



Indigenous Peoples' Right to Education

- This year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is devoted to the right to education.
- The right of indigenous peoples to education is protected by the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which in Article 14 states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."
- The right of indigenous peoples to education is also protected by a number of other international human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.
- Goal 4 of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* calls for ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.
- In spite of these instruments, the right to education has not been fully realized for most indigenous peoples, and a critical education gap exists between indigenous peoples and the general population.

A continuing struggle:

- There are an estimated 370 million indigenous people in the world, living across 90 countries. They make up less than 5 per cent of the world's population, but account for 15 per cent of the poorest. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures.
- As distinct peoples, indigenous peoples have developed their own knowledge systems, values, institutions, practices and economies, often based on sustainable management of natural resources. Likewise, indigenous peoples have their own cultural methods of transmitting knowledge.
- When states and religious denominations developed formal education for indigenous peoples, indigenous cultures, languages and practices were often ignored or discouraged.
- The education sector is a particular arena that not only mirrors and condenses the historical abuses, discrimination and marginalization suffered by indigenous peoples, but also reflects their continued struggle for equality and respect for their rights as peoples and as individuals.
- Barriers to education for indigenous students include stigmatization of indigenous identity and low self-esteem of indigenous learners; discriminatory and racist attitudes in the school environment, including in textbooks and materials and among non-indigenous students and teachers; language barriers between indigenous learners and teachers; inadequate resources and low prioritization of education for indigenous peoples, reflected in poorly trained teachers as well as lack of textbooks and resources.

- Many regions of the world lack the disaggregated data that could reveal the accurate situation of discrimination and marginalization of indigenous peoples. However, where data exist, they show consistent and persistent disparities between the indigenous and the non-indigenous population in terms of educational access, retention and achievement, in all regions of the world.

Some facts and figures:

- In Nunavut, the northernmost territory in Canada, Inuit high-school graduation rates are well below average, and only 40 per cent of all school-age indigenous children are attending school full time. (*State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Volume 3 – upcoming publication*)
- In Australia, participation of indigenous 15-19 year-olds in higher education stood at 60 per cent in 2013, well below the 80 per cent participation for all Australians in the same age group. (*State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Volume 3 – upcoming publication*)
- In the Latin America and Caribbean region, on average, 85 per cent of indigenous children attend secondary education, but only 40 per cent complete that level of education. (*State of the World's Indigenous Peoples, Volume 3 – upcoming publication*)

Recommendations:

- Efforts should be made to ensure that indigenous peoples have access to education that is culturally and linguistically appropriate and that does not aim at or result in unwanted assimilation.
- Instruction in the mother-tongue language is recommended for indigenous children, youth and adults. Where indigenous language is not the mother language (i.e. where the language is not being transmitted), language revitalization programmes should be integrated into the education system.
- The educational attainment of indigenous women and girls often lags behind that of other segments of the population. Special priority must be given to ensuring that indigenous women and girls have access to and benefit from education.
- Second chance, vocational training and adult literacy education programmes are an important element of inclusive education with many long-lasting benefits for indigenous peoples.

The International Day:

- The United Nations General Assembly in 1994 established the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples to be observed on 9 August to mark the day of the first meeting, in 1982, of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.
- Every year, 9 August is commemorated as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, with special events around the world, including at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

