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Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a crossroads

Regional monitoring report SDG4 - Education 2030

Education 2030

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The Global Education 2030 Agenda

UNESCO, as the United Nations' specialized agency for education, is entrusted to lead and coordinate the Education 2030 Agenda, which is part of a global movement to eradicate poverty through 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Education, essential to achieve all of these goals, has its own dedicated Goal 4, which aims to *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."* The Education 2030 Framework for Action provides guidance for the implementation of this ambitious goal and commitments.

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Challenges for transforming education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Seven years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, this publication takes stock of the implementation of SDG4-E2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean. The report identifies challenges that can guide educational policies for the next decade.

In recent years there was a slowdown, and in some cases stagnation, in the progress of many of the educational achievements observed in the 2000-2015 period. In other indicators, there are improvements and encouraging achievements, some common to the region and others specific to some countries. Despite this, the overall balance allows us to recognize the effect of a period marked by economic difficulties, political discontinuity and the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evidence presented in this publication reinforces the urgent need to accelerate progress for the educational goals set in 2015 with more investment, social participation, dialogue and state capacities to enable improvement and the systemic transformation of education.

15
countries in the region have reduced their public spending on education since 2015.

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Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a crossroads

Regional monitoring report SDG4 - Education 2030

Prologue

Education in Latin America and the Caribbean currently faces a complex scenario. The pandemic has unleashed the largest educational crisis in the region in a hundred years. Nearly 170 million children and adolescents were affected by a massive suspension of in-person instruction, which became one of the longest school closures in the world. The crisis is not over yet, and there are already profound impacts on learning, educational exclusion, and the socio-emotional well-being of students and teachers.

The very difficult present that the region and the world are going through puts at risk the fulfillment of the commitments that the countries, gathered at the United Nations General Assembly, adopted in September 2015, when they approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The importance of an inclusive, equitable and quality vision for education was defined through Sustainable Development Goal 4.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNESCO, together with UNICEF and ECLAC, have monitored the progress of countries in meeting the goals of the SDG4-Education 2030 agenda. This report, the result of the efforts of the three institutions, provides an assessment of its implementation in the region, analyzing achievements and identifying challenges. It also responds to the mandate that emerged from the first two regional meetings of ministers of education of Latin America and the Caribbean, within the framework of this agenda, which called for the establishment of a regional monitoring mechanism, and was recently ratified in the 2022 Declaration of Buenos Aires that emerged from the third meeting.
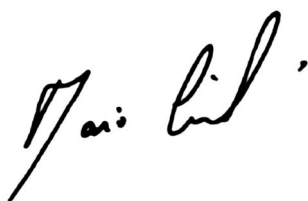
This publication reflects, with great concern, the profound educational crisis that has been manifesting itself in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years. The report warns that many of the educational achievements made by our countries, whose progress was remarkable in the early years of this century, have suffered a slowdown, or even stagnation since 2015. Compliance with the 2030 goals was not assured even before the COVID-19 pandemic, and much less so today.

Our education systems face old and new tensions in their goal of guaranteeing the right to lifelong learning for all. The next few years will be decisive for the fulfillment of the targets that have been set. The search for solutions to the crossroads of education will require urgent action and political will. The targets will not be achieved if we fail to change the direction of policies and the allocation of resources for education.

In this context, we believe that the SDG4-E2030 Regional Monitoring Report is an extremely rich resource that makes it possible to identify and measure education trends prior to the crisis, understand how countries faced the challenges imposed by the pandemic, and evaluate the conditions with which to address the urgent needs of the coming years, to promote the achievement of the goals set for 2030.

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Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) established the importance of an inclusive, equitable and quality vision for education. This Regional Report offers an assessment of its implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean between 2015 and 2021, analyzing its achievements and identifying the challenges that could guide educational policy decision-making over the next decade and help achieve the goals set for 2030.

This document represents a joint effort by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/UNESCO Santiago), the UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The report responds to the mandate of the last two Latin America and the Caribbean regional meetings of ministers of education. It is part of the commitment of the SDG-E2030 Regional Steering Committee to monitor the agreements set forth and lessons learned from the achievements made and ongoing challenges.

The report notes that the achievement of the goals set for 2030 was not clear even before the COVID-19 pandemic and is now even more uncertain given the difficult context that the region and the world are facing. In view of this, many goals will not be reached if the direction of education policies and resource allocation does not change.

The indicators show that in recent years, even before the educational crisis caused by the pandemic, there was a slowing—and in some cases even a stalling—of progress towards many of the notable educational achievements that took place during 2000 and 2015. In some indicators, this demonstrates the limits faced when reaching the most hard-to-reach populations, such as children with disabilities, residents of remote rural regions and members of poor households. The difficulties related to including this hard nucleus of educational exclusion are reflected in the stalling of access indicators. There are improvements and

encouraging achievements linked to other indicators, some of which are shared across the region and some of which are specific to certain countries. In general, we can observe the effect of a more recent period marked by economic difficulties, political discontinuity and the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This leads us to issue an urgent call to accelerate progress—through more investment, social participation, dialogue and State capacities to lead systemic improvement and transformation processes in the area of education—towards the education goals set in 2015.

This report presents a selection of data and indicators obtained from the global and thematic monitoring frameworks of SDG4,[1] along with complementary information that is comparable across countries and available for the last few years in an effort to expand on some areas of analysis. The available information allows us to consider trends between 2015 and 2019 or between 2015 and 2020, depending on each case. Table 1 presents a summary of the evolution of these indicators for Latin America and Caribbean countries. The report also presents a general overview of the region's educational and social situation and an analysis of the trends in education policy between 2015 and 2021 in the key thematic areas related to the achievement of the established goals. This policy analysis is based in a literature review and a consultation with regional experts. The pages that follow present a summary of the most important points included in each chapter of the report.

The context: Social and economic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean

The first chapter presents the main economic and social trends that can be observed in the region during this period. It addresses economic growth, the labor market, the evolution of poverty and inequality, and public spending.

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1 The SDG monitoring framework is comprised of 12 global indicators for monitoring its seven targets and three means of implementation, which are complemented by another 32 thematic indicators that expand on various areas of education. The full list of the 44 indicators is provided in the annex to the report.

The regional trends in education are developing against a global background of instability, limited economic growth, increasing inequalities and an environmental crisis that threatens the planet. In the years leading up to 2020, growth was practically zero, marking a period of stagnation that stands in contrast to the cycle of strong growth that marked the first part of the 21st century. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this social emergency and had an especially serious impact on the most vulnerable sectors of society. In 2020, Latin America and the Caribbean experienced its worst economic recession since 1900, with a drop in GDP of 6.8%.

Labor market indicators have shown adverse trends in the region since 2015, with an increase in unemployment and a deterioration in the quality of jobs. The crisis caused by the pandemic exacerbated this situation, hitting women, young people, informal workers and low-income individuals especially hard. The overwhelming departure of women from the labor market represents an 18-year setback in their levels of participation in the labor force.

The notable drop in the poverty rate observed between 2002 and 2014 was followed by a cycle of stagnation and setback beginning in 2015—the period analyzed in this report. Between 2015 and 2019, the poverty rate increased until reaching 30.5%. In 2020, 17 million more people fell into poverty due to the pandemic— compared to the previous year—bringing the total regional number of people living in poverty to 204 million. This brought the extreme poverty rate to 11.4% and the poverty rate to 33%.

Latin America and the Caribbean countries had to address challenges on various fronts in order to control the pandemic. The spread of COVID-19 and its economic and social effects were aggravated by the region's structural problems, including high levels of inequality, informal labor, a lack of social protection, poverty, and vulnerability. Along with these structural weaknesses, the prolongation of the public health crisis was combined with the slow and unequal progress of vaccination processes in the region. Estimates suggest that 28 of the region's 33 countries did not manage to vaccinate 70% of their population in 2021.

The profound social and economic inequalities that characterize Latin America and the Caribbean have a direct impact on their population through social determinants of health. As such, it is necessary to coordinate public health measures with social protection so that they jointly contain the crisis.

Access, equity and completion of early childhood education and primary and secondary education

The second chapter of this report addresses trends in access, pathways and completion of educational offerings for children and adolescents. The first key element of this section is the monitoring of the target that seeks to "ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" (SDG 4.2). By 2019, the gross early childhood education enrollment rate was 46.6% in the region and there were broad differences according to the cycles. The early childhood education coverage (from 0 to 2 years) was just 18.6%, while the gross rate of pre-primary education (age 3 to beginning of primary school) was 77.5%. The evolution of this indicator presents constant growth over the past twenty years.

Between 2015 and 2020, nearly 2.1 million children entered early childhood education development programs, a rate that was much higher than that observed during the previous five-year periods. However, beyond the progress made, it is still the case that a low percentage of the population has access to early childhood development programs: just 18.6% of children between 0 and 2 years of age. We must increase these rates of inclusion because, at the current rate, only a quarter of the population would be covered by 2030. Furthermore, the available information shows that early childhood education program attendance has been most strongly impacted by the pandemic.

At the same time, we observed a marked deceleration in the growth of pre-primary education during this period. SDG indicator 4.2.2 on participation in educational programs one year before the start of primary education shows that 5% still have no access to any stage of this educational offering. This percentage is twice as high in rural areas and among children from the poorest households. Countries continue to present vast differences in terms of coverage and progress regarding access to this level. During the period analyzed, Costa Rica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Peru and Panama stood out because of their growth.

We also observed slowing indicators regarding access to primary and secondary education between 2015 and 2020. The out-of-school rate (SDG indicator 4.1.4) for primary school dropped from 3.2% in 2015 to 2.9%

in 2020. The rate for secondary school rose from 6.1% to 6.8% during that period, and the rate for upper secondary school dropped from 22.7% to 21.3%. As a result, some 10.4 million children and young people are thought to have been excluded from access to primary and secondary education in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2019. These statistics pre-date the pandemic, and there is no question that COVID-19 increased the fragility of pathways that guarantee permanence in the education system.

The completion rate by education level (SDG indicator 4.1.2) is another key indicator because it addresses students who have moved through and completed an education level. With a stable value over time, 92.7% of the adolescent population completed primary school in 2020. The percentage of young people who complete lower and upper secondary education was 79.1% and 63.7%, respectively. Recognizing a strong deceleration in the improvement in completion of each level compared to 2000-2015 is a concerning matter. It is important to note that countries like Mexico, Costa Rica and Uruguay, which presented high levels of exclusion for upper secondary education, managed to improve during the recent period.

Despite the improvements, inequalities continue to be widespread. While 84.6% of students from the highest income quintile complete secondary education, the number drops to 44.1% for the lowest income quintiles. On the other hand, 66.6% of the urban population completes upper secondary education compared to just 46.4% in rural areas. The indigenous population presents high levels of educational exclusion. For countries that have data on this topic, 59% of indigenous people complete upper secondary education on average.

In the analysis of the longer 20-year period, it is notable that completion of lower and upper secondary education has expanded more than coverage has increased. This is connected to the fact that there are improvements in terms of pathways during the analyzed period along with the existence of policies aimed at expanding opportunities to complete educational levels other than traditional programs.

One indicator related to this trend is the percentage of children over-age for grade (SDG indicator 4.1.5). Over the past twenty years, the countries of the region managed to reduce over-age enrollment at the primary and secondary levels. This trend continued to be very marked during the period analyzed. The repetition

rate has clearly decreased in the region over the past two decades from historically very high numbers, particularly at the beginning of primary education. Repetition at that level remained stable at around 3.6% between 2015 and 2020, while the rate for secondary school continued to decrease until it reached 4.5% of students. It is important to consider that these indicators are especially concerning in Central American countries and present very low rates or an almost-zero level in the Caribbean countries.

Policies that sought to actively increase the educational inclusion of more disadvantaged populations were implemented throughout the region. Specifically, progress was made on new strategies for inclusion in early childhood education. Strong social inclusion policies centered on conditional cash transfers continued and were expanded in many countries in the region. Compensatory actions were developed to address social inequities, and innovative programs were implemented, aimed at redistribution and recognition of vulnerable sectors.

The report notes how issues such as the pandemic, disabilities and the situation of students left out of the school system have been addressed, and it presents examples for specific cases. These include comprehensive early childhood education policies, the development of new educational platforms to promote the use of technologies in a context of distance learning, and innovative experiences to protect educational pathways in various countries. These major policy efforts do not ameliorate the enormous challenges that continue to exist in the region when it comes to achieving full educational inclusion of the most disadvantaged social groups.

COVID-19 exacerbated existing problems, as did the pandemic's impact on educational exclusion. The suspension of in-person learning had a devastating effect on sectors with less at-home pedagogical support, weaker Internet connectivity and more limited access to educational materials. International agencies estimate that a significant percentage of students were left out of learning during the pandemic, and we anticipate a generalized learning loss that will have a greater impact on the most disadvantaged populations. The effects of the pandemic and suspension of in-person learning on students' mental health is an issue that generates concern and forces us to rethink educational actions in broader contexts in which learning is combined with student wellbeing.

Returning to the classroom and strengthening comprehensive programs that address educational, social and emotional situations are key challenges for the region today. This will require new efforts to fund education, the design of effective policies and the creation of updated support networks for the most at-risk sectors in education systems.

Student learning

The third chapter of this report analyzes the quality of student learning based on international standardized tests in order to monitor trends while considering a broader and more complex vision of the curriculum. The main tools used in this analysis are the results of the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Studies (Estudios Regionales Comparativos y Explicativos, ERCE) conducted by the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación, LLECE)[2] for primary school and the assessments of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for secondary school.

