tests. The first is curricular-based, focusing on knowledge areas and processes common to the region’s curricula. The second assesses skills, as defined by UNESCO, and is based on the notion that what is taught at

school must contribute positively to life beyond the schooling period.

The paragraphs below present the SERCE findings. The results show four proficiency levels that reflect students’ capabilities in each of the areas and grades evaluated. The graphs show proficiency for each country in blue. Dark blue represents the percentage of students at Level IV, while light blue represents the percentage of students who have achieved at least Level I.

On average, 36% of third-graders did not achieve Level II reading performance or above (see Graph 11), while 23.3% of the sixth grade students have not reached Level II or above in reading.

**GRAPHIC 11:** Percentage of 3rd grade students per proficiency level in Reading, 2006.



Source: UNESCO-OREALC, Primer Reporte SERCE: Los aprendizajes de los estudiantes de América Latina y el Caribe, 2008.

In mathematics, 49.2% within the third graders have not reached Level II or above, while for the sixth grade students it was 19.4% (see Graph 12).

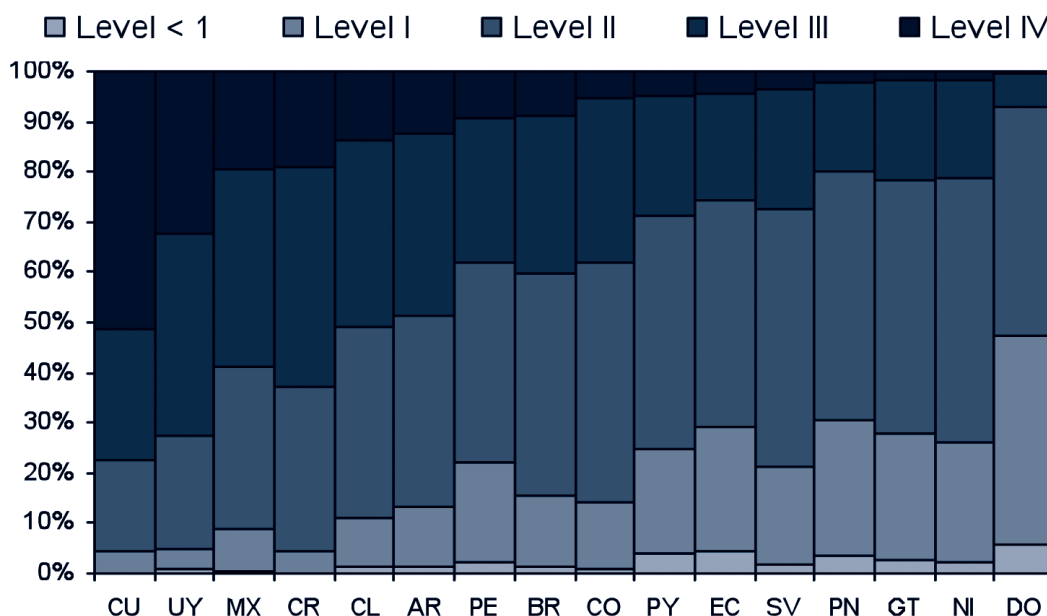
Eight countries participated in the evaluation for the sciences: Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. This test measured achievement in the sixth grade only. On average for the countries evaluated, 43.9% of the students are below Level II.

**Factors associated with learning achievement**

The SERCE provides a look at the main variables that explain student performance in the region. It is based on an analytical context-input-process-product model, which holds that schools, resources and learning are mediated by the surrounding social context<sup>17</sup>.

The factors associated with learning are presented in two groups of variables that affect learning: those related to contexts, inputs or processes of schools,

GRAPHIC 12: Percentage of 6th grade students per proficiency level in Mathematics, 2006.



Source: UNESCO-OREALC. Primer Reporte SERCE: Los aprendizajes de los estudiantes de América Latina y el Caribe, 2008.

and those related to contexts, inputs and processes of students.

School climate is the educational variable that most impacts student academic performance. Friendliness among classmates and teacher respect

for students are associated with higher achievement. The impact of this variable is greatest in sixth-grade reading and science and in third-grade mathematics, underlining the importance of harmonious, positive human relationships within schools for creating an environment that fosters learning.

