

## Regional fact sheet: Latin America and the Caribbean

Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have achieved universal primary education and are now witnessing a rapid expansion of both pre-primary and secondary and tertiary education. Latin American and Caribbean countries have experimented with a particularly wide range of governance reforms, including finance equalisation schemes in Brazil, and increased school choice and competition in Chile. Their results in terms of reducing inequalities have been mixed.

### EFA progress and challenges

- Child well-being indicators - The under-five mortality rate stands at 27 deaths per 1000 under-five children (27‰), a third of the developing-country average (81‰). Yet, some countries are lagging behind, including Bolivia (61‰) and Haiti (72‰).
- Between 1999 and 2006, the number of children enrolled in pre-primary schools increased from 16 to 20 million, the gross enrolment ratio correspondingly rose from 56% to 65%. The ratio increased by more than 25 percentage points in Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago.
- In Mexico and Ecuador, successful social protection programmes giving cash transfers to poor families have been improving child health and increasing enrolments. Mexico's Oportunidades is even being copied in New York City.
- The region is close to universal primary education (UPE). Some 69 million children were enrolled in primary education in 2006; the gross enrolment ratio (GER) stood at 118% and the net enrolment ratio at 94%. Guatemala and Nicaragua caught up with the rest of the region by 2006. However, in Dominica and the Dominican Republic enrolment ratios have *declined* since 2000.
- The region accounted for only 3.5% of the world's out-of-school children (2.6 million out of school children) in 2006. Brazil is the only country with more than 500,000 out-of-school children, and is on track to achieve UPE by 2015.
- School-life expectancy is high but dropout and grade repetition remain major issues. In 2006, the median percentage of primary school students who were repeating grades was 4.1% for the region (2.9% for the Caribbean and 6.4% for Latin America) It reached 18.7% in Brazil and 20.3% in Surinam.
- Expanding secondary and tertiary education is a key concern for the region. In 2006 there were 59 million secondary students and a GER of 89% – up from 80% in 1999. In Costa Rica, Guatemala, Guyana and the B.R. Venezuela, the secondary GER increased by more than 20 percentage points over this period.
- Speaking an indigenous or non-official language remains a source of disadvantage in the region. In Bolivia, 68% of Spanish speakers aged 16 to 49 have completed some secondary education while one-third or fewer of Quechua, Aymara and Guarani speakers have done so.
- The region had 16 million tertiary students in 2006. The average tertiary gross enrolment ratio went up from 21% in 1999 to 31% in 2006, but it varies greatly, between 3% in Belize and 88% in Cuba.

- In 2000-2006, there were still some 37 million adult illiterates in the region. Brazil alone accounts for more than a third of the region's illiterates (14 million), followed by Mexico (6 million). The regional adult literacy rate went up from 87% in 1985-1994 to 91% in 2000-2006.
- Though gender parity has been reached in primary education, the under-participation of boys is a major issue for secondary and tertiary education. Particularly among disadvantaged groups, boys are more likely to leave school early to earn a living, opting for shorter secondary education programmes.
- Learning achievement remains low. In the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Guatemala half or more of grade 3 students have very low reading levels. A recent assessment in Peru found that as few as 30% of children in grade 1 and only about half in grade 2 could read simple passages from a grade 1 textbook.
- According to the EFA Development Index, 2 countries in the region have achieved EFA as a whole (Aruba, Cuba), 3 are close (Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay) and 18 countries are in an intermediate position. Only Nicaragua is considered to be far from achieving EFA.

### **National education finance**

- The share of total public expenditure on education in GNP varies between 1.2% (Bermuda) and 10.8% (Saint Kitts and Nevis), the median being 4.1%, below both the developing-country median (4.4%) and the developed-country median (5.3%).
- Between 1999 and 2006, that share increased in 11 of the 20 countries with data for both years, including Cuba, Bolivia and Mexico; it declined in 9 countries, including Argentina, Peru and Paraguay.
- At PPP US\$614 (constant 2005 dollars) in 2006, median public expenditure per primary pupil in Latin America is much higher than in poorer regions but remains well below that in North America and Western Europe (\$5,584). The highest figure is \$1,703 in Argentina, followed by Costa Rica (PPP \$1,623) and Mexico (PPP \$1,604). The lowest levels are in Bolivia (PPP \$435), Guatemala (PPP \$390) and Nicaragua (PPP \$331).

### **International aid for education**

- Latin America and the Caribbean received aid to education worth US\$785 million in 2006, more than in 2005 (US\$703 million) and than the 1999-2000 annual average (US\$592 million).
- In 2006, US\$280 million, or 36% of total aid to education (down from 45% in 1999-2000), went to basic education, amounting to only \$5 per primary school-age child. While Brazil received only US\$1 per primary school-aged child in 2006, some of the poorest countries did receive large amounts, notably Nicaragua (US\$97), Guyana (US\$52) and the Dominican Republic (US\$32).
- Aid for education targets a small number of countries: In 2006, the five largest recipients received 48% of the total share: Nicaragua (US\$113 million, including US\$81 to basic education), the Dominican Republic (US\$88 million, including US\$41 to basic education), Peru (US\$66 million), Brazil (US\$62 million) and Haiti (US\$53 million).