

Commission on Population and Development (56th session) General discussion, Monday 10 April

Statement by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Thank you Chair for giving me the opportunity to take the floor and highlight the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, which was adopted 10 years ago, in 2013, by all Latin American and Caribbean countries participating in the Regional Conference on Population and Development, a subsidiary body of the ECLAC.

The Montevideo Consensus represents the regional expression of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014. Currently, we are in the process of reviewing its implementation, on which we will report at next year's CPD.

The Montevideo Consensus consists of 10 chapters, and education is one of its areas of concern, mostly in chapter B on the "Rights, needs, responsibilities and requirements of girls, boys, adolescents and youth". There, it makes a call for universal, free, public, high-quality, and intercultural education; the prevention of pregnancy among adolescents through education; and the need for statistical data on education.

The Montevideo consensus also calls to ensure the effective implementation from early childhood of comprehensive sexuality education programmes, from a gender sensitive, and human rights perspective.

Let me also mention, M. Chair some of the findings of the analytical work conducted by the ECLAC and published in the Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, where we show that in the past 20 years, the region has made great progress in increasing the proportion of the population completing different levels of education. In most of the countries of the region, universal primary education completion was achieved around 2020. However, the trend was more mixed in secondary education, and there are many inequalities in outcomes depending on students' socioeconomic level, their urban or rural residence, their race and ethnic origin, their migratory or disability status, among other dimensions.

In the region, in 2020 the completion rate for upper secondary education on average was 70%. However, it was only 51% in the lower income quintile, compared to 89% in the richest income quintile. Upper secondary school completion was 80% in urban areas, but only 53% in rural areas. We also observe lower completion and assistance rates by Indigenous Peoples and Afrodescendants, as well as by migrant children. Persons with disabilities complete on average only 7 years of schooling, compared to 10 years for persons without disability.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, long-standing educational inequalities were revealed and deepened. School closures as a way of controlling the spread of the virus led to distance learning to ensure the continuity of learning. However, in the region a big digital divide exists in terms of access to connectivity, equipment and skills. Even if governments mitigated these inequalities by providing digital devices or subsidies for their purchase, and providing economic support to low-income households, distance learning had its limits and school attendance decreased.

Finally, let me mention that increased access to education by girls and young women in Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the region's great advances in recent decades. In fact, women's rates of completion of secondary and higher education are higher than men's.

However, advances in women's access to education have not translated into equal conditions in the labour market, where women have lower wages and lower participation rates than men's, and are especially underrepresented in the higher-productivity and most dynamic sectors of the economy, such as those related to the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Thank you very much.