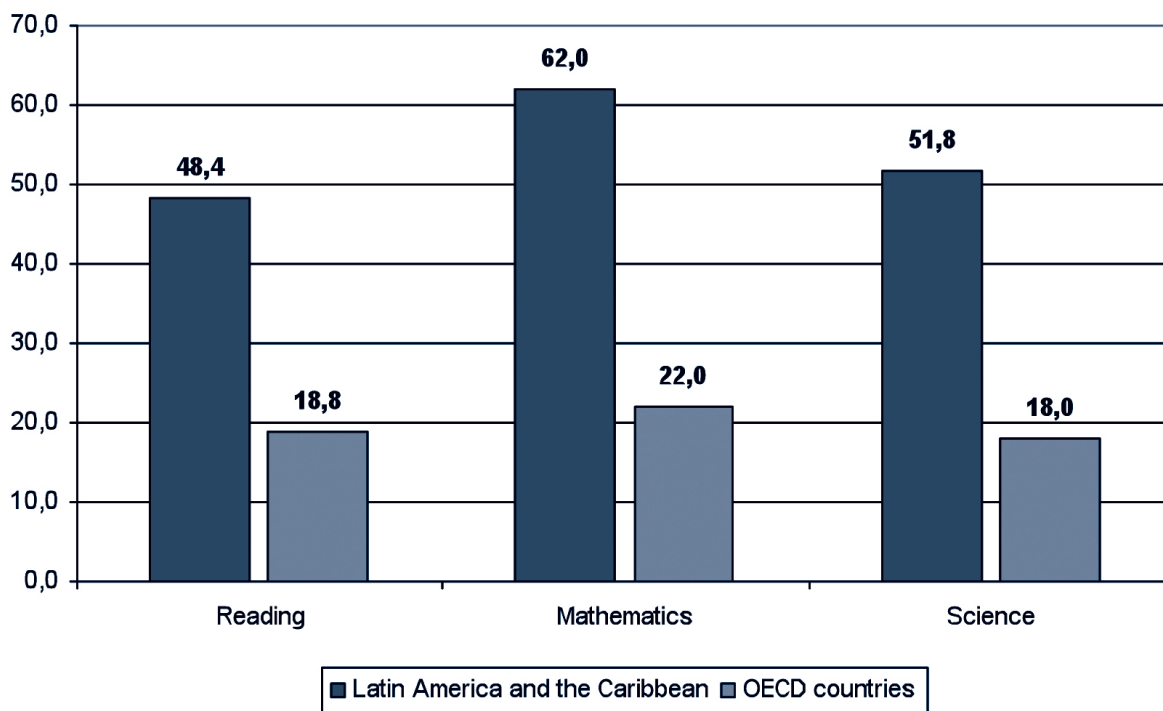
<sup>17</sup> See: UNESCO-OREALC. 2010. *Factors associated with the cognitive achievement of students in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Santiago de Chile, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago.

Context variables such as average social and cultural class, gender, speaking an indigenous language, the prevalence of child labour, the number of years of prior schooling, grade repetition and student socioeconomic and cultural level all correlate consistently with achievement. Student social, economic and cultural status is the variable that most influences learning performance. Students from families with less access to material and cultural goods, and whose parents have less schooling, tend to attain lower levels of academic achievement.

#### 4.6.2 Achievements in secondary education – the PISA Study

Eight Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay) and one Caribbean state (Trinidad & Tobago) participated in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, three more than in 2006<sup>18</sup>. The study evaluated the ‘life skills’ of 15-year-old teenagers in the domains of reading, mathematics and scientific literacy, regardless of their school year. This ‘life skills’ approach can be distinguished from the

GRAPHIC 13: Percentage of students with a low student performance level in reading, math and science



Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), data from the PISA study, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> The ‘new’ countries were Panama, Peru and Trinidad & Tobago.

curriculum-based approach, which aims at assessing learning outcomes not by age but by school grade (as is the case of the LLECE, for example). Despite the different approach, the study provides a snapshot of student performance at the secondary school level, as most members of this age group are enrolled in secondary education.

The results of the PISA 2009 study reveal that countries of the region are doing relatively poorly, overall, with all participating countries scoring below the OECD average in all areas tested. Chile, the highest-scoring country in the region, scored below countries like Russia, Turkey and Spain in all areas.

