

## Regional fact sheet – Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean continues to lead other developing regions in progress towards Education for All. This positive average picture masks significant diversity, however, both within the region and in terms of progress on the various goals. While some countries continue to make strong gains, in others progress has stalled or even reversed on some goals. Improving education quality remains a particular challenge.

### EFA progress and challenges

- Children who suffer nutritional deprivation in the womb or malnutrition during the early years of life are at risk of developmental delays that impede later learning. In the region, 16% of children under age 5 suffered from severe or moderate stunting in 2000–2007, with country rates as high as 30% in Peru and 49% in Guatemala.
- Enrolment in pre-primary education has risen by 22% in Latin America and the Caribbean since 1999: around 20 million children enrolled in pre-school programmes in 2007. On average, 65% of children in Latin America and 74% in the Caribbean were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2007.
- Between 1999 and 2007, the average primary net enrolment ratio (NER) in Latin America and the Caribbean increased from 92% to 93%, with the large majority of countries having NERs of 90% or more.
- The number of out-of-school children in the region was just under 3 million in 2007, compared to over 3.5 million in 1999. Five percent of primary school age children were out of school in 2007, and the region accounted for 4% of the global out-of-school population. Some countries with relatively large out-of-school populations in 1999 had made significant reductions by 2007, including Guatemala, Nicaragua and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
- Latin America and the Caribbean is considered to have almost reached gender parity in enrolment in primary education. Twenty-five of the region's thirty-six countries with data were at parity in 2007. When it comes to ever enrolling in school, girls in the region are less disadvantaged than girls in other developing regions. In Brazil, for example, boys are more likely than girls never to enrol.
- There were close to 2 million out-of-school adolescents in the region in 2007, equivalent to 5% of the lower secondary school age group. Twenty-three percent of lower secondary school age adolescents were still enrolled at the primary level.
- In 2007, the regional secondary GER was nearly 89%. Country GERs ranged from less than 70% in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay, to over 100% in seven Caribbean countries and Brazil. It is the only developing region in which it is boys who are being left behind in both general secondary and technical and vocational education.
- The adult literacy rate climbed by an average of 5% between 1985–1994 and 2000–2007 to reach 91%. On average, adult literacy rates are marginally lower

among women than men in Latin America and higher among women than men in the Caribbean.

- An estimated 9% of the adult population in the region, or 36 million adults, lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills needed in everyday life. Brazil ranks eighth in the world for illiterate adult population: almost 14 million. Guatemala and Nicaragua are estimated to have illiteracy rates in excess of 20%, while in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras and Jamaica the rates are between 11% and 18%.
- The 2006 SERCE regional assessment shows that reading proficiency of primary school students varies widely across the region. Less than half of all grade 3 students in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Guatemala had more than very basic reading skills. In contrast, over 85% of students in Costa Rica and Cuba had more than basic reading skills.
- In the region, nine countries have achieved or are close to achieving the four most easily quantifiable EFA goals, sixteen countries rank in an intermediate position, and only Nicaragua is considered to be far from achieving EFA.

### **Marginalization in education**

Fourteen countries in Latin American and the Caribbean are included in a new data set on education marginalization, which highlights how poverty and gender intersect with language, ethnicity, disability and regional differences to limit the educational opportunities of millions. Significant gender gaps disadvantaging girls persist for poor households in half the countries from the region in the database, including Bolivia and Peru.

- In Bolivia, Aymara and Quechua speakers aged 17 to 22 accumulate two and four years fewer in school, respectively, than do Spanish speakers. In Guatemala, average years in school range from 6.7 for Spanish speakers to 1.8 for Q'eqchi' speakers.
- Policies to combat marginalization are making a difference. For example, despite challenges, intercultural and bilingual education in several countries such as Bolivia and Peru, and more flexible approaches to providing it, are achieving some significant positive results. Brazil's FUNDEF programme devoted 60% of its resources to recruiting and training more teachers in poorer states, which has helped reduce grade repetition and dropout.
- Experience in Latin America and the Caribbean has been at the forefront in establishing the important role of cash transfers in improving enrolment and attendance among poor and other marginalized groups.

### **National education finance**

- The percentage of national income devoted to education in 2007 varied substantially, from 1.2% in Bermuda to nearly 14% in Cuba. Between 1999 and 2007 the share of education spending in GNP rose in ten of the nineteen Latin American and Caribbean countries with data available for both years.
- The region as a whole assigns less importance to education in government budgets than do other developing regions. In 2007, the median share of national

budget allocated to education was 14.3% in Latin America and the Caribbean, compared with 20.5% in the Arab States and 17.5% in sub-Saharan Africa, for example.

### **International aid for education**

- Latin America and the Caribbean receives a relatively small share of total official development assistance, accounting for just under 7%. Brazil and Mexico are emerging aid donors. But international aid remains important for education financing in some countries, particularly the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua.
- Averaged over 2006 and 2007, total annual aid to education to Latin America and the Caribbean amounted to US\$813 million, up from US\$605 million a year in 1999 and 2000. Education accounted for 7% of total aid flows to the region in 1999 and 2000, rising to 9% in 2006 and 2007.
- However, the share of basic education in total aid to education fell by ten percentage points in Latin America and the Caribbean between 1999–2000 and 2006–2007, from 45% to 35%.