

PANEL 2

Education and Disability

In Latin America and the Caribbean, around 8 million children under the age of 14 live with disabilities. Among them, it is estimated that 7 out of 10 do not go to school and 50,000 are institutionalized (UNICEF, 2016). The barriers—both formal and non-formal—that this population encounters in education systems was the subject of the second panel of the **IV Regional Forum on Education Policy: Inclusion and Education in Post-Pandemic Times**. Here are some of the highlights of the diagnostic analyses and the recommendations of the specialists leading the panel: the researchers of the background papers of the regional edition of the 2020 GEM Report, Katharina Pfortner and Indiana Fonseca, and the specialist in educational inclusion and the rights of children with disabilities for UNICEF LACRO, Cynthia Brizuela.

LAWS AND POLICIES

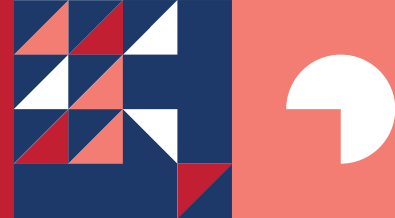
When the goal is to achieve full educational participation and equal opportunities, it is important to consider a two-way approach. On the one hand, this entails the notion of an “inclusive system” as an education system that is accessible, where teaching methods, curricula and materials are flexible and respond to the needs, interests and abilities of any student. And, on the other, it considers the notion of “reasonable accommodations,” which should focus on individual needs. This means that students have accessible conditions, equipment and materials, enabling their participation with equal opportunities.

ON AVERAGE,

12- TO 17-YEAR-OLDS
WITH DISABILITIES

were **10 percentage points less**
likely to attend school than
those without disabilities.

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LAWS IN
42% OF COUNTRIES
IN LATIN AMERICA AND
THE CARIBBEAN

PROVIDE FOR

EDUCATING STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES
IN SEPARATE SETTINGS,

AND IN 16% OF COUNTRIES
FOR EDUCATING THEM IN
INCLUSIVE SETTINGS.

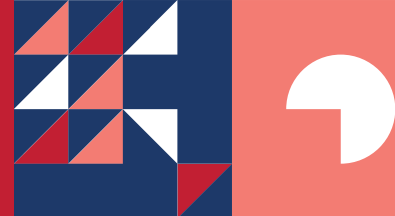
GEMR LAC 2020

It is necessary to remove barriers to inclusion so that every environment for children—schools, health facilities, public transport and more—enables access for and encourages the participation of children with disabilities alongside other children.

One of the positive aspects included in the regional edition of the 2020 GEM Report is related to the clarity of the concepts surrounding inclusive education in Nicaraguan legislation. It provides for free and equal access to education for all Nicaraguan inhabitants, where education is considered a right for all people, taking equity as a means to overcome exclusion and inequality and to establish permanence and progression in the education system. The law incorporates inclusive education by establishing that *“the school or an alternative education service shall include people with disabilities and excluded, marginalized and vulnerable social groups, especially in rural areas, without distinction of ethnicity, religion, gender or any other cause of discrimination, thus contributing to the elimination of poverty, exclusion and inequalities. The aim is to provide education for all students as individuals by reconsidering the organization and curricular proposal of the education system” (2006 General Education Act).*

Other important political advances in the region are linked to:

- 1) The adherence by all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the text of General Comment No. 9 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child that provides an interpretation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child from the perspective of children with disabilities, and the enactment of relevant national laws. In almost every country, this has posed challenges for public policy, their institutions and all the actors involved.
- 2) New national laws and new institutions created to protect the rights of children and adolescents with disabilities.



3) The adherence of all countries to the Marrakesh Treaty—the International Treaty to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled—as well as the recognition of national sign languages and their implementation in many media outlets.

4) The efforts of countries and municipalities to improve physical accessibility and accessible transport through national laws and municipal regulations.

5) There are still challenges related to accessibility—and all their implications—in an education system with inclusive practices. In view of this situation, there is an urgent need to consider the implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities across the board in all public policies, and not only in educational policies.

GOVERNANCE AND FINANCING

Nicaragua is a country with few resources; nevertheless, it promotes social investment as a priority. Despite the crisis, the government guarantees that over 50% of the general budget is allocated to social programs in the country. Such is the case of the Programa AMOR, a full-coverage national scheme on early education and the education of children with disabilities that includes rural areas. However, although funding for the Program is planned, no resources are being allocated to develop an inclusive education policy.