From a regional perspective, however, a more detailed picture emerges. Chile, Uruguay and Mexico are the highest scoring countries in the region overall, with Trinidad & Tobago, Colombia and Brazil following closely. Argentina, Panama and Peru are among the lowest scoring countries, with Peru and Panama in 3rd and 4th position from the bottom, respectively.

Incidentally, in all areas the order of countries within the region remains similar, with the only minor difference being in the area of mathematics, in which Uruguay has the highest overall score; in addition, Argentina seems to be doing slightly better in mathematics than in other areas. Despite these differences, the results of the PISA study 2009 indicate that there is still much work to be done to improve the quality of education in the LAC Region.

Furthermore, the PISA study reiterates the finding that the distribution of knowledge among school pupils tends to reproduce the same inequalities that appear for income distribution.

At the same time there is a proportional relationship between the effective learning outcomes measured

by the PISA study and the per student investment made by each participating country. However, it is also true that knowledge levels can be unequal among countries that spend similar amounts per pupil, indicating that the correlation between investment and learning may be strong, but it is not absolute. This points to the existence of certain margin for intervention for optimising the resources available. In other words, in most Latin American countries there is not only a lack of resources, but also a low degree of effectiveness in their management and use.

#### 4.6.3 The situation of teachers

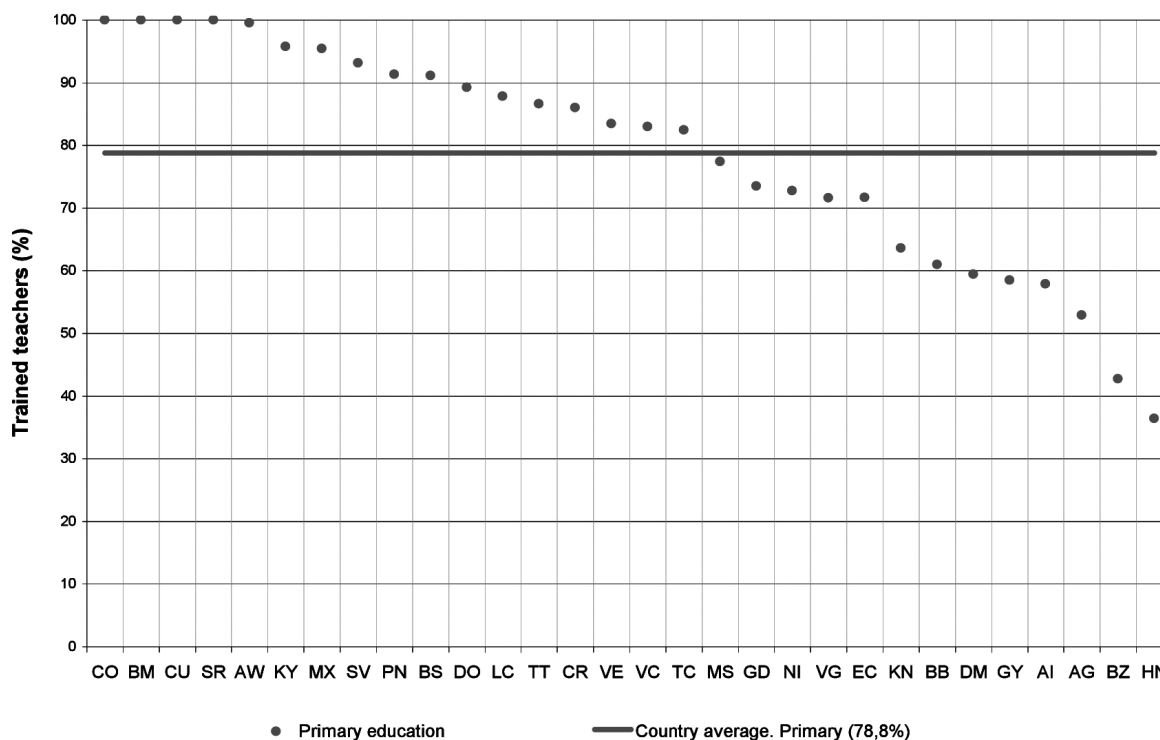
There is consensus between the countries of the region on the importance of teacher qualifications, especially in the context of the education reforms that several countries have introduced. As a result, governments have made and continue to make significant investments in both initial and in-service teacher training. The following graphs offer data on the proportion of teachers with the minimum formal teacher training (pre-service or in-service) normally required for teaching at the level indicated.