At the primary school level—as in other indicators analyzed in this report—there is a marked difference in the trend during the two periods. While student performance improved in all areas and years of study evaluated between the SERCE (2006) and the TERCE (2013), the assessment results remained practically stable or presented very slight changes and even a few setbacks between the TERCE (2013) and the ERCE (2019). It is troubling to see an absence of improvements in learning achievements given the years that separate the latter two assessments.

The percentage of students who reach the minimum proficiency level based on SDG indicator 4.1.1 reveals low learning achievements in the region. By 2019, the average was low for grade 3 in the evaluated countries: 54.6% in reading and 50.9% in mathematics. In other words, approximately half of the students did not achieve the expected minimum proficiency levels, which focus on initial literacy development and basic mathematics operations at that point.

The average percentage of students who achieved the minimum proficiency levels in grade 6 was 31.3% in reading and 17.2% in mathematics. This decrease compared to grade 3 reveals a very serious problem in learning progression during the final years of elementary school: less than one third of students complete primary school with the minimum competencies.

There were some improvements between 2013 and 2019 among the countries that participated in the ERCE test: Peru continued to improve while Brazil and, to a lesser extent, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador presented progress. By contrast, some countries presented clear setbacks in some areas, such as Argentina and Costa Rica in mathematics or Guatemala in reading.

Approximately half of 15-year-old students from the ten Latin American countries that participated in the 2018 PISA test achieved the minimum levels of reading competency. This proportion is slightly lower in the sciences and drops to one third for mathematics, thereby revealing lower learning levels in this area.

The results also show that the regional average did not change in the three areas between 2015 and 2018. As was observed at the primary education level, the general overview of the period shows a stalling in learning outcomes. In regard to country-specific trends, only Peru demonstrated an improvement between 2015 and 2018, and countries like Colombia and the Dominican Republic showed a decrease in learning. In the PISA participating countries, Chile continued to present the best comparative results in the region.

Based on monitoring of SDG indicator 4.1.1, the PISA results should be contextualized considering the percentage of out-of-school 15-year-olds. Even some of the countries with high achievement levels lag behind when out-of-school students are considered, which suggests that levels of exclusion are higher in those locations. For the region as a whole, assuming that the out-of-school population does not reach the minimum proficiency levels defined in the context of SDG4 monitoring, just 31% of all 15-year-olds have the minimum proficiency levels expected for reading by the end of secondary school. That number drops to just 21% in mathematics.

The analysis of the results also allows us to identify broad inequities in learning achievements within countries. Few manage to combine good results

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2 We have used the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo, TERCE) applied in 2013 and the fourth version of the ERCE, which was conducted in 2019. In cases that involve a longer-term trend, we have included the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE), which was implemented in 2006.

(compared to the regional median) with more equitable ones. For example, the cases of Costa Rica and Cuba in grade 3 and Mexico in secondary education are noteworthy in these two combined areas.

The main factor associated with learning inequities is the socio-economic level of the population. If one considers students from the lowest income quintile, only 40% achieve the minimum expected proficiency level in reading in grade 3, while that number is over 70% for the highest income quintile. These differences are very similar to those observed in secondary education and are also recognized in grade 6, with the aggravating factor that the percentages are much lower in the lowest income quintile: just 16% achieve the expected minimum proficiency level in reading, and just 9% do so in mathematics.

The worrying situation of low learning achievements in the region was aggravated by the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The region lost a high number of in-person learning days between 2020 and 2021 (and the situation continued into 2022 in some countries). This had a serious impact on learning opportunities, especially for the most disadvantaged groups. We must study the specific and cumulative impact that this situation will have on the learning pathways of the region's students in the coming years.

In short, the results of regional assessments alert us to the stalling of learning, even without considering the impact of the pandemic. This shows that the region is far from achieving the goals set for 2030 due to both low learning levels and the absence of improvement over the past five years.

In this dimension, education policies have focused on designing educational alternatives that can redefine three central pedagogical dimensions: uniformity versus diversity of students, populations and cultures; a rigid education administration model versus a flexible one that adapts to specific and changing needs; and individual performance versus a collaborative learning environment.

The source of systemic learning improvement is curricular coherence which, based on the countries with the best results in this area, covers fewer topics but communicates them in a deeper, more coherent and clearer manner. Certain curricular changes related to a greater emphasis on interdisciplinary and holistic approaches can be observed between 2015 and 2021, as well as new contents regarding education for global citizenship, sustainable development or the development of digital skills. However, some research conducted in Latin America suggests that there is still a good deal of room to improve curricular alignment and coherence.

The shift towards skills-based curricular organization and the definition of policies for curricular standards or shared foundations were convergent processes in several countries in recent years. At the same time, standardized quality assessments played a growing role as monitoring mechanisms and, in some countries, they served as new forms of curricular regulation by applying pressure to achieve results. These policies coexisted with higher levels of administrative autonomy, with more responsibility assigned based on institutions' results. Some countries also promoted secondary school organizational reforms to generate more integrated projects and extended the school day in an effort to expand learning opportunities.

The policies introduced to enhance learning were quite varied, covering numerous initiatives based on the context of each country. The pandemic generated a strong shift towards the use of digital platforms and materials that few countries had anticipated (one exception was the case of Uruguay, and the well-established Ceibal Plan). Curricular adjustments, the review of academic systems and support for student pathways also emerged, as did instruments designed for school self-assessments and other initiatives that have the potential to transform traditional learning. In that context, one of the key challenges includes how to reconsider teaching practices to enhance learning in such unequal societies characterized by a strong fragmentation in the continuity of governmental actions.

Teachers and principals

The fourth chapter focuses on teachers and the specific SDG4 target that highlights the importance of increasing the supply of qualified teachers in order to expand education systems. The report also analyzes indicators related to school principals, an important element in the pedagogical leadership of educational institutions.

Some 260,000 new teachers joined the school systems of the region between 2015 and 2019. This number follows the pace of growth of enrollment but does not improve the student-teacher ratio. The addition of teachers to school systems slowed during this period.

There was a 2.7% increase over 2015, while in previous periods there had been increases of 9.5% (2007-2011) and 4.5% (2011-2015). Overall, between 2000 and 2019, 2.4 million teachers joined the region's education system, which represents a 30% increase.

We also observed an improvement in the relative presence of teachers with the required training during the period. This trend is slight but sustained, and is part of the consistent renewal process observed over the past 20 years. The proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications (SDG 4.c.1) is about 80% in Latin America and the Caribbean, with some variations among education levels.

In regard to teachers' characteristics, the predominance of female participation in the profession remained stable, particularly at the pre-primary and primary levels.

In the majority of the countries of the region, nearly all classroom teachers and school principals have post-secondary or tertiary training, at least at the primary education level. Five countries have not managed to ensure that at least 90% of classroom teachers have training past upper secondary education. A very high percentage of Guatemalan and Nicaraguan classroom teachers and school principals have only completed secondary education.

Despite the limited data available on in-service teacher training, the ERCE complementary questionnaire shows a slight increase in in-service education opportunities for primary education teachers between 2013 and 2019. This expansion reveals a change in the type of training offered. Fewer teachers accessed higher education (dropping from 33% to 29%), and courses were offered more frequently (increasing from 26% to 33%).

School principals are key figures who can create institutional improvement projects. It is troubling to note that the limited data available that can be used to describe them reflect a setback in the percentage of principals who received specific training on educational administration or management between 2013 and 2019.

In regard to teachers' labor conditions, there was a slight decrease in the percentage of teachers with job stability, and the percentage of those who work in a single school and more weekly hours increased. The lack of comparative data on teacher salaries across the region means it is not possible to analyze this aspect, which is important to understanding how teachers are valued socially and what professional development opportunities are open to them.

In contrast to the first fifteen years of the new century, the period analyzed in this report shows a slowing—and in some cases, stalling—of policies related to quality training opportunities and improved labor conditions. The report recognizes a series of policies that have sought to generate changes in teachers' professional training and careers, particularly in countries like Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia and Peru. The reform processes that have taken place over the past two decades have had diverse political coordinates and, in several cases, generated tension with teachers' unions. During the most recent period, few countries undertook significant teaching policy reform processes. In some cases, progress was made on new curricular guidelines, scholarships, programs and assessment models for initial and continuing teacher training. However, very few countries managed to create professional careers based on merit and in-service education opportunities. Chile is one of the noteworthy cases in this regard.

In a context marked by political fragmentation and discontinuity and the serious economic crisis facing the region, achieving an integral vision of teaching that enhances its prestige and teachers' pedagogical capacities is a major challenge. The pandemic has created new challenges, and the constant adaptation to those changes was combined with the social and emotional needs of at-risk students. Facing these challenges will require a long-term vision that involves improvements in salaries, training and professional career prospects. This will contribute to make teaching a more valued profession and ensure that education professionals have the skills that they need to improve learning. The training and professional career of school principals is another key challenge for educational policies in the region.

Higher education

The fifth chapter presents an analysis of trends in higher education. The improvement in access based on monitoring of SDG indicator 4.3.2 regarding the gross enrollment rate for tertiary education is a highlight, which jumped from 49% to 54.1% between 2015 and 2020. This improvement is part of a longer cycle that managed to incorporate some 17 million students in the region into higher education over the past 20 years. However, the increase rate has slowed in recent years, as is the case with other indicators analyzed in this report. In particular, the gap between men and women has grown. Distribution was nearly equal in 2000; however,

in 2020, the gross enrollment rate for higher education was 61.7% for women and 46.8% for men.

A troubling aspect of the recent evolution in access to higher education is the increase in gaps between countries and within each of them. The five countries with the highest enrollment rate in higher education increased access by an average of eight points, while the five with the lowest indicators grew an average of one point between 2015 and 2020.

On the other hand, the gap in access based on socioeconomic level within each country has increased. In recent years, tertiary education has favored the middle and upper sectors almost exclusively. By contrast, the population's most disadvantaged groups have experienced very slight growth, which leads to greater inequality in the social distribution of accessing higher education. Some countries like Uruguay and, to a lesser extent Chile and Argentina, have greater coverage in low-income sectors, but the gap is very wide and has increased in the majority of countries in the region.

The countries of the region have developed policies with very diverse approaches in a context in which the offer of higher education has become broader and more diverse in recent years. Several countries have reinforced the State's role in higher education with new specialized politico-administrative structures, such as quality assurance agencies. The creation of new loans, scholarships and student support programs also have been important in several countries in the region. This strategy was complemented by expanded public coverage in an effort to increase access to higher education.

The pandemic has had a significant effect on higher education institutions and forced them to seek out new ways to respond to adverse contexts and budgetary restrictions. Some countries created new mechanisms to make loan payments more flexible in order to limit the effects of the crisis on students. Others sought to make technology available to allow students to engage in distance learning or developed teacher training mechanisms to help teachers adapt. The suspension effects of in-person learning were very negative, but the public health crisis has also opened up a window of opportunity in regard to digital transformation processes in higher education systems, the adoption of new pedagogies and greater international collaboration.

The challenges faced by higher education are diverse, but the importance of improving educational quality and

excellence has been emphasized, particularly in regard to encouraging graduate studies. The countries of the region have also sought to increase equity, which is reflected in better financial support mechanisms for students and the strengthening of research and its role in innovation in order to better position LAC universities in international academic networks. The connections between higher education, research, innovation and development will continue to pose challenges for the region in a context in which governments must make decisions about the strategic value of the sector for the future.

Youth and adult learning and education

The sixth chapter focuses on trends in the field of youth and adult learning and education. Based on the available information, the report analyzes the evolution of SDG indicator 4.6.2 regarding the literacy rate. The percentage of the population that is literate has grown steadily over time. In the past ten years, the number of illiterate people in the region dropped by 7.7 million. This trend was sustained during the 2015-2020 period, which is the focus on this report. However, the region continues to face the challenge of addressing the nearly 28 million young people and adults over the age of 15 who are illiterate.

It is worth noting that literacy levels for those aged 15 to 24 are close to universal, which is a reflection of the historic high levels of primary education coverage. The greatest shortfalls in this area involve rural areas, where 12.8% of the young and adult population is illiterate. This percentage has decreased in recent years, but the rate is not fast enough for universal literacy to be achieved by 2030.

For its part, SDG indicator 4.4.3 expresses the rate of educational achievement of young people and adults by educational level. Long-term trends show a constant improvement in the population's highest education level. This growth was sustained during the analyzed period. This progress is related to generational processes of increased schooling and the creation of new education programs for young people and adults.

Nonetheless, despite this improvement, marked deficits persist in regard to guaranteeing minimum educational achievements for the entire population. On average, 19% of the young and adult population of the countries analyzed did not complete primary education. In some countries, this percentage is as alarmingly high as 30% or 40%. Secondary education attainment is even more problematic. Just 44% of the young and adult

population have completed secondary education, and only 17% have completed higher education.

In regard to youth opportunities, the problematic situation of the 16.4% of young people aged 15 to 24 who neither study nor work stands out. This has remained stable over the past twenty years, which means that achieving social and educational inclusion in the region is a key challenge.

The policies implemented between 2015 and 2021 show the prevalence of consensuses, recommendations and agreements on youth and adult learning and education (YALE) during the previous years that allowed the concept of lifelong learning and the importance of youth and adult education to be recognized. Some positive trends during the period include progress on legal frameworks for the design and development of plans, programs and actions and the development of flexible modalities. This progress stands in contrast to the enormous inequities and inequalities within countries due to institutional failings, the assimilation of YALE offerings into traditional education and limited attention paid to teacher professional development and active and digital citizenship. One exception in this regard is the instrumentation of a shared global framework which supports the professionalization of adult educators (Curriculum globALE).