DATA SYSTEMS

There has been some progress in the coverage of data systems in Latin America and the Caribbean, but they are still lacking in terms of statistical data on disability.

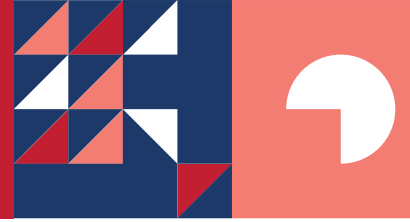
In the statistical data of the plan for Special Schools in Nicaragua, there are no records on the number of students included in the regular system, only of the students in special



AMONG LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS,

38%	53%	55%	58%
IN CHILE	IN MÉXICO	IN COLOMBIA	IN BRAZIL

REPORTED A HIGH NEED TO DEVELOP SKILLS TO TEACH STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.



education, with a 99% permanence rate. There is no downward trend, which means that there is no plan for transitioning towards inclusive education.

The education system must consider each and every student at all levels and in all schools (state, private, regular or special education schools), since the general education system is one. And, in this sense, collecting data to support planning (with the support of networks and organizations) is a decisive step to raise awareness in society and obtain government funding.

CURRICULUM, TEXTBOOKS AND ASSESSMENTS

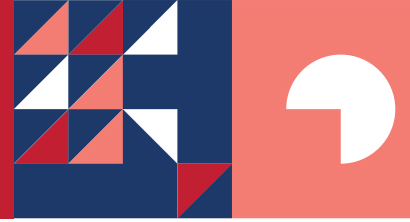
As a general framework, the gradual introduction of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its respective supports and reasonable accommodations are necessary for an inclusive education.

In Nicaragua in particular, the Centre for Educational Resources for the Blind (CRECI, acronym in Spanish) reproduces educational material using Braille, embossing and sound, and since 2012 the country also has regulations for the care of students with curriculum adaptation needs.

In the context of the pandemic, television and radio were incorporated in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru as tools in distance education, integrating accessible modalities and, in some cases, curricular adaptations of their pedagogical proposals. Other responses to the educational crisis posed by COVID-19 include the development of educational materials and resources for accessible online education for children and adolescents with disabilities, promoted by many countries in the first months of the health emergency. However, in many cases the content offered is non-curricular.

SCHOOLS

In Nicaragua, for children with disabilities, there are special education schools and regular schools with inclusive education (a modality of special education), as well as inclusive classrooms (“special” classrooms within regular schools in communities where there are no special schools).



TEACHERS, MANAGERS AND EDUCATION SUPPORT STAFF

One of the priorities of Nicaragua's 2017–2021 Education Plan is training teachers, head teachers and deputy head teachers in best teaching practices and in providing pedagogical support for primary and secondary school teachers.

The main challenge for tracking educational inclusion is monitoring the implementation and impact of training on the quality of education for students.

The Educational Resource Centres for Diversity (CREAD, acronym in Spanish) have been active since 2009 in eight of the regular schools in the Nicaraguan education system, providing information, counselling, support and training while preparing teaching materials for inclusive education centres. For sign language workshops in schools and other institutions, however, the challenge is always an extreme shortage of sign language interpreters in schools.

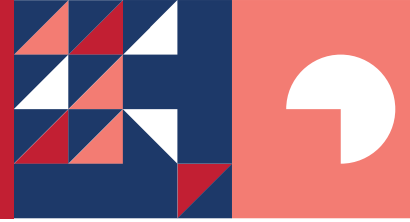
STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Families are aware of the daily challenges faced by students with disabilities. In this participatory approach, it is essential that the experience of families be leveraged as a valuable resource for the community.

A SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF THE CBM PARTNER IN NICARAGUA:

ASOPIECAD/OCN/MINSA – COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1. This nationwide endeavour serves 17 municipalities in the poorest departments of the country.
2. Participants include 21,000 people with disabilities of all ages.
3. It is funded by contributions from the national (MINSA) and local governments and from CBM, using community resources.
4. They coordinate with all stakeholders in the community (including international organisations).
5. Their objective is to promote and enforce Law 763 (on the rights of people with disabilities).



Perhaps the most important challenge in the current context is to rebuild ourselves through the lens of inclusion. This post-pandemic challenge is an opportunity to rethink the education system in conjunction with society as a whole, and this requires a paradigm shift.

It implies abandoning the traditional notion that children must be “rescued” and adopting measures to eradicate physical, cultural, economic, attitudinal, communication and mobility barriers that prevent the fulfilment of the rights of the child, including actively participating in decision-making that affects their daily life.