Graph 14 shows the proportion of teachers that meet national training requirements for primary education. As of 2008, the percentages ranged from 36.4% to 100% in the countries for which information was available.

On average, 78.8% of teachers in the region are trained. In ten countries, over 90% of teachers have been certified, while in two countries fewer than 50% were certified.

Graph 15 shows the percentages of teachers that meet national training requirements for secondary school. The numbers range from 29.3% to 100%, with a cross-country average of 71.4% for 2008. Seven countries stand out with over 90% of secondary teachers

GRAPHIC 14: Percentage of trained teachers in primary education, 2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

meeting training requirements while, in another four, fewer than 50% meet requirements.

The two graphs above show that, overall, less secondary school teachers meet training requirements than their primary school counterparts.

Certified teachers according to national standards should have an impact on quality education and learning outcomes. However, both the SERCE and the PISA studies show that learning achievements within the whole region are very poor, even in those countries with a high number of certified teachers.

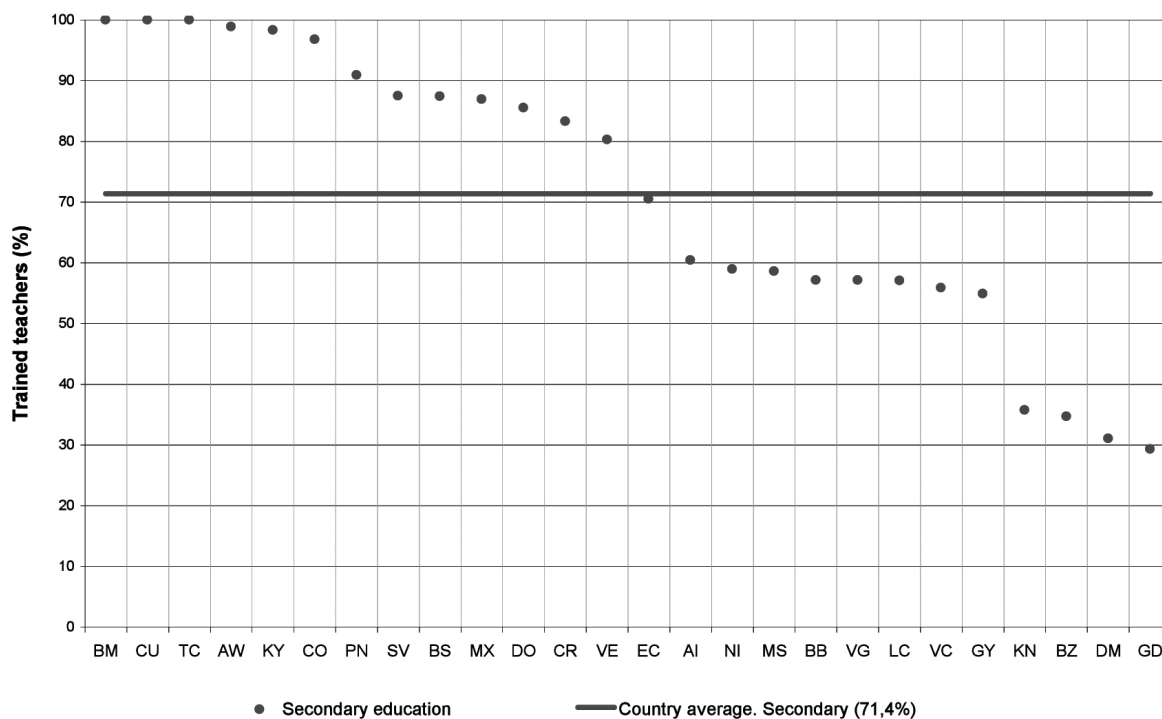
Therefore, the quality of initial and in service teacher education has to be improved, so that teachers make a difference in terms of quality education. Furthermore, the best and highest qualified teachers should be encouraged to work in those sectors of the society where quality education is mostly needed<sup>19</sup>.

There is a serious lack of solid and evidence-based information on teachers. Fostering the gathering and processing data on the issue is extremely urgent.