The key challenge for YALE in Latin America and the Caribbean is achieving a new position that makes its contribution to society visible, enhancing its sphere of action and strengthening the implementation of policies and programs. We must examine the space given to YALE as a remedial and compensatory space with limited budgetary allocations, which was aggravated by the conditions during the pandemic, which have had a greater impact in this area due to lack of access to Internet connections and digital devices.

Technical and vocational education and training

The seventh chapter refers to technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The available information allows to monitor the rate of participation of individuals aged 14 to 24 in technical and vocational education and training programs through SDG indicator 4.3.3. The rate of participation in technical and vocational programs for this population is 6.9%. That number is slightly higher than the rate observed in 2015 (6.3%), and shows very marked gender parity.

Another important aspect to monitor is access to vocational guidance in secondary education in the region. Enrollment in technical education at the upper secondary level grew steadily between 2002 and 2019, up from 14.5% to 22.4%. There was a decrease in this growth between 2015 and 2019 of just 0.5 percentage points over five years. That rate is much lower than the one observed for 2002 to 2010. Participation in lower secondary education was much lower—just 6.1% in 2019. It has grown very slightly over the past five years.

There are significant variations among countries. This opportunity is open to two out of every three secondary education students in Bolivia, but the presence of TVET is very low or almost null in several Caribbean countries.

Policy trends in this area show that new initiatives have been developed to create an integrated agenda of technical and vocational education and training actions. Some countries have created new policy guidelines or governing agencies in the sector, such as Chile, Ecuador and Peru. Several have made progress on strengthening institutional frameworks and regulations, the development of more adequate governance models, and the quality of training offerings.

However, challenges related to progress on the relevance and adequacy of the programs continue, improving the quality of learning and social recognition of TVET. In that regard, the current demands of industry and contexts require further progress with the development of training proposals that enhance innovation, employability, citizen and ecological sustainability and transferable skills.

Education system funding and governance

The eighth chapter offers an analysis of trends in education funding and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Framework for Action for the implementation of SDG4 recognizes that progress towards these goals requires an increase in education investment with a focus on the areas that present the greatest delays and deepest inequities. Recognizing specific heterogeneities and challenges for each country and context is necessary: countries should commit to bringing public education expenditure to a threshold of at least 4% to 6% of GDP or between 15% and 20% of total public expenditure, as proposed.

After a period of significant growth in education investment that coincided with a cycle of economic growth (2004-2014), the period analyzed in this report is marked by a new drop in the effort to finance

education. As *per capita* GDP growth in the countries stops—or even shows a trend towards decline— education expenditure as a percentage of GDP and total public expenditure also stops and even decreases. Investment in education increased from 3.7% to 4.6% of GDP between 2006 and 2014, but then dropped to 4.3% in 2019.

There are certain differences in the trends observed in Latin American countries and Caribbean nations. In the latter case, the effort to finance education also decreased in recent years measured in terms of education expenditure as a percentage of total public expenditure. The trends also vary by country overall in the region. During the most recent period, 18 countries increased education expenditure and 15 decreased it. Furthermore, the inequalities between countries have increased. The difference between the 10 countries with the highest and lowest levels of investment based on GDP moved from 2.7 points in 2015 to 3.3 in 2019.

Various challenges exist in terms of improving education financing based on each country's economic context and recent history. Amid the crisis of the pandemic, the first 2020 data suggest that education expenditure as a proportion of GDP increased, but this may be more an inertial effect given the abrupt drop in GDP and requires monitoring to analyze the education financing in this new situation in the coming years. The information available for 2020 reveals worrying signs regarding financial efforts in this area. Fourteen of the 22 countries for which education expenditure data is available—as a percentage of total public expenditure—are below the expected threshold of 15%.

Meeting SDG4 requires combining adequate public funding conditions and government capacities to translate those resources into consistent and systemic actions. Governance is a key axis that brings together the multiple challenges outlined in this report. Most educational policies are inviable or unsustainable without state capacities of legitimate and democratic government of education systems. The eighth section of this report reviews some recent trends in the region and opens challenges in regard to state capacities in terms of governing education.

Following a strong move towards education system management decentralization in the 1990s, the role of national States has dominated over the past two decades in managing certain strategic policies. This includes, for example, major compensation programs, curricular reforms and the creation of national educational quality assessment agencies. This trend met with certain limits in recent years resulting from the strong discontinuity and political change observed in many countries, the economic slowdown and the pandemic.

The experts consulted reported that the quality of governance and policies designed to strengthen the management capacities of the state education system was not a key topic on their countries' education policy agenda between 2015 and 2021. While there were some reforms in education management, as seen in Chile, or participatory or strategic planning processes in other countries, a more passive agenda regarding the governance of education systems dominated. By contrast, some subnational governments in countries with high levels of decentralization stood out in terms of improving the quality of governance.

One key aspect from the past few years in the area of education system governance has been innovation in the field of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), which were possible thanks to technological advances. The nominalization of students and teachers has expanded in most countries in the region, and progress has been made with the use of data to strengthen pathways and prevent students from dropping out, such as the case of Early Warning Systems. These systems are vital to providing efficiency and transparency in public education management.

The report notes that improving education funding and creating democratic education governance capacities will be key to achieving systemic improvements related to the achievement of SDG4, as they sustain long and complex education policy processes over time. Education system governance is a necessary condition for guaranteeing the quality and continuity of education policies. In these challenging times, it is important to build capacities for short- and long-term action, generating consensus and improved levels of trust among the various stakeholders of the political and educational systems.

Conclusions and challenges

The period analyzed in this Regional Report (2015-2021) presents various challenges and threats regarding the achievement of the education targets of the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean. There are major obstacles and a high degree of uncertainty to meeting the SDG4 targets stipulated by 2030, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The region's education systems face both old and

new tensions on guaranteeing the right to lifelong education for all. This overall vision of the region is complemented by a comparative perspective that shows certain inspiring paths established by systems that have achieved significant progress and noteworthy education policies.

Education in Latin America and the Caribbean is at a decisive crossroads. The distance to be covered to meet the SDG4 targets is still too great, and the journey has become more uncertain and unpredictable. It is not only important to address historic and recent failures to guarantee the right to education, particularly in regard to the poorest populations: those who live in rural areas, those who belong to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, those who are in a situation of mobility and those with disabilities. It is also necessary to address the new challenges that have arisen both locally and globally in terms of educating citizens who can ensure the survival of a planet that faces conflicts and uncertainty and the construction of societies with more equity and economic development.

This is a difficult period and we must bring together educational improvement and change based on the creation of profound consensus. Doing so entails strengthening political alliances and dialogue through processes that encourage long-term policies. State capacities and more and better education investment are key aspects for accelerating progress towards the achievement of SDG4 by 2030. The implementation of multiple actions based on a paradigm of education as a human right and decision-making that considers scientific evidence and monitoring of results will be necessary to address the challenges related to access, equity, quality and lifelong learning. Supporting teachers and schools is a key part of the journey towards better education.

The marked deceleration of educational achievements reflected in this report is a concerning sign and it was exacerbated by the pandemic. The next few years require stronger, better coordinated actions that are clearly oriented towards the targets, which seem to be getting further away in terms of the data and closer in terms of time, that have been proposed to guarantee fundamental levels of the right to education in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2030.

Table 1. Trends for indicators for monitoring SDG4-Education 2030 for 2015-2020

Number SDG	Indicator	Circa 2015	Circa 2020	2020-2015	Observations
The region's social and economic context					
—	Percentage of the population living in poverty	29.1	33.0	+3.9	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of the population living in extreme poverty	8.8	13.1	+4.4	Regional estimate
—	Central government social expenditure as % of the GDP	11.0	13.6	+2.6	Simple average for LA countries
—	Central government social expenditure as % of total public spending	51.8	55.4	+3.6	Simple average for LA countries
Access, equity and completion of early childhood education and primary and secondary education					
4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age)	93.1	95.1	+1.9	Regional estimate
4.2.4 (a)	Gross enrolment ratio in early childhood educational development	15.3	18.6	+3.3	Regional estimate
4.2.4 (b)	Gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education	74.7	77.5	+2.8	Regional estimate
4.1.4	Out-of-school rate for primary education	3.2	2.9	−0.3	Regional estimate
4.1.4	Out-of-school rate for lower secondary education	6.1	6.8	+0.7	Regional estimate
4.1.4	Out-of-school rate for upper secondary education	22.7	21.3	−1.4	Regional estimate
4.1.2	Completion rate for primary education	93.3	92.7	−0.5	Simple average countries
4.1.2	Completion rate for lower secondary education	77.3	79.1	+1.8	Simple average countries
4.1.2	Completion rate for upper secondary education	61.3	63.7	+2.4	Simple average countries
4.1.5	Percentage of children over-age for grade in primary education (2 years or more)	9.9	7.8	−2.0	Regional estimate
4.1.5	Percentage of children over-age for grade in lower secondary education (2 years or more)	15.3	13.0	−2.4	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of grade level repeaters in primary education	3.7	3.6	−0.1	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of grade level repeaters in lower secondary education	5.5	4.5	−1.0	Regional estimate
4.2.5	Number of years of free pre-primary education	1.6	1.7	+0.0	Simple average countries
4.2.5	Number of years of compulsory pre-primary education	1.1	1.1	+0.0	Simple average countries
4.1.7	Number of years of free primary and secondary education	11.2	11.1	−0.1	Simple average countries
4.1.7	Number of years of compulsory primary and secondary education	10.6	10.6	+0.0	Simple average countries
Student learning					
4.1.1 (a.i)	Percentage of children and young people in grade 3 achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading	58.5	54.6	−3.9	Simple average for LA countries
4.1.1 (a.ii)	Percentage of children and young people in grade 3 achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics	50.9	50.9	+0.0	Simple average for LA countries
4.1.1 (b.i)	Percentage of children and young people at the end of primary school achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading	27.9	30.4	+2.5	Simple average for LA countries
4.1.1 (b.ii)	Percentage of children and young people at the end of primary school achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics	15.2	17.6	+2.4	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of children and young people at the end of primary school achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in science	19.6	18.9	−0.7	Simple average for LA countries
4.1.1 (c.i)	Percentage of children and young people at the end of secondary school achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in reading	53.8	50.8	−3.0	Simple average for LA countries

Table 1. Trends for indicators for monitoring SDG4-Education 2030 for 2015-2020 (continuation)

Number SDG	Indicator	Circa 2015	Circa 2020	2020-2015	Observations
4.1.1 (c.ii)	Percentage of children and young people at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics	35.7	37.1	+1.4	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of children and young people at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in science	47.6	47.6	+0.1	Simple average for LA countries
Teachers and principals					
—	Percentage of students per teacher in pre-primary education	20.2	20.1	−0.2	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of students per teacher in primary education	21.4	20.8	−0.6	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of students per teacher in lower secondary education	18.1	18.3	+0.2	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of students per teacher in upper secondary education	14.6	13.8	−0.7	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of students per teacher in tertiary education	14.3	14.5	+0.2	Regional estimate
4.c.2	Percentage of students per trained teacher in pre-primary education	25.1	24.1	−1.0	Regional estimate
4.c.2	Percentage of students per trained teacher in primary education	26.0	25.1	−0.9	Regional estimate
4.c.2	Percentage of students per trained teacher in secondary education	19.5	20.7	+1.2	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of female instructors in pre-primary education	94.9	95.1	+0.2	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of female instructors in primary education	77.6	77.6	−0.0	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of female instructors in lower secondary education	62.9	61.4	−1.5	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of female instructors in upper secondary education	52.2	52.1	−0.1	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of female instructors in tertiary education	40.8	41.8	+1.0	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of instructors under the age of 30 in primary education	16.3	15.1	−1.2	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of principals under the age of 30 in primary education	6.4	5.2	−1.2	Simple average for LA countries
—	Average years of service in their role for primary education teachers, in years	13.4	14.3	+1.0	Simple average for LA countries
—	Average years of service in school for primary teachers, in years	7.3	7.4	+0.1	Simple average for LA countries
—	Average years of service in their role for primary education principals, in years	9.8	8.8	−1.0	Simple average for LA countries
—	Average years of service in their school for primary education principals, in years	7.1	6.9	−0.2	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of primary school principals with post-secondary training (International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 4) or higher	90.1	93.9	+3.8	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of primary school instructors with post-secondary training (ISCED 4) or higher	82.5	88.1	+5.5	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of primary school instructors who attended continuing education programs in the past two years	58.2	61.6	+3.4	Simple average for LA countries
—	Percentage of primary school instructors who attended management training in the past two years	58.9	51.7	−7.2	Simple average for LA countries
Higher education					
4.3.2	Gross enrollment rate for tertiary education	49.0	54.1	+5.2	Regional estimate
4.3.2	.... Rural	24.6	23.9	−0.7	Simple average countries
4.3.2	.... Urban	67.5	73.0	+5.5	Simple average countries

Table 1. Trends for indicators for monitoring SDG4-Education 2030 for 2015-2020 (continuation)

