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Migrant and refugee children in the world today could fill half a million classrooms, according to UNESCO education report

Latin America loses 1 in 12 and the Caribbean over 1 in 2 of their high skilled people to emigration

UNESCO's 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report, *Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges not walls*, shows that the number of migrant and refugee school-age children around the world today could fill half a million classrooms, an increase of 26% since 2000.

The Report highlights countries' achievements and shortcomings in ensuring the right of migrant and refugee children to benefit from quality education, a right that serves the interests of both learners and the communities they live in.

As the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay argues, "*Learning is not a luxury. Everyone loses when the education of migrants and refugees is ignored. Education is the key to inclusion and cohesion. It is the best way to make communities stronger and more resilient.*"

It shows where this right is challenged in Latin America and the Caribbean. Unaccompanied minors are increasingly held in detention centres, where they often lack access to education. About 50,000 children from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico were stopped at the US border on average every year between 2013 and 2017. In the United States, paediatric and mental health professionals visiting family detention centres reported that education services were inadequate. In Mexico, 35,000 minors, more than half unaccompanied, were held in detention centres without organized education besides ad hoc activities with a limited education component, such as craft sessions and religious discussions

In the Dominican Republic, stateless Haitians do not fully enjoy the right to education. Primary attendance rates were 52% among children born in Haiti, 79% among those born in the Dominican Republic to immigrant parents and 82% among those born in other countries. Even when they manage to get enrolled, progressing through the system is difficult. Haitian immigrants require proof of nationality to register in the national database and sit national examinations for secondary admission. Even if they overcome those barriers, schools may ask students who have reached age 18 for a copy of their national identity card, which in practice often means they cannot graduate. Knowing they may be unable to obtain a diploma, many children disengage from education.

While Chile's 2008 Presidential Directive announced the provision of public education to all children, regardless of migration status, in reality it has been at the discretion of local government officials

Nevertheless, there are good examples of the inclusion of migrants and forcibly displaced people in education across the region. Colombia is a champion for having used its legal framework to protect the education of its internally displaced populations. In 2002, the Constitutional Court instructed municipal education authorities to treat displaced children preferentially in terms of access to education. It and other counties in region, including non-Spanish speaking countries, such as Brazil or Trinidad and Tobago, have been recently addressing the education consequences of the fastest-escalating displacement of people across borders in Latin American history, welcoming Venezuelan students alongside their students.

Argentina, helped many undocumented migrants become regular through a 2004 migration law and the subsequent Patria Grande programme, which states that '*under no circumstances shall the irregular status of an immigrant prevent his or her admission as a student to an educational institution.*'

Beneath the country level, cities also take a lead role in promoting inclusion, and educating against xenophobia. São Paulo, Brazil, launched an awareness campaign and established a Municipal Council for Migrants, an advisory group that incorporates immigrants into local political life and promotes their rights.

Bruno Covas, Mayor of Sao Paulo: *“Migration is a complex phenomenon, more complex in large cities. This is why local governments must work permanently to promote citizenship and combat discrimination. Education is essential to stimulate migrant’s socio-cultural inclusion, autonomy, and access to formal labor market. In São Paulo, migrants have their citizens’ rights recognized, having equal right to school enrollment and participation in educational projects”.*

Those emigrating are more educated than those staying behind as well. The GEM Report calculates the extent of brain drain showing that 1 in 12 of the highly skilled in Latin America and more than 1 in 2 in the Caribbean are emigrating to other countries: Guyana lost 78% of its skilled workers to emigration, Grenada lost 71%.

Some countries encourage skilled migration. Brazil has a programme, *Ciência sem Fronteiras* (Science without Borders), which has funded thousands of tertiary students to study in more than 40 countries, focusing on disciplines critical to Brazil’s growth.

Caribbean countries have also experienced high teacher emigration in recent decades, not least due to active UK and US recruitment efforts. For small island states, even small numbers of emigrating teachers can create significant shortages. Hard-to-replace mathematics, physics, science and computer science teachers the most prone to move abroad.

As elsewhere in the world, immigrants in Latin American countries, also tend to be more educated than hosts, as in Brazil, Panama and Uruguay. However, there are also exceptions, such as Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica, where 1 in 12 students are foreign.

Manos Antoninis, Director of the GEM Report said: *“Despite common political discourse, the more educated are the more likely to migrate, whether on the prospect of higher returns on their education, or because they are better able to respond to opportunities elsewhere.”*

Children of emigrants to the United States from 10 countries in Latin America had 1.4 more years of education, on average, than the children of those who had not emigrated, except in El Salvador and Mexico, rising to 3 more years among Nicaraguans and over 2 years for those from Colombia.

The Report shows a positive effect of migration on education the region in the form of remittances sent back by migrants. On average, remittances increased education spending in Latin America by 53%, rising to 66% in Guatemala and Lima in comparison to 35% in other low and middle income countries. The GEM Report calls for transaction costs for wiring remittances home to be reduced to the UN target of 3% from the current average of 7.1%, which could increase education spending around the world by US\$1billion per year.

Report recommendations:

1. Protect the right to education of migrants and displaced people
2. Include migrants and displaced people in the national education system
3. Understand and plan to meet the education needs of migrants and displaced people
4. Represent migration and displacement histories in education accurately to challenge prejudices
5. Prepare teachers of migrants and refugees to address diversity and hardship
6. Harness the potential of migrants and displaced people
7. Support education needs of migrants and displaced people in humanitarian and development aid.

For more information, please contact Kate Redman k.redman@unesco.org +33(0)671786234

Notes to editors

Visit the [#EducationOnTheMove campaign](#) page to see the stories of people on the move around the world in real time, showing their challenges, and successes in accessing an inclusive education.

Visit the Report's [electronic press kit](#) for Report materials and multi-media content, including b-roll