19 See: UNESCO-OREALC. 2010. Op.cit., p.16.



GRAPHIC 15: Percentage of trained teachers in secondary education, 2008.



Source: Database of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS).

#### 4.6.4 ICT and education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have triggered a rapid transformation in the economic, social and cultural life of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Efforts made to improve levels of access to computers and the Internet in schools in the region were primarily undertaken for secondary education. Data from the PISA Study<sup>20</sup> shows that from 2000 to 2006, for secondary students, levels of access to computers

have improved significantly. The ratio of students per computer in 2000 was 36, while it was 19 in 2006. Levels of access to the Internet also improved from 27% to 52%. However, within OECD countries only the ratio is six students per computer and 87% of secondary students have access to the World Wide Web.

Access to computers and the Internet in primary education is much lower in the region. According to information provided by the SERCE Study of 2006 only two out of five primary schools had a computer

<sup>20</sup> We refer to PISA 2006 in which six Latin American countries participated: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, México and Uruguay. Information on ICT and education from PISA 2009 will be released in June 2011.

lab. Access levels to the Internet are not known but they are supposed to be lower than the access rate to computers.

The impact of computers and Internet as educational tools does not only depend on access to them. The way students use informatics tools and the time they are exposed to them play also an important role. Studies, undertaken within the framework of PISA and SERCE, show that if the use of computers at home is primarily for electronic mail, Internet and educational programmes, it improves academic results at school. Proper use of ICTs in the classroom, carefully monitored by the teacher, can yield benefits for educational attainment, while an overuse can be associated with low academic results.

Policies concerned with the issue were mostly dedicated to create strategies and to develop actions aimed to incorporate new digital technologies in education in the region. Interventions in this area were concerned with: i) providing computer equipment and access to Internet for schools, ii) assuring training for teachers working in the ICT area as well as for regular teachers, iii) developing educational portals and providing material for curricula and transversal topics in a digital format for its use in the classroom.

In fact, there are high levels of investment in ICTs and education in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, projects on ICT in education are frequently implemented, set up and concluded without any knowledge of their impacts, which is consequently a loss of resources<sup>21</sup>. More sophisticated planning and evaluation of the introduction of ICTs in the teaching/

learning process in the classroom is therefore necessary.

Free access to quality software and open resources in the educational sector could be promoted. In this sense, the participation of the private sector is increasingly important. Working paper No. 4 elaborates further on this topic. A noticeable intervention in the LAC region concerns the Plan CEIBAL in Uruguay. In 2006, the Government of Uruguay set about to distribute one laptop to each student and teacher in the public education system. As of 2009, the objective of distributing 380.000 computers had been met. The Plan aims to reduce social inequity by reaching not only boys and girls but also their families as the computers belong to the students and can be used in and out of the school. To this end, a national programme to enhance the logistical and technological capacities for national connectivity was implemented. Presently, the Plan connects over 89% of all schools in the country i.e. 99% of all students. Furthermore, it offers connections in 250 public places and other education centres, both public and private<sup>22</sup>.

21 UNESCO-OREALC. 2010. El impacto de las TIC en la educación. Relatoria de la Conferencia Internacional de Brasilia, 26-29 abril 2010. Document prepared by Ana Elena Schalk.

22 See: UNESCO Memo of the 7th of March 2011. Subject: Global coordination of UNESCO's intersectoral initiative in the area of information and communications technologies applications in education (ICT-CFT and GCDL).

## 5. TOWARDS 2015 AND BEYOND: CHALLENGES AND COMMITMENTS TO BE RENEWED

This section outlines the most pressing problems and greatest challenges for education in the region. Persistent problems must be tackled more forcefully in any post-EFA agenda after 2015.

### Early Childhood Care and Education

The improvement of ECCE is highly important, as it affects the individual throughout life as well as his/her educational attainment. An improvement of the net enrolment rates in pre-primary education would reflect a consolidation of ECCE in the region.

Most countries have reached gender parity in pre-primary education enrolment. However, major disparities in pre-primary enrolment rates exist among countries, as well as among different socioeconomic groups and geographical locations (rural versus urban areas). That means that pre-primary education is often not available to those who need it most, on a large scale. Moreover, many countries have serious shortages of qualified pre-primary teachers.