Number SDG	Indicator	Circa 2015	Circa 2020	2020-2015	Observations
4.3.2	.... Women	55,3	61,7	+6,4	Regional estimate
4.3.2	.... Men	42,8	46,8	+4,0	Regional estimate
4.3.2	.... I Income quintile	17,8	19,5	+1,6	Simple average countries
4.3.2	.... V Income quintile	109,3	126,0	+16,7	Simple average countries
Youth and adult learning and education					
4.3.1	Rate of participation of young people and adults in education and training programs in the past 12 months	5,2	4,4	−0,8	Simple average countries
4.4.3	Youth/adult educational attainment rates. Primary education and higher	75,9	79,2	+3,3	Simple average countries
4.4.3	Youth/adult educational attainment rates. Lower secondary education and higher	52,4	56,6	+4,2	Simple average countries
4.4.3	Youth/adult educational attainment rates. Upper secondary education and higher	39,0	44,1	+5,1	Simple average countries
4.4.3	Youth/adult educational attainment rates. Tertiary education and higher	15,6	17,2	+1,6	Simple average countries
4.6.2	Youth/adult literacy rate (15 and over)	93,1	94,5	+1,3	Regional estimate
4.6.2	Youth literacy rate (ages 15 to 24)	98,3	98,6	+0,3	Regional estimate
4.6.2	Adult literacy rate (ages 25 to 64)	93,8	95,1	+1,3	Regional estimate
4.6.2	Older adult literacy rate (ages 65 and over)	79,0	82,7	+3,8	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 who neither study nor work	17,8	16,4	−1,4	Simple average for LA countries
Technical and vocational education					
4.3.3	Rate of participation in technical and vocational education programs (ages 15 to 24)	6,4	7,1	+0,8	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of lower secondary students on programs with a vocational orientation	5,7	6,1	+0,4	Regional estimate
—	Percentage of upper secondary students on programs with a vocational orientation	21,9	22,4	+0,5	Regional estimate
Education system funding and governance					
1.a.2	Education expenditure as % of total public spending	16,1	15,4	−0,7	Simple average countries
1.a.gdp	Education expenditure as % of GDP	4,5	4,3	−0,2	Simple average countries
4.5.4	Education expenditure per student as a % of per capita GDP - pre-primary education	12,3	13,3	+0,9	Simple average countries
4.5.4	Education expenditure per student as a % of per capita GDP - primary education	14,8	15,4	+0,6	Simple average countries
4.5.4	Education expenditure per student as a % of per capita GDP -secondary education	18,0	18,2	+0,2	Simple average countries
4.5.4	Education expenditure per student as a % of per capita GDP - tertiary education	17,6	22,1	+4,5	Simple average countries

Data sources: The quantitative data used in this report and presented in this table have been selected to present the main educational trends in the region. The main sources for the analysis of indicators were: data published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, results of the assessments implemented by the Latin American Laboratory for the Evaluation of Educational Quality (LLECE), the Database of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPALSTAT) and specific processing developed by ECLAC for this study based on the Household Survey Data Bank. For more information, see the Methodological Annex, p. 210

Introduction

After a long process led and managed by member States at the United Nations General Assembly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015. This program, which stands out for the comprehensiveness of its 17 goals and its universal nature, marked particularly through Sustainable Development Goal 4, a broad agreement by the States to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Thus, the SDG4-Education 2030 Agenda sets targets ranging from early childhood to adulthood, and covers diverse topics such as literacy, relevant and effective learning, employment skills and competencies, technical and vocational education and training, sustainable development, and global citizenship.

The achievement of the 2030 targets is not guaranteed. As early as 2019, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) warned that global trends for SDG4 showed that, at the current pace, many of the proposed targets could not be met, and called for a faster implementation of the agenda and more in-depth monitoring and follow-up (UNESCO, 2019d). In the region, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) also warned about the uneven progress of SDG indicators, and in its projections to 2030 it identified difficulties in achieving some of the SDG4 targets, such as secondary education learning (Target 4.1), connectivity in schools (Target 4.a) or the availability of qualified teachers (Target 4.c) (ECLAC, 2020d).

The global health emergency brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which two years on continues to affect education systems and whose impact remains unclear, imposed new challenges on countries with regard to ensuring compliance with the agreed international goals and upholding the educational achievements of recent years. The first effects of this educational emergency are beginning to become evident. Millions of students around the world are at risk of never returning to their classrooms: the learning losses caused by school closures are vast and uneven. It is the youngest children and students belonging to the most vulnerable groups who have suffered the greatest losses (UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank, 2021). For

this reason, various international stakeholders and organizations have warned about the need to prioritize education in emergency recovery plans, in order to avoid an even deeper decline (ECLAC and UNESCO, 2020; GEMR, 2020a; United Nations, 2020).

In this context, and seven years after the adoption of the SDG4-Education 2030 Agenda, this regional report aims to assess its implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean, analyzing its achievements and identifying the challenges that could guide education policy decision-making in the next decade, thus promoting the achievement of the goals set for 2030. This is a joint effort between the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC/ UNESCO Santiago), the UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF LACRO) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

The report responds to the mandate arising from the last two regional meetings of ministers of education of Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2017, the Buenos Aires Declaration stated that "strengthening specific regional and subregional monitoring mechanisms for the region is key, and that they must take into account the specific contexts and progress towards E2030 in our countries." In 2018, the Cochabamba Agreement adopted a roadmap for implementing SDG4-Education 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean for the 2018-2021 period, defined a coordination mechanism for its implementation—headed by a Regional Steering Committee (RSC)—and called for the creation of a regional monitoring effort integrating different data sources and is aligned with other regional monitoring initiatives.

The report builds on the regional monitoring work done for the Education for All goals included in the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum, 2000). The progress and compliance status of the countries of the region in meeting these commitments were reflected in the series of reports *The State of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, the latest edition which was published in 2013. This identifies a series of challenges and key issues for the post-2015

discussion agenda (UNESCO OREALC, 2013c). The report also complements the efforts of the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEMR) by providing a contextualized look at the regional level. The GEMR was created in 2002 as an editorially independent report, hosted and published by UNESCO. The 2015 World Education Forum assigned it the mandate of tracking and reporting on the progress of education under the Sustainable Development Goals, especially as it relates to the SDG4 monitoring framework.[1]

OREALC/UNESCO Santiago, UNICEF LACRO and ECLAC propose this regional report as the central product of the regional monitoring mechanism considered in the SDG4-E2030 implementation roadmap for Latin America and the Caribbean, in the hope that it will become a key analysis element that will feed the debate among education authorities.[2]

Analysis strategy and sources of information

A two-pronged approach is used to monitor the issues proposed in the report. Firstly, it proposes following up on the evolution of a set of educational data and indicators that will enable the monitoring of the progress of the different SDG4 targets that have been set. Secondly, it proposes an analysis of regional trends in education policy, such as regulatory frameworks, program implementation, financing and governance of the systems, in order to contextualize the trends observed in the indicators and help to better understand the goals progress, stagnation, or setbacks in the current agenda.

This report focuses on the 2015-2021 period, but also considers the longer term, usually from 2000 onwards, in order to provide context and gain a perspective on what has happened since the adoption of the SDG4-E2030 Agenda. This enables the comparison between what has happened since the beginning of the century and the general trends. The pandemic

effects are also explored, interpreting the phenomenon in terms of how and in what areas it has affected the education field. These three timeframes are present and discussed throughout the report; however, the medium-term analysis and exploration of the pandemic effects are used to characterize and highlight what is happening during the period of this report.

The set of indicators selected for quantitative analysis prioritizes those included in the global and thematic monitoring frameworks of the SDG4-E2030 Agenda. These frameworks are part of the 2030 Agenda four monitoring levels which were proposed in due course in the *Synthesis Report* issued by the United Nations Secretary-General (2014). The other two levels are regional and national. The process of defining the global indicators was led by the United Nations Statistical Commission and implemented through an UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). The thematic framework development for education was led by a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on post-2015 indicators, comprised by experts from international agencies, member States, and civil society, and its proposed indicators were reflected in the Education 2030 Framework for Action. Since then, its development and implementation has been led by the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) on SDG4-E2030 indicators.[3] In addition to the global and thematic indicators, the report incorporates others that are commonly used in the region and that reflect particular dimensions of concern in the regional educational debate.

The analysis of educational policy trends is based on a literature review that followed a systematic criterion (Hart, 2001; Greenhalgh *et al.*, 2005) and focused on the period covered by this report. The absence of relevant information in some countries was extended to the immediately preceding period. Complementing this, a survey of national experts was carried out in all Latin American countries in 2021, selected on the basis of their professional career, the number and relevance of their publications, and their contributions to the field of education policy in their country. The survey was answered by 54 experts from 18 countriesIn the case of the Caribbean, due to a low

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1 The GEMR report also includes periodic regional and thematic publications. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, a regional report on inclusion and education was published in 2020, in partnership with OREALC/UNESCO Santiago and SUMMA (UNESCO, 2020e).

2 In addition, based on this report, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago, as Executive Secretariat of the Regional Steering Committee, has promoted the participatory construction of the new Regional Roadmap for the implementation of SDG4-E2030 for the period 2022-2025, which will be submitted for consideration at the next meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean.

3 The updated official list of global and thematic indicators can be found in the Annex to this report. For more information on the process of defining the global and thematic monitoring frameworks for the SDG4-E2030 Agenda, see UIS (2016a) and GEMR (2017). The output of the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) on SDG4/E2030 indicators is available at https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/.

response rate in the first survey round, we opted for a direct consultation to experts and officials and carried out by a local specialist with the support of UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean, located in Kingston (See the Annex-Methodology for more details on the expert survey).

In line with the recommendations of the Buenos Aires Declaration, the main sources of information for the indicator analysis used in this report are the UIS,[4] the GEMR[5] and the Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality in Education (*Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad Educativa*, LLECE).[6]

In addition to these UNESCO resources, there are other important regional and global sources for education: the ECLAC database (CEPALSTAT), the ECLAC database of household surveys (BADEHOG), the UNICEF Datawarehouse, mainly linked to the results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and the Ibero-American Network of Higher Education Indicators (*Red ÍndicES*) of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI). In the field of learning, the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—in which ten countries in the region regularly participate—are also used.

The report focuses on the use of internationally comparable data and indicators, and therefore does not use national statistics which, although being official country data, cannot guarantee a correct comparison

(see the methodological annex for more details on data sources and processing criteria.)

Despite global and regional efforts to produce comparative data on education, there is still an important group of targets, dimensions, and disaggregations that are part of SDG4, for which there is a lack of statistical information for regional monitoring, or which do not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the different topics. Data availability for Latin America and the Caribbean in the global and thematic SDG4 indicators has not improved since 2015, and insufficient disaggregated and comparable statistics are produced, especially when analyzing the situation of indigenous and Afro descendant peoples, people with disabilities, in a situation of mobility, or with diverse sexual orientations. Moreover, there is a marked absence of data on topics outside the classic information system survey dimensions, such as global citizenship or sustainable development education, digital skills development, or bullying (Vera, Scasso and Yañez, 2022). This situation, and the limitation it entails for regional education monitoring, is a warning signal that should motivate national and regional stakeholders to continue their efforts to improve the production of education statistics and their reporting on the aforementioned regional and global monitoring initiatives.

Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows: Chapter 1 analyzes the social and economic context in Latin America and the Caribbean during the studied period. To this end, it addresses economic growth and the labor situation, including poverty and inequality, and the evolution of public and social expenditure. This chapter concludes by outlining the health crisis situation in the region.

The following six chapters analyze key issues for education in Latin America and the Caribbean: access, equity, and completion in early childhood, primary, and secondary education; student learning; teachers and principals; higher education; youth and adult learning and education; and technical and vocational education and training. Each of these chapters links the analyzed topic to the SDG4-E2030 Agenda targets, providing a follow-up of the indicators selected for monitoring, and analyzing education policy trends.

Chapter 8, following a similar structure, addresses the education system funding and governance. This chapter has the dual purpose of analyzing the flow of resources behavior allocated by countries to education and

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4 The UNESCO Institute for Statistics is the official source of comparable cross-country data on education. It is tasked with producing international indicators for educational monitoring using information available through its annual education surveys and other data sources to ensure international comparability. In addition, the UIS is mandated to lead data collection activities, develop indicators, and strengthen national education information systems (UNESCO, 2015a).

5 The Global Education Monitoring Report is the mechanism for monitoring and reporting on SDG4 and education topics in other SDGs. It also reports on the implementation of national and international Education 2030 strategies to help hold all relevant partners accountable for their commitments (UNESCO, 2015a).

6 LLECE is part of OREALC/UNESCO Santiago and, with the participation of 18 countries, contributes to monitoring regional student learning progress. It is a space for exchange, collaboration, and innovation to offer information through its Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo, ERCE). The ERCE tests and questionnaires are administered to third and sixth grade students. Since its inception, four regional studies have been implemented in 1997, 2006, 2013, and 2019.

studying how education systems are managed in terms of their governance.

Every chapter includes highlighted experiences at the national and regional level in the form of boxes. These practices were detected thanks to the consulted experts and are developed from a literature review. Boxes exploring the specific impacts of COVID-19 in different areas are also included, which are complementary to the main text.

The final chapter concludes with a summary of the trends presented throughout the report, provides an overview highlighting the stagnation of a group of key education indicators for Latin America and the Caribbean in the years since the approval of the 2030 Agenda, and invites reflection on the future through ten challenges addressing this stagnation and the crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Context: Social and economic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean

Introduction

The social and economic context faced by the Latin American and Caribbean region in the period analyzed in this document (2015-2021) is relevant to understanding the opportunities for progress and obstacles faced by education systems. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a comprehensive development agenda, with goals that are universal and indivisible. This agenda is based on the holistic nature of the three dimensions of sustainable development: the social, economic, and environmental dimensions, so that progress toward its fulfillment presupposes achievements in each of them. Some of the social problems faced by the region are rooted in economic and environmental factors. Likewise, growth and increased productivity, as well as environmental sustainability, depend on the social context. Thus, actions must be considered within the framework of the 2030 Agenda that address this interrelationship and interdependence, anticipating the consequences that may occur in the three spheres and seeking synergies among them (ECLAC, 2019).

Therefore, in order to make progress with achieving the SDG4 targets, efforts must be coordinated and integrated with other development dimensions in order to break down those critical hubs of exclusion that hinder access to wellbeing for significant population groups in the region. The 2030 Agenda puts equality at the center of its motto of "leaving no one behind." This entails going beyond studying and making the average progress indicators visible and taking a closer look at the population as a whole, especially those groups who have historically faced greater lags and situations of vulnerability. It, therefore, implies considering each and every person in their diversity of situations as a subject of rights. Latin America and the Caribbean is the most unequal region in the world and the costs associated with inequality impact not only the lives of the people who live in it, but society as a whole.

Since 2010, ECLAC has advocated the importance of moving forward in reducing inequality in the region,

under a broad concept of *equality*—that goes beyond equality of means (income, property, financial and productive assets)—to equality of rights, capacities, and recognition. This implies approaching it from a multidimensional perspective, which includes its economic, social, political, and cultural characteristics. At the same time, it considers the different foundations underlying the social inequality that characterizes the Latin American and Caribbean region that impacts social, political, and economic relations, manifesting itself in the violation of the universality of rights principle. There are a series of mechanisms on structural and institutional discrimination, stratification, and hierarchical organization that influence the permanence and reproduction of inequality. The interaction and accumulation of these different levels and types of inequality generate a complex scheme of social relations where overlapping and combined discriminations are manifested in gaps of autonomy, wellbeing, and power. These are also presented as inequalities in treatment, different opportunities, and marked differences in the exercise of rights. This relationship scheme translates into stereotypes and differences that are rooted in the very institutions that reproduce them (ECLAC, 2017a).

Currently, the region is experiencing a marked deterioration in living conditions, which can be seen in the increase of unemployment, poverty, and inequalities due to structural problems of social and economic nature, as well as to the pandemic. This report will show how the different foundations of inequality are also reflected in the diversity of indicators associated with the progress of the SDG4 targets in the region. It is important to make these visible in order to direct actions to ensuring universal access to the quality education right and, at the same time, are sensitive to differences. Education is a fundamental element for countries' development, so investing in it means investing in people, investing in the most fundamental asset available to the countries of the region in order to address inequality and achieve higher levels of development, among other factors.

Economic growth and the labor market

Before the arrival of COVID-19, ECLAC had already stated that the global economy was going through three structural crises: instability and low growth, growing inequality, and an environmental crisis threatening the sustainability of life on the planet. This calls for the implementation of a new style of development to overcome these threats. These three crises are interrelated and they share a political economy that has emphasized a relationship between the State, the market, society, and the environment, and that has continually limited the capacity of governments to direct the action of markets in favor of development. This has caused increasing imbalances, heightened political and geopolitical tensions, thereby increasing conflicts and weakening both the multilateral system and the legitimacy of democracies at the domestic level (ECLAC, 2020c).

In 2020, the region experienced the most important crisis of the last century due to the situation caused by the pandemic, with a 6.8% drop in gross domestic product (GDP) and the worst economic performance of any region in the world. The growth trend in the Latin American and Caribbean region had slowed prior to the crisis. Between 2014 and 2019, the region grew at an average rate of 0.3%, making it one of the worst growth periods recorded, with levels similar to those of World War I and the Great Depression (**Figure 1.1**).

The sharp fall in GDP during 2020, coupled with the weak growth of the previous period, resulted in a historic drop in employment and an unprecedented rise in unemployment, along with a significant increase in poverty and inequality. These issues have, in turn, further exacerbated the region's structural problems (ECLAC and PAHO, 2021). ECLAC estimated a growth rate of 6.2% for 2021 and forecast an average growth rate of 2.1% for the region in 2022 (ECLAC, 2022a).

The region contracted an average of 7.6% of per-capita GDP in 2020, with high heterogeneity among countries, according to estimates presented by ECLAC in the "Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2021" (ECLAC, 2022a). The drop was less than 5% of per-capita GDP in Paraguay, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Haiti, Brazil, and Costa Rica. Meanwhile, the fall in GDP was between 10% and 20% in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Honduras, Argentina, Cuba, Peru, and Panama. In the remaining seven countries, the decrease in per-capita GDP was between 5% and 10% in 2020 (**Figure 1.2**) (ECLAC, 2022a).

The labor market indicators have followed a negative trend since 2015, resulting in a gradual increase in unemployment and a worsening of job quality (ECLAC, 2019, 2021e; ECLAC and ILO, 2020; Weller, 2020). The generation of decent work opportunities allows economic growth and productivity to cause greater social inclusion, lower inequality, and greater

Figure 1.1. Percentage of annual GDP growth rate. Latin America and the Caribbean 2015-2022
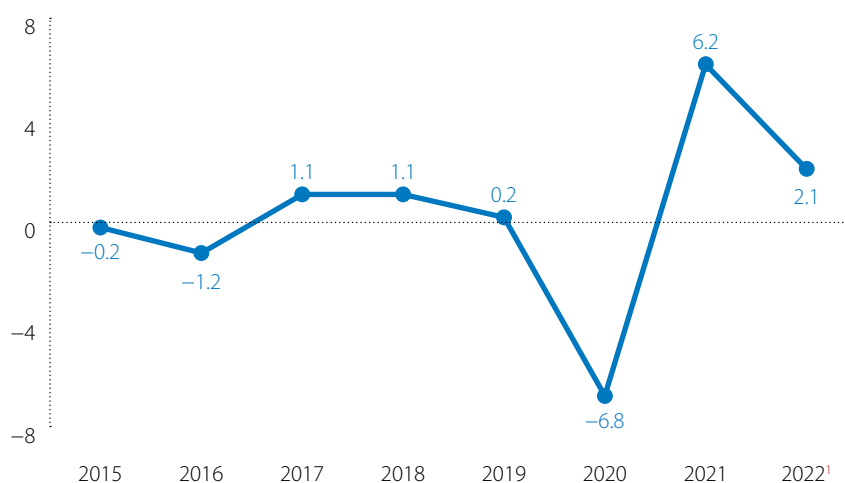
1. Forecast presented in ECLAC (2021a).

Data sources: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). CEPALSTAT statistical databases and publications. https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/ and Bolt and Zanden (2020). https://www.rug.nl/ggdc/historicaldevelopment/maddison/releases/maddison-project-database-2020?lang=en

Figure 1.2. Percent change in per-capita GDP at constant prices by country. Latin American countries. 2020

Country	Value
Panama	−19.2
Peru	−12.2
Cuba	−10.9
Argentina	−10.7
Honduras	−10.4
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	−10.1
Ecuador	−9.2
Mexico	−9.1
El Salvador	−8.4
Colombia	−7.8
Dominican Republic	−7.7
Latin America	−7.6
Chile	−6.6
Uruguay	−6.2
Costa Rica	−4.9
Brazil	−4.6
Haiti	−4.5
Guatemala	−3.4
Nicaragua	−3.1
Paraguay	−1.9
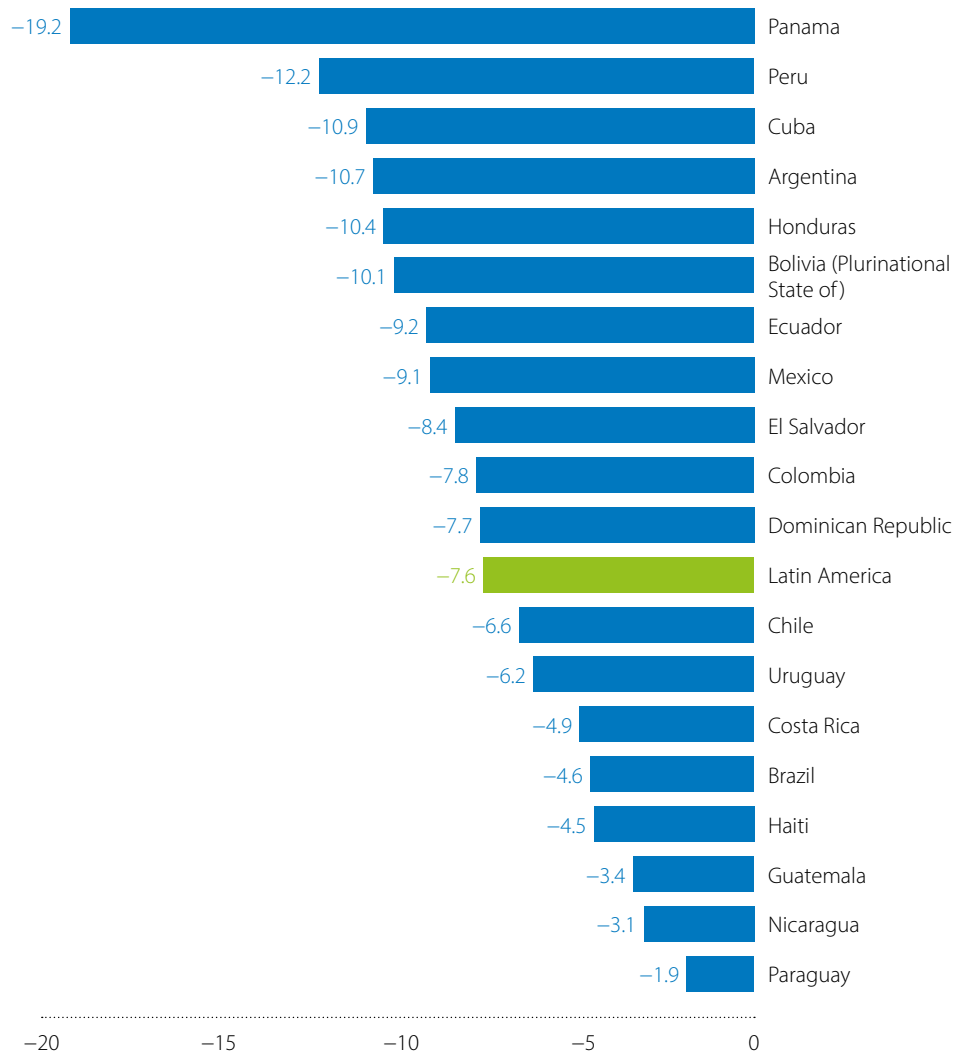
Note: The Latin American average includes Cuba and Haiti.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). CEPALSTAT statistical databases and publications. https://statistics. cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/ and ECLAC (2022a).

wellbeing for people.[1] Conversely, the absence of these opportunities is a determinant of poverty and social inequalities (ECLAC, 2019).

Labor markets in Latin America and the Caribbean are characterized by structures and dynamics with little capacity for generating productive employment and decent work opportunities, as well as marked inequalities reflecting the central themes of the social inequality matrix (gender, race, ethnicity, age, and territory, among others). They are the link between a very heterogeneous productive structure, characterized by a high proportion of low-productivity sectors and broad inequality of household income. This leads to a very significant proportion of the population working in low-productivity sectors, which reproduces income inequality and inequality of access to the social protection systems associated with formal jobs, and results in unequal access to labor regulation (ECLAC, 2019).

Since 2020, the social and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic generated an unprecedented impact on the labor market, with significant drops in employment and participation, which in turn

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1 *Decent work* is work that ensures an income of at least the minimum levels defined by national regulations and that is above the poverty line, It also includes protection of labor rights (including freedom of union organization and collective bargaining) and access to social protection; adequate working hours; and is performed in safe working environments that are free from all forms of discrimination.

triggered historic increases in unemployment. This was a greater impact for women, young people, and workers in the informal and low-income sectors (ECLAC, 2021d). Estimates by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2021) suggest that the equivalent of more than 30 million jobs were lost during 2020 due to unemployment, an exodus of people from the workforce, or a decrease in the number of hours worked. This was one of the most affected regions in terms of labor. The exit of women from the labor market was particularly significant, reaching 2002 levels. The recovery of the female participation rate during 2021 was expected to reach 50%—a figure similar to that recorded for 2016—while for men, participation rates were forecast to reach 73.5% (ECLAC, 2022a).

Evolution of poverty and inequality

The 2030 Agenda proposes the eradication of poverty in all its forms as one of its main global targets and as a prerequisite for progress toward sustainable development. Poverty, understood from a multidimensional perspective, implies being deprived of opportunities and effective participation in society, and is one of the most critical manifestations of the violation of rights. The interrelationship between multiple shortfalls in wellbeing and the cumulative effects of poverty and extreme poverty impacts people's potential to develop throughout their lives. What is more, it

also leads to their replication from one generation to the next, thereby threatening the foundations of sustainable and inclusive economic and social development. Making progress with the eradication of poverty and extreme poverty is therefore critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda (ECLAC, 2019).

According to ECLAC estimates, between 2002 and 2014, poverty and extreme poverty decreased considerably in the region; however, that trend began to reverse as of 2015, when both showed slight successive increases. The impact of the pandemic on the conditions affecting the population's wellbeing comes in addition to this gradual increase in poverty and the slowdown in the rate of reduction of inequality that had been evident in the years prior to the crisis (ECLAC, 2022c). Due to the pandemic, and despite the emergency social protection measures adopted by the countries of the region to mitigate and curb its effects, poverty and extreme poverty increased to levels that had not been seen in the entire period analyzed. In 2020, the extreme poverty rate reached 11.4% of the population and the poverty rate 33% (**Figure 1.3**). This means that the total number of poor people amounted to 204 million, 17 million more than the previous year.