A follow-up to EFA might go beyond the need for quality pre-primary education with high levels of parity, to include a focus on early childhood programmes for children from 0 to 3 years of age. This issue is crucial for establishing a more comprehensive approach to ECCE that prepares and accompanies children from birth to the first grade of primary education.

### Primary Education

A high percentage of children of primary school age access this level of education at some stage in their lives, with most countries in the LAC region having

net enrolment rates around 95%. However the rate, though high, has remained virtually constant over the last eight years. In addition, the net intake rate, which indicates the proportion of children that enter primary school at the theoretically appropriate age, is still lower than desired, which should be a matter of concern for the region as late entry increases the likelihood of early school leaving.

Notwithstanding these challenges, a high number of LAC countries are close to meeting universal completion of primary education (UPE). Almost a third of countries have completion rates above 95% for the youngest population segment. It should be highlighted that during the time period analysed herein, some countries with budget deficits made major advances in primary education completion rates for different generations. However, completion rates in primary education completion rates are still very uneven between countries, and the non-completion of primary education remains an important issue for many governments. This in turn has implications for meeting the second EFA goal by 2015.

Repetition of the first grade is still a problem in LAC countries. Both repetition and dropout are complex phenomena that are often related to poor quality in education. The establishment of public policies to address this problem would be well placed in any follow-up to the EFA initiative.

### Secondary Education

The majority of countries in the region made significant progress in access to secondary education in the period analysed. A third of the region's countries have reached 80% access or above education among the youngest age group or more.

The country average rose more than 7 percentage points over the last 8 years. As in primary education, the countries with low secondary school enrolment rates are those facing greater social challenges from demographic growth and dependency rates, high proportions of rural populations and relative low levels of human and economic development. Despite these challenges, some of these countries have increased their net enrolment rate in secondary education significantly.

As secondary education completion rates show, much work is still needed to promote this level of education, as, on average, little more than half of the youngest generation (20-24) finishes secondary school, and these rates are even lower among older age groups. Besides this, there are strong differences in access to and completion of secondary education among LAC countries.

The achievement of universal secondary education could therefore be included in any follow-up to the EFA initiative beyond 2015.

## Post-secondary education

Access to post-secondary education is still low in almost all countries of the region, however a comparison of enrolment rates between 2000 and 2008 shows some improvement. The achievement of lifelong education is a great challenge in the region beyond and will remain so beyond 2015. A follow-up and a more comprehensive understanding of EFA could explore the need to diversify the offer at the secondary level, create more opportunities for accessing post-secondary education and examine access to tertiary education. This is particularly important to the LAC region, where most countries are classified as MICs.

## Adult literacy

In all the countries studied, the percentage of the population deemed fully illiterate is lower in younger segments than in older population cohorts. The expansion of primary and secondary education in recent decades has lowered illiteracy rates. Gender parity has also improved recently. The main issue remains functional illiteracy and its negative impact on socio-economic growth and social stability.

## Gender parity and other equity issues

Most of the countries have achieved (or are close to achieving) gender parity in access and completion of pre-primary and primary schooling as well as literacy rates, especially in the younger populations. Nevertheless, completion rates in secondary schooling show in many countries an increasing tendency in favor of girls. All countries have improved primary education parity for place of residence, income level and ethnicity, but inequalities among certain social groups remain an important challenge. No country has achieved parity in the completion of secondary education, and major disparities exist in all age categories among the aforementioned population groups.

Many of the region's countries have high levels of economic inequality. It is therefore not surprising that major disparities exist in the completion of primary and secondary education among different income groups. There is more parity among socioeconomic groups in the younger age range than in the older, but the gaps remain extremely large. This makes it clear that the issue of equity must be included in any post-EFA educational agenda for the Latin American and Caribbean region.

## Learning achievement and quality education

Both the SERCE and PISA studies show that learning achievements in primary and secondary education in the region are low. In reading, mathematics and science, far too many children fail to achieve the minimum level required to advance socially in the future. Improving learning achievements must therefore be a priority for the future. Great disparities in learning achievement also exist among certain groups, as the associated factors of the SERCE study show. For instance, children from marginalized communities have generally lower achievement levels. This issue also should be taken into account.