During 2021, the poverty rate in the Latin American region reached 32.1% of the population, with 13.8% living in extreme poverty. This means that the number

Figure 1.3. People living in poverty and extreme poverty in percentages and millions of people. Latin American countries. 2015, 2018-2021
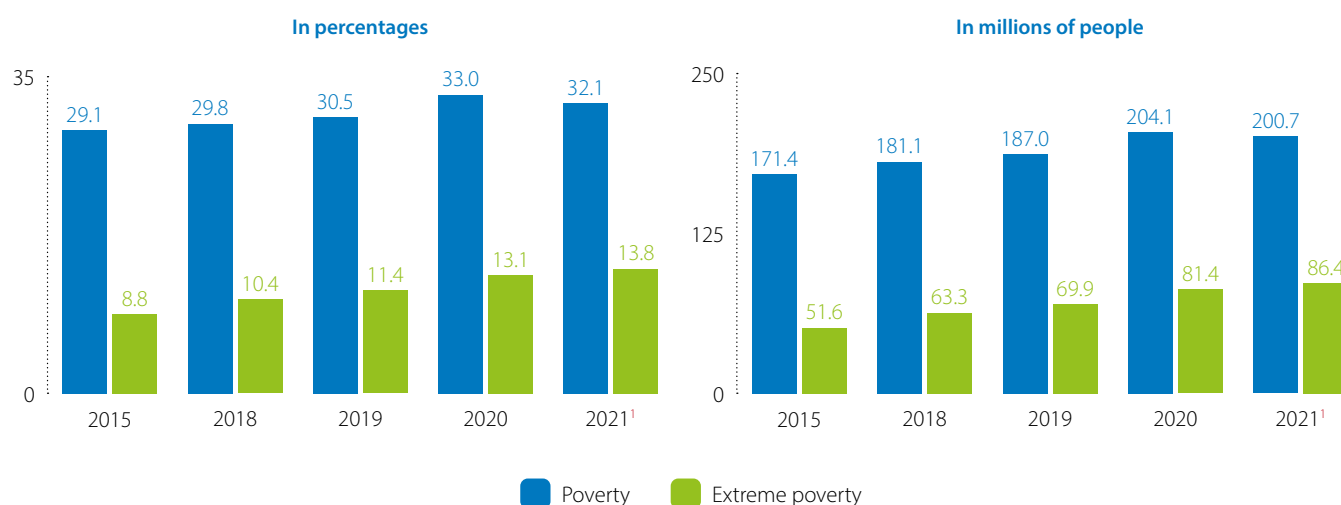
1. The values for 2021 correspond to projections.

Note: The estimates correspond to weighted averages of data from Argentina. the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Brazil. Chile. Colombia. Costa Rica. the Dominican Republic. Ecuador. El Salvador. Guatemala. Honduras. Mexico. Nicaragua. Panama. Paraguay. Peru. Uruguay. and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

of people living in extreme poverty increased from 81 million to 86 million in 2020, and the total number of people living in poverty decreased slightly from 204 million to 201 million. These levels of poverty and extreme poverty remain higher than those of 2019, both in relative and absolute terms, despite the economic rebound during 2021. This reveals that, in social terms, the crisis is ongoing and it highlights the vulnerability of a significant proportion of the middle-income population, which has low non-contributory social protection coverage (ECLAC, 2022c).

As of 2020, the social and economic effects of the health crisis have brought about a generalized impoverishment of most of the Latin American population and have generated downward mobility in the socioeconomic strata. The slight economic recovery in 2021 was not enough to reverse the full social impact of the crisis and recover the level of wellbeing enjoyed by the population in 2019. Thus, the "Social Panorama of Latin America 2021" estimates a higher proportion of the population in the low and lower-middle income strata, with a decrease in the proportion of the population in the upper-middle- and high-income strata in the region (ECLAC, 2022c).

Despite the reduction in income inequality over the last decade, mainly attributable to public policies, Latin America remains the most unequal region in the world in terms of the Gini coefficient. This is due to multiple factors, including the segmentation of the productive structure that has historically characterized the region, as well as various institutional inclusion and exclusion mechanisms that have their roots in the culture of privilege and promote the reproduction of inequality over time. One of the main expressions of inequality is income concentration, which also determines differential opportunities for access to essential goods and services and influences people's ability to develop to their full potential and achieve greater wellbeing (ECLAC, 2022c). As early as 2015, stagnation in the reduction of inequality compared to previous periods was already being seen (**Figure 1.4**). In 2021, the downward trend observed since 2002 was broken and income inequality levels in the region increased. The Gini coefficient increased by a regional average of 0.7 between 2019 and 2020.

The deterioration in the distributional situation in 2020 is linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The factor that had the greatest impact on increasing inequality levels was the decrease in income from salaried labor in the lowest-income quintiles. Self-employment income declined at a lower level than wage income in the lowest-income quintiles, which helped making the losses in labor income for these groups smaller than they might have been. Cash transfers, particularly those implemented by governments to address the emergency, played a critical role in preventing a further increase in inequality (ECLAC, 2022c).

Figure 1.4. Change in the Gini coefficient expressed in annualized rates of change (in percentage points). Latin American countries. Selected periods between 2002 and 2020
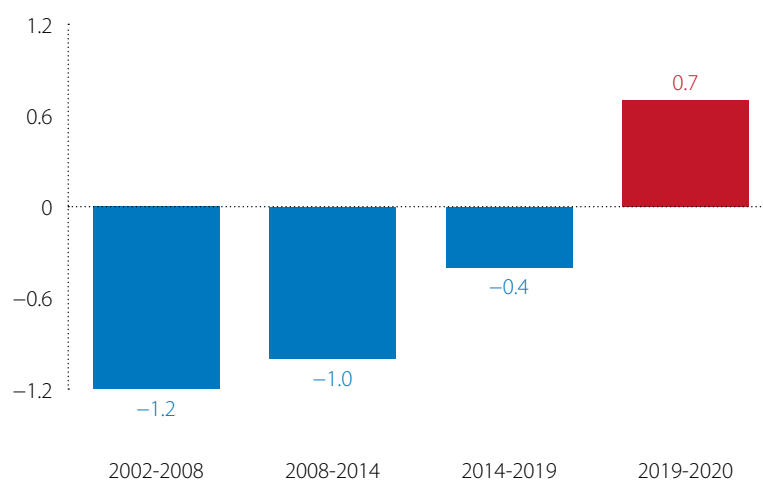
Note: Estimates correspond to simple averages of data from Argentina. the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Brazil. Chile. Colombia. Costa Rica. Dominican Republic. Ecuador. El Salvador. Honduras. Mexico. Panama. Paraguay. Peru. and Uruguay. For each country. information from the closest year with available data is used.
Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Thus, the social protection measures implemented have been of great importance in containing the social impacts of the pandemic. The countries of the region implemented a series of emergency measures, which involved an increase in public expenditure on cash transfers and labor policies. It is essential to understand that, if the health crisis is not controlled, there will be no sustainable economic recovery and the social crisis will continue for a longer period. For this reason, ECLAC has recommended maintaining emergency cash transfers through 2022 or until the health crisis is under control.

Evolution of public and social expenditure

Fiscal policy was a key economic policy instrument in responding to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020. The fiscal packages implemented by countries in the region, which during that year represented 4.6% of GDP on average, were aimed at strengthening public health systems, supporting household income with cash transfers and protecting the productive structure. These efforts led to an increase in public expenditure, which reached a historic level in Latin America. At the same time, a significant decline in public revenues was recorded as a result of shocks to private consumption and gross national income. The sum of these trends generated large fiscal deficits and a significant increase in public debt (ECLAC, 2021a).

Latin America's central governments averaged a deficit of 6.9% of GDP at the end of 2020. Fiscal deficits in the Caribbean also increased significantly, reaching a deficit of 7.3% of GDP in the same year. Meanwhile, central government gross public debt in Latin America in 2020 increased by 10.1 percentage points of GDP compared to the end of 2019, reaching 56.2% of GDP on average. A similar dynamic, but of greater magnitude, was observed in the Caribbean countries for which information is available: public debt reached 88% of GDP on average, compared to 70.6% of GDP in 2019, equivalent to an increase of 17.4 percentage points of GDP (ECLAC, 2021a).

This trend shows that the region of Latin America and the Caribbean faces major challenges in moving towards a transformative recovery with equality and a view to sustainable development. Tax revenues will have to be reinforced through progressive tax policies, and mechanisms to reduce tax evasion and avoidance will need to be sought. This type of strategy would support the funding of public expenditure and mechanisms to reduce income inequalities, in particular, in order to

ensure the financial sustainability of the social policies that have been so crucial during the pandemic, which were designed to achieve more inclusive, egalitarian, and resilient societies (ECLAC, 2021a).

Total public expenditure by central governments in Latin America reached 24.7% of GDP, its highest level on record. This increase was largely associated with the packages of measures adopted to address the social and economic crisis caused by the pandemic. Rates of over 10% were observed in some countries, and in Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, the rates were equivalent to or higher than 20% (ECLAC, 2022a).

The challenges faced by Caribbean countries in this regard are worth noting. This group of countries already faced high public indebtedness prior to the COVID-19 pandemic because of their need to cover the costs of recovering and rebuilding their productive structure following a series of climate-related disasters. This significantly restricted their fiscal capacity to respond to the pandemic (ECLAC, 2020a). On top of this, the crisis has had a severe impact on the tourism industry, which is a highly important source of employment, household income, and government revenues in the Caribbean, employing close to 2.4 million people and accounting for 15.5% of GDP. The Caribbean countries are also highly dependent on imported food and other goods, which puts their supply chains at risk (ECLAC, 2021d; ECLAC and PAHO, 2020).

Between 2015 and 2019, average public social expenditure at the central government level in seventeen Latin American countries was stable relative to GDP (**Figure 1.5**). In 2020, as a consequence of the crisis triggered by the pandemic, this expenditure showed a significant rise in relation to GDP: 2.3 percentage points on average, reaching an all-time high of 13.6% of GDP. This level of social expenditure comes in response to an increase in the amounts of social expenditure and the negative annual GDP growth rates recorded by Latin American countries during the period. Moreover, public social expenditure also increased in 2020 in relation to total public expenditure, consolidating its position as the main component of public expenditure. On average, 75% of the increase in total public expenditure was allocated to social expenditure.

In the English-speaking Caribbean countries, updated data for the 2015 to 2020 series available for the Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago show a stability similar to that of Latin America

**Figure 1.5. Public social expenditure as a percentage of GDP and total public expenditure.
Latin American countries. 2015-2020**
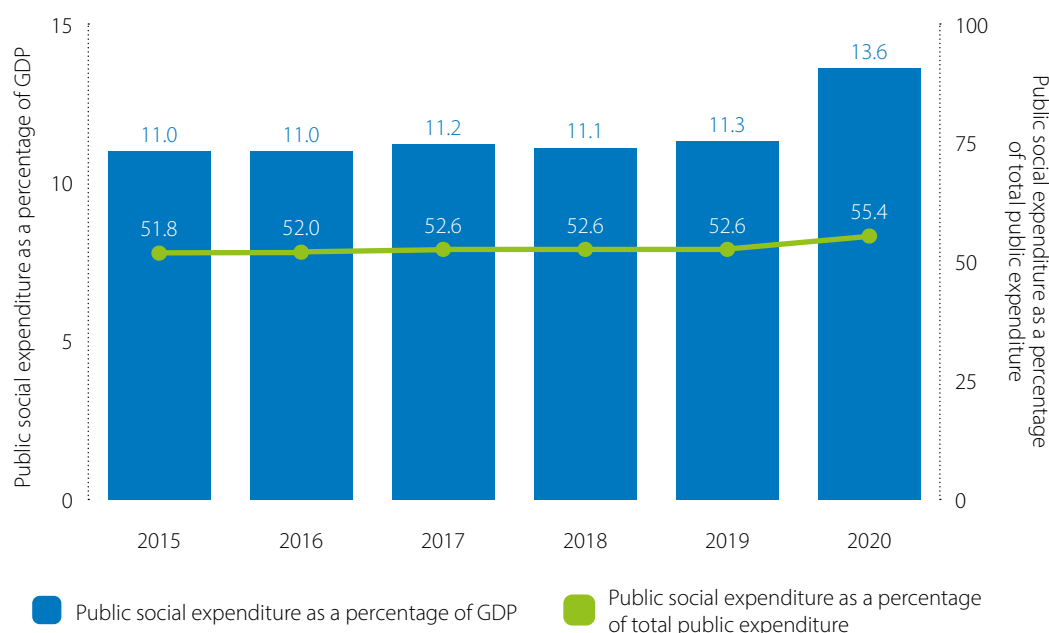
Note: Estimates correspond to simple averages of data from Argentina. the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Brazil. Chile. Colombia. Costa Rica. the Dominican Republic. Ecuador. El Salvador. Guatemala. Honduras. Mexico. Nicaragua. Panama. Paraguay. Peru. and Uruguay. The Plurinational State of Bolivia's coverage corresponds to its central administration and Peru's to the general government. The latest available data for Panama is for 2017.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). CEPALSTAT statistical databases and publications. https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat

in average central government social expenditure, albeit with a slight drop in 2019. Social expenditure increased from 11.2% of GDP in 2019 to 13.3% of GDP in 2020, with an average similar to that of the Latin American countries (**Figure 1.6**).