The issue of teacher education and training is directly linked to learning achievements, and the number of trained teachers varies widely among LAC countries, indicating that greater efforts are needed in many countries to increase teachers' professional skills if quality education for all is to be achieved.

For secondary students, access to ICTs has improved significantly in the region in the last years. However, the levels of access remain low when compared to OECD's average. Only two out of five primary schools in the region had a computer lab according to the SERCE study of 2006. Open and free software could raise the awareness and levels of access to ICTs as well as targeted teacher education programmes (pre- and in-service) emphasizing the proper use and monitoring of ICTs in the classroom. Working papers Nos 3. and 4 elaborate this further.

ICT projects in the region are frequently designed, set up and concluded without any knowledge

of their results or impacts on the quality of education.

While quality education and learning achievements are directly linked, the concept of quality in education should include more than just academic performance. It is recommended that any follow-up to EFA engage the concept of quality of education holistically, taking into account such elements as health, security and safety, among others. Such an approach should also consider the mode of educational delivery (such as student-centred learning) and educational assessment as key elements in both education quality measurement and the quality of education itself.



## 6. ACCELERATING EFA IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

### 6.1 Emerging issues in the region: on the way to 2015 and beyond

- The Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC) will be evaluated in 2011 to establish a renewed vision and, consequently, a renewed action plan for the LAC Region.
- Regional partnerships should be strengthened and expanded to improve results, accelerate progress, protect gains and improve educational planning (UNESCO, UN agencies, Development Banks, OAS, OEI, NGOs, Foundations, Private Sector, etc.).
- A better understanding of the quality of education, its dimensions and implications will contribute to improving educational policymaking and planning across the region.
- The use and quality of evidence-based education policymaking and planning can be increased across the region through better use and follow-up of socioeconomic indicators and qualitative criteria for innovative capacity building and advocacy.
- Inequity, its ramifications and implications on social progress, remains the main issue in the LAC region. There is a strong need to assess and understand the impact of education in mitigating inequity, and to respond to the key question: what is the actual contribution of education to reduce inequity. More detailed data on equity issues in education and other social sectors is much needed to provide a solid input for sound policy making. Working paper No. 6 elaborates further on this topic.
- Teacher issues have to be solved as a key instrument to achieve EFA Goal 6, quality education. Other UN agencies e.g. ILO, could make a great contribution in this respect.
- A regional initiative on teachers, addressing instructional quality, accreditation, certification and minimum standards needs to set in place, emphasising the pivotal role of teachers in improving quality in education, and overall educational development.
- Concerning ICTs in education, a more sophisticated planning and evaluation by means of solid indicators is necessary. Two lines of action are considered: a) assessment or learning outcomes as a means to harness and understand the actual impact of ICTs in the teaching/learning process; b) design of teacher education programmes to prepare and train teachers for the introduction and monitoring of ICTs in the classroom.
- Innovative funding modalities for education could be explored through smarter financing of education in the region such as the the South-South Cooperation trend or the fact that an increasing number of MICs in the region are becoming donors in their own right. This presents interesting opportunities for sourcing additional funding for education.
- Raising the profile of 'inclusive education' could provide an umbrella for addressing a number of challenges the region is facing, including improving quality access to children of indigenous descent, rural populations and learners with special educational needs (SEN).
- School violence and armed conflict are ever increasing problems in the region. Phenomena such as armed conflicts, drug wars and the

- Central American Mara crime networks, to name only a few, negatively influence schooling and adversely affect the educational environments. As cited in the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report<sup>23</sup>, children from conflict areas are less likely to be in school and youth and adults are expected to be less literate. Violence increases inequalities in education and affects educational establishments in all sectors of our societies, especially the most vulnerable, thus putting at risk their access and accomplishment of quality education. Moreover, violence is most likely to adversely affect the education of indigenous children in the region.

## 6.2 Recommendations for policies and actions

Considering the issues mentioned above, a framework for actions to be undertaken to further improve education in the region is presented below.

### Early Childhood Care and Education

- More educational establishments for early childhood education are needed in the region, especially in rural and low-income areas. This must be addressed soonest as it is at the root of low levels of learning in the region. Evidence indicates that more and better ECCE services greatly benefit later educational stages.
- The provision of ECCE services has to go beyond pre-primary education to cover the time from birth to primary school.
- Better trained teachers and more comprehensive and inclusive curricula are needed to ensure

quality education of the youngest learners in the region.