The share of central government public expenditure allocated to social functions shows an increase of one percentage point between 2019 and 2020 in these five Caribbean countries. It remained well below the average proportion achieved in Latin American countries. In some countries, this situation is explained by the high weight of interest payments rather than by initiatives related to fiscal policy. This situation is particularly evident in the case of Jamaica.

Public social expenditure consists of environmental protection, housing and community services, health, recreation, culture and religion, education and social protection functions.[2] In the Latin American region, however, resources are mainly concentrated in the social protection, education, and health functions, which

in 2020 accounted for 5.9%, 4.1%, and 2.7% of GDP, respectively. It is worth noting that, in response to the pandemic crisis during 2020, the social protection and health functions increased their resources significantly, by 1.7 and 0.4 GDP percentage points, respectively. Although the five Caribbean countries have the same functions with higher expenditure than in Latin America, the distribution of resources is different, with the education function accounting for the highest level of expenditure in 2020 with 4.5% of GDP, 0.4 GDP percentage points more than in the previous year. On the other hand, health and social protection functions reached 3.9% and 3.2% of GDP in 2020, highlighting the increase regarding 2019 in the order of 0.9 and 0.6 GDP percentage points, respectively (ECLAC, 2022c).

Prolonged health crisis

This region is the one that has been most affected by the health crisis and has presented the highest number of reported COVID-19 deaths in the world (1.562.845 as of December 31, 2021). The number of deaths is expected to increase as long as the pandemic persists (ECLAC, 2022c). This figure represents about 30% of

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2 See Chapter 8 for a specific discussion of public education funding.

Figure 1.6. Public social expenditure as a percentage of GDP and total public expenditure. Caribbean countries. 2015-2020
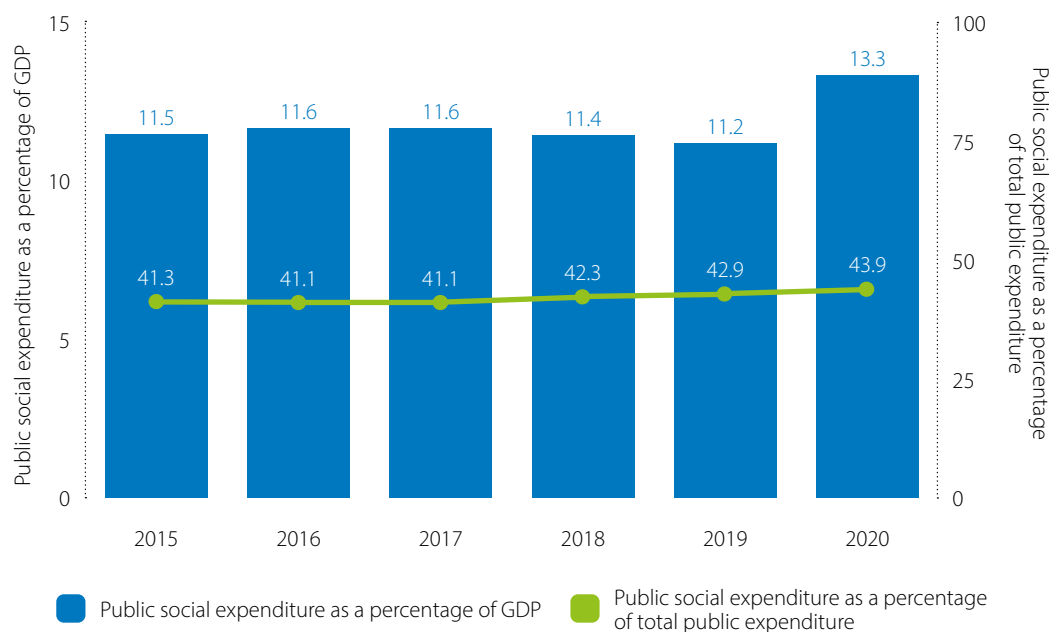
Note: Estimates are simple averages of data from the Bahamas. Barbados. Guyana. Jamaica. and Trinidad and Tobago.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). CEPALSTAT statistical databases and publications. https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat

the deaths worldwide, despite the region being home to only 8.4% of the world's population. The region accounts for nearly one-fifth of the confirmed cases of COVID-19, a situation that can be explained, in part, by the conditions of vulnerability that characterize the region, which highlight the importance of people's and communities' health and wellbeing for economic performance and social development (ECLAC, 2021b).

These vulnerability factors are diverse and pose different challenges to be addressed for the control of the pandemic. The economic and social effects of the prolonged health crisis are aggravated by the region's structural problems, associated with high levels of inequality, labor informality, lack of social protection, poverty, and vulnerability. In addition, most of the countries have weak and fragmented health and social protection systems, and a significant proportion of the population is located in expanding marginalized urban settlements that lack access to basic services. In addition, the region has faced increasing migratory flows and population displacements, as well as conflicts of various kinds, and also suffered disproportionately from the impact of the climate crisis.

Thus, the health crisis has arrived in a region marked by inequality, giving rise to scenarios of multiple and simultaneous exclusion and discrimination, generating

greater vulnerability to the health, social, and economic effects of this disease for certain population groups affected by the main foundations of the social inequality matrix (socioeconomic stratum, gender, ethnic-racial condition, age, territory, disability, migratory status) (ECLAC, 2021f).

In addition to these structural vulnerability characteristics of the region and its health systems, the prolongation of the health crisis is closely related to the slow and uneven progress of vaccination campaigns in the region (ECLAC and PAHO, 2021). ECLAC, in line with the World Health Organization (WHO), has promoted the vaccination of at least 70% of their population in all countries in the region with a complete vaccination scheme by mid-2022 to prevent the emergence of new variants.[3] In late 2021, ECLAC forecast the progress (ECLAC, 2022c) countries would achieve with their vaccination campaigns, taking into account access to vaccines and the institutional capacity of each country to implement their processes. It grouped countries into three categories. The first group of 14 countries could vaccinate 70% of their population with a full vaccination

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3 By the end of January 2022, 62.5% of the population of Latin America and 34.2% of the population of the Caribbean had received a complete vaccination series (two doses). Yet 26 of the 33 countries in the region had yet to reach 70% of the population, so controlling the health crisis is still difficult.

series by mid-2022, while a second group of 7 countries would be able to do so by the end of 2022. The third group—consisting of 12 countries—could reach this target during 2023. These countries are characterized by an institutional framework that presents major logistical challenges, with difficulties in accessing basic supplies and significant resistance from the population (**Figure 1.7**) (ECLAC, 2022c).

Figure 1.7. Percentage of population with complete or partial COVID-19 vaccination series by country. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. December 31, 2021

Country	Complete scheme	Partial scheme
Chile	86.0	4.0
Cuba	85.5	6.9
Uruguay	76.8	2.7
Argentina	71.6	12.2
Ecuador	70.3	8.9
Costa Rica	68.2	8.6
Brazil	67.0	10.6
Peru	63.9	9.1
El Salvador	63.8	5.0
Antigua and Barbuda	59.6	3.5
Panama	56.3	12.8
Mexico	55.9	7
Colombia	55.2	19.6
The Dominican Republic	52.0	11.3
Barbados	49.9	4.3
Belize	49.2	7.7
Saint Kitts and Nevis	47.8	3.7
Trinidad and Tobago	47.7	3.1
Nicaragua	43.4	29.4
Honduras	42.7	6.1
Paraguay	40.8	7.2
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	40.4	23.6
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	38.7	8.7
Suriname	38.6	5.6
Dominica	38.3	2.5
Guyana	37.2	14.7
The Bahamas	37.1	2.4
Grenada	31.4	5.2
Saint Lucia	26.7	3.5
Guatemala	25.7	10.1
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	23.6	6.5
Jamaica	19.1	4.9
Haiti	0.6	0.4
Latin America	59.7	10.7
The Caribbean	33.0	5.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	59.4	10.6

Data sources: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). ECLAC COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean. https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19 and Mathieu et al. (2021). https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations-nature

As discussed in this chapter, this region is characterized by profound social and economic inequalities, which in turn have directly impacted its population in the context of the pandemic through the social determinants of health (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006). It is vital to take this into account in order to move forward as a region towards a transformative recovery that puts equality and sustainability at the center. This implies recognizing the interrelationship between the health, social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and addressing them holistically (ECLAC, 2022c). The link between health crisis control measures and social protection strategies is of particular importance, as they can jointly contain the impacts of the crisis. The coordination of these measures should focus on guaranteeing a basic level of wellbeing while contributing to access to healthcare, which will facilitate economic reactivation. Latin America and the Caribbean will not be able to move towards a stable and sustainable economic and social recovery until the health crisis is brought under control. Just as there are social determinants of health, the economy is impacted by health determinants (ECLAC, 2022c).

This historic global crisis has provided an opportunity to implement a more dynamic and integrated approach to public policy strategies that should be here to stay. It has shown the importance and high impact of coordinating and aligning education planning and implementation with that of other sectors, particularly in the health, nutrition, and social protection areas. There is consensus on the importance of returning to in-person classes, with all the necessary health and safety measures required, especially for the most disadvantaged sectors. The education system fulfills a protection and monitoring role that goes far beyond academic purposes to include sociability, health, and violence prevention. It is also a fundamental means of facilitating the reintegration of fathers, mothers, and caregivers into the workforce, especially for women. This crisis offers an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen the resilience and capacity for recovery of education systems and move towards inclusive and equality-promoting systems that contribute to the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ECLAC, 2022a).

Access, equity and completion of early childhood, primary and secondary education

Accessing and completing school in SDG4, Education 2030

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promotes actions to strengthen inclusive and equitable quality education and provide learning opportunities for primary and secondary education (target 4.1), as well as early childhood development and pre-primary education services and development (target 4.2). This goal involves addressing a variety of situations, many of them combined, in which barriers to the enjoyment of the right to education are manifested. These barriers are related to the socioeconomic context, living in rural areas, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement, imprisonment, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion and other beliefs and attitudes (UNESCO, 2020e).

Latin America and the Caribbean present profound inequalities with deep historic roots, as discussed in chapter 1. The region's education systems face extreme poverty, broad social gaps, inequalities connected to historically excluded populations, and new emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to ensure that we achieve the SDG4 targets, the countries of the region must move forward with initiatives designed to meet a variety of challenges. One of the basic aspects, and one that is a condition for achieving the others, is the goal of ensuring that the entire child and youth population accesses primary and secondary education and guaranteeing that they can move through them in a timely manner to completion.

This chapter describes the current situation and recent trends in the countries in the region around access to various educational levels for children and adolescents, from early childhood through secondary education, and the way in which they move through each of them in their different stages.

Access to early childhood education

SDG4 makes specific reference to early childhood education, which signals the importance of this stage of development. Target 4.2 establishes that countries must "ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education" by 2030.

UNICEF identifies three key arguments for universal pre-primary education as a global priority: i) it establishes solid foundations for learning, ii) it increases the effectiveness and efficiency of education systems, and iii) it is an effective strategy for promoting economic growth (UNICEF, 2019b). As ECLAC has stated (2017b), from an inter-generational perspective, investment in capacity building in the early years of life is key to reducing inequities throughout the life cycle:

> Universal access to quality preschool education can have a positive impact in the long term, by building children's capacities and enhancing their future performance, and in the short term, most particularly by allowing mothers to complete their formal education or to acquire job training or facilitating their insertion into the job market, in a context that is still characterized by the absence of a culture of joint responsibility for care work between men and women (ECLAC, 2017a: 57).

Latin American and Caribbean countries have made a commitment to target 4.2 based on the expansion of pre-primary education coverage and access to early childhood educational development programs. This is so much the case of the region that it ranks third in terms of its funding efforts in this area, with 8.1% of its educational resources being directed to pre-primary education. This figure is only outpaced by Europe and Central Asia (11.3% in both cases) (UNICEF, 2019b).

In order to address the monitoring of this target, this chapter looks at each stage of education prior to primary education as defined in the context of SDG4 monitoring (UIS, 2013a, 2018b): early childhood education (ECE) is equivalent to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and covers all provision for children too young to enter

primary education. Early childhood education (ECE) is divided into two stages: early childhood educational development (ECED), which is equivalent to ISCED 1 and is directed at children ages o to 2 years, and pre-primary education (PP), which is equivalent to ISCED 2 and is directed at children ages three to the beginning of primary education.[1]

SDG Indicator 4.2.4—gross early childhood enrolment ratio—describes the relationship between the enrollment at a given level and the population of children who should be at that level based on their age. This approach is fairly close to the percentage of enrolled students, though it is influenced by enrollment of children in that age range who attend school for other educational levels (like attending primary education early).

Calculations can cover the entire ECE level or one of the two cycles: for ECED, SDG indicator 4.2.4.a or for PP, SDG

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1 In practice, ISCED 0r (ECED or PP) programs do not always cover all of the ages in the theoretical range for that level. A typical case is that of countries that only have one year of pre-primary education. As such, even in the context of this international classification, we recommend considering the duration of each educational program in years when making comparisons across countries.

indicator 4.2.4.b. For 2019 (**Figure 2.1**), the gross early childhood enrollment ratio in the region was 46.6%, which means that less than half of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean in that age group was attending some form of educational provision. This coverage is very different between the cycles that comprise the educational level: early childhood educational development programs have just 18.6% coverage, while the gross rate for pre-primary education was 77.5%, that is, over three quarters of children in that age group access this level of education.