- More information and data on ECCE is needed for effective decision-making in the region.

### Primary Education

- The issue of children who cannot access or complete primary education needs to be urgently addressed. The UIS/UNICEF joint initiative All Children in School by 2015, which focuses on the 5% of primary-school age children who are not in school, stresses the need for policies and programmes that effectively address the problem and reduce the inequalities that remain in many countries. Furthermore, available resources are not always efficiently used and no systematic analysis has been undertaken to identify bottlenecks and explain why well-intentioned policies do not always yield robust results.
- Guaranteeing timely entry to primary education is essential for adequate progress.

### Secondary Education

- Access to and completion of high quality secondary education has to be improved, in both urban and rural areas, within low-income communities and especially among learners belonging to certain ethnic groups.
- Access to post-secondary education also must be improved, especially by lowering of inequity and financial barriers. Diversification in the offer (demand and supply) to secondary education will intensify in the years ahead. Planning and management of secondary education, teacher



education and programmes for secondary education and relevant education indicators have emerged as pressing issues in the LAC region. The relevance of secondary education and its alternate, Technical/vocational education and life skills training, as well as their relationship with the world of work and Tertiary Education, are increasingly present in the educational agenda of many countries of the region.

## Inequity and education

- Inequity in LAC remains a problem that badly needs to be addressed, having education as the main contributor to mitigate it. Beyond the standard economic measurement of inequity in terms of income, inequity is to be also seen in terms of the poor access to quality social services such as health or education.
- The level of education also impacts on the household income, children's educational attainment and the type of occupation (formal or informal) that the individual will exercise. As this also affects the levels of income and livelihoods of the following generation, inequalities tend to be reproduced from one generation to next.
- Good schools, financially accessible and offering quality education duly guaranteed by the State, will effectively contribute to decreasing existing education gaps and social disparities between the lowest and highest income segments of the society, between rural and urban groups, between indigenous and non-indigenous groups. This would make schools true channels for social mobility

## Adult literacy

- As functional illiteracy remains a problem in Latin America and the Caribbean, new and more sophisticated methods of measurement must be developed for the future. In this regard, the UIS's experience with the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) could provide critical inputs for the region.

## Learning achievement and quality education

- The issue of RFA Goals 6, i.e. quality education for all, which includes improved learning achievements underpinned by higher levels of equity, has to be addressed more forcefully.
- Curricula and educational programmes have to be updated to ensure they remain relevant to student's lives and social circumstances. In an ever more pluralistic world, content planning and teaching methods have to be flexible and effectively attend students with different learning needs, desires and expectations.
- The importance of the role of the teachers in education cannot be overemphasized and is ever increasing in the region. However, data on teachers are scarce. Therefore, information systems to gather and process robust data on teacher and related issues have to be set up urgently.
- The quality of teachers is directly linked to overall quality in education. Issues such as improved pre- and in-service teacher training need to be addressed, as ways of attracting high-performing students to the teaching profession, along with

programmes to direct the best teachers to schools in marginal or vulnerable areas which are most in need of quality teaching.

- The use of ICTs and their instruction have to be improved and fostered in the region. Teacher education programmes aimed to improve teachers' skills and capacities to harness ICTs in the classroom need to be formulated. Free access to quality software and open resources should be promoted. The participation of the private sector is critical while also leaving the necessary space for the development of national educational software industries.
- School-based management and organization, infrastructure and materials are issues recognized as impacting positively on quality education, and shall therefore be generally improved.
- As the SERCE study shows, a positive social climate at school, a feeling of community, and respect for diversity all favorably affect learning outcomes. In this sense, it is important to strengthen the educational leadership and managerial capacities of school principals in order to ensure a healthy institutional atmosphere.
- Violence in schools is an ever-increasing problem in the region and threatens EFA gains and progress. Effective initiatives and policies are urgently needed to address this problem through targeted education programmes to foster a Culture of Peace and non-Violence ("Convivencia")
- Other important educational issues to be addressed concern DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction), preparedness and response for the reactivation and protection of the education systems in zones affected by calamities or disasters. This also relates

to the emerging crucial theme of Education to combat Climate Change, within the framework of the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development.







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