The data show that there has been a sustained increase in the population in the region that attends ECE programs over the past 20 years. The rate of increase of pre-primary education was highest between 2003 and 2009, when the growth rate was 1.7 percentage points per year. This period saw the most intense and sustained advances in the expansion of school enrollment. By contrast, growth has slowed in recent years.

In the case of access to ECED programs, increased coverage shows a sustained rate of around 0.7 percentage points per year between 2007 and 2020.

In absolute terms, between 2007 and 2020, this expansion involved broadening opportunities of access

Figure 2.1. Gross early childhood enrolment ratio in a) pre-primary education and b) early childhood educational development (SDG4.2.4) Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2020
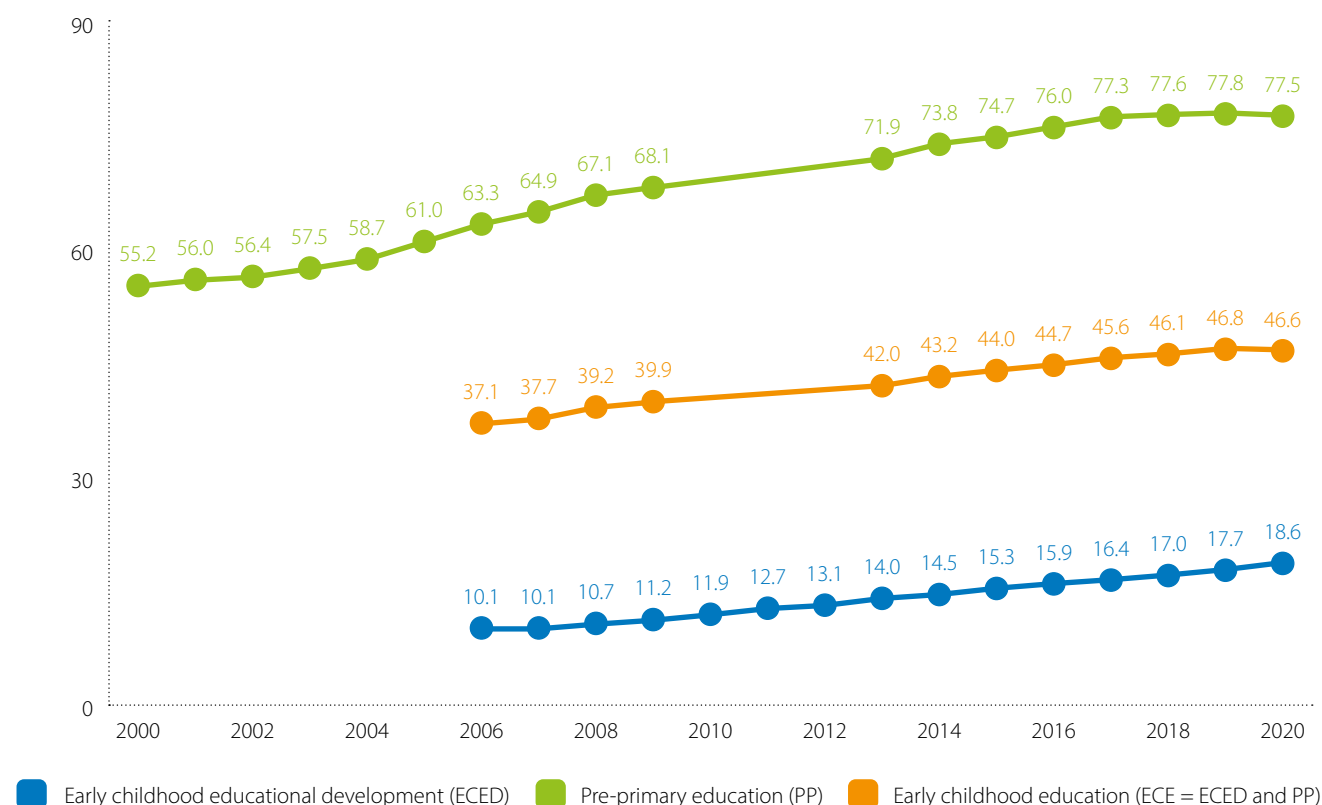
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

for over 6.3 million children in the region, reaching a total of 27.3 million children enrolled in education. Of these, 2.1 million were added between 2015 and 2020, and a little over half (1.2 million) correspond to early childhood educational development programs.

Beyond these advances, a low percentage of the population benefits from access to these programs, and major disparities persist in the number of years accessed, which generates unequal conditions for subsequent access to primary education.

The period 2015-2020 stands out because it presents variations in the dynamic of expansion in this level. Pre-primary education growth slowed significantly during this period, and has nearly stalled over the past few years. During this same period, early childhood educational development programs showed a larger expansive dynamic. For example, between 2010 and 2015, nine out of every 10 new ECE registrants joined

PP, and only one joined an ECED program. The ratio was inverted between 2015 and 2020: only four out of every ten new registrants joined PP. The rest enrolled in ECED.

Updated data from 20 countries—around half of which are in the Caribbean—has been used to analyze this expansion of access to ECED programs. These data show broad heterogeneities and marked pending debts in terms of guaranteeing general access to children between the ages of zero and two (**Figure 2.2**).

There is great disparity in access opportunities among the countries in the region. The extremes are Cuba, which provides over 90% coverage, and Paraguay, with just 1%. Furthermore, countries also present different trends over time. Only a few show a clear trend towards improvement (Montserrat, Brazil, Cuba and Chile). By contrast, growth has been more subdued in the majority of countries in the region, and some show no improvement.

Figure 2.2. Gross early childhood enrolment ratio in early childhood educational development programs (SDG4.2.4) Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020
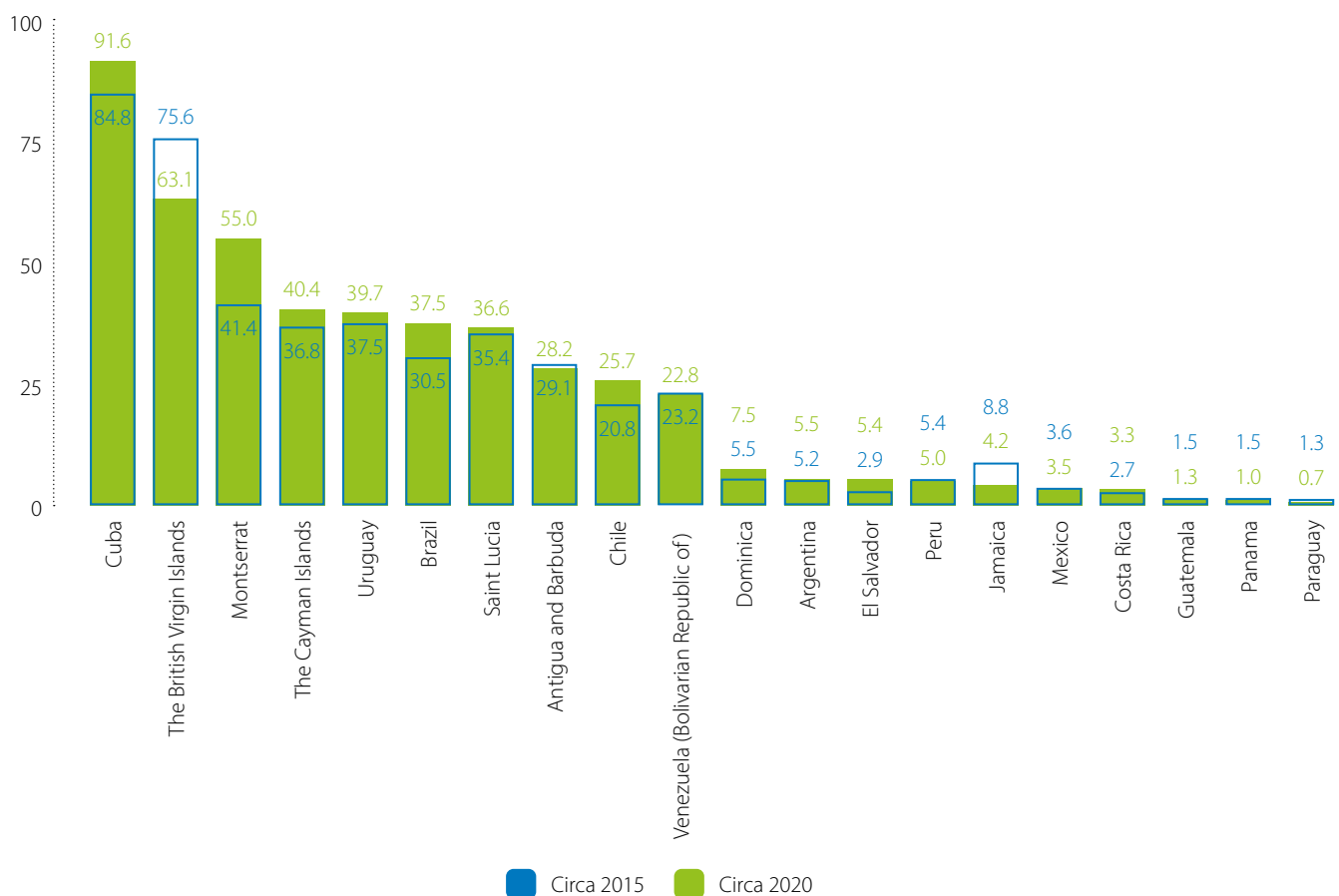
Note: For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Antigua and Barbuda and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2014), and for Paraguay (2016). For the years around 2020, values from that year were used except for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Montserrat, Saint Lucia and Uruguay (2019), for Antigua and Barbuda (2018) and for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2017).
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

Even sustaining the growth rates observed, they would only manage to cover a quarter of the population by 2030, and many children ages zero to two would be excluded from access to early childhood education programs. This alerts us to the need to accelerate the expansion of the level in the coming years through strategies that guarantee greater opportunities for access.

In regard to pre-primary education, the region presents heterogeneous levels of coverage and diverse trends (**Figure 2.3**). Some countries present very intense improvements at the coverage level. This is true for Costa Rica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Peru and Panama, where rates have increased over 10 percentage points. Although they have a lower rate of growth, the cases of the Dominican Republic, Grenada, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Suriname and the Bahamas are also worth noting.

In some countries, the indicators present a downward trend, which is the case in Ecuador, Jamaica, Anguilla or Montserrat. These cases are not necessarily related to a setback in coverage given that, due to the nature of the calculation of the indicator, there are other drivers associated with this trend. For example, the country may have made progress reducing the number of over-age students, that is, decreasing the number of students attending pre-primary education at an age that corresponds to primary education.

Beyond the age ranges covered in the analysis, it is important to consider the fact that the duration of pre-primary education varies across countries. As such, coverage level comparisons may be biased due to the different durations. On average, pre-primary education programs in the region last 2.5 years. Their duration ranges from one year (as is the case in Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands) to three years (in Argentina, Guatemala and Paraguay).

It is thus important to complement this assessment with a consideration of access to at least one year of pre-primary education. This enables to assess the percentage of children who are completely excluded from this level. **Figure 2.4** presents SDG indicator 4.2.2, the participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age.

Five percent of children have no access to pre-primary education in the region, at least not at the appropriate age. The trend for the past 20 years shows that as the indicator approaches universality, expansion slows,

which reveals the existence of a hard nucleus of complete exclusion from the level.

The time series reveals two cycles of expansion: The indicator increased from 82% to 89% between 2002 and 2006, and grew from 87% to 94% between 2011 and 2016.

Figure 2.5 combines two indicators analyzed above to build a single, more comprehensive perspective: access to pre-primary education overall and only in the last year. Presenting both indicators reveal five areas,[2] each of which refers to different situations of exclusion regarding pre-primary education:

- Area 1: Widespread access to pre-primary education. The countries in this group present very high levels of access in all years of the study. Practically the entire population attends education at this level for several years. In general, these are cases with a high percentage of private sector participation.

- Area 2: Tiered access that is only widespread in the final year of pre-primary education. In these countries, only the last year is universal at this level, and attendance is lower during the previous stages. The rates of attendance by simple age are typically presented in a tiered format. This area presents a combination of countries with high and low private sector participation.

- Area 3: Widespread access to pre-primary education. In this group, 85% to 95% of the population attends pre-primary education for several years. However, there is a group of children who are completely excluded from this level.

- Area 4: Tiered and not yet widespread access. Here there are high levels of coverage in the final year, but they do not reach levels of universal access (between 85% and 95%), and attendance is lower in the previous stages. Like Group 2, the attendance rates by simple age present as tiers, but with lower levels of coverage.

- Area 5: Generalized gaps in access. In these countries, a relatively high percentage of the population has no access to pre-primary education (15 % or more), and many spend only one year

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2   To facilitate the analysis, the report proposes areas that represent different situations, which are presented in different colors. These areas are proposed as an analytical tool that can be used to describe the dynamic of access to pre-primary education. The proposed limits for each of them are arbitrary.

Figure 2.3. Gross early childhood enrolment ratio in pre-primary education programs (SDG4.2.4b). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020

Country	Circa 2015	Circa 2020
The British Virgin Islands	128.5	132.6
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	100.3	117.9
The Turks and Caicos Islands	103.9	109.5
Peru	89.2	102.9
Grenada	92.0	100.5
Cuba	97.2	101.4
Costa Rica	79.3	97.2
Anguila	96.2	113.6
Uruguay	94.0	95.9
Brazil	90.7	95.5
Suriname	87.3	94.2
Curaçao		94.0
Cayman Islands	85.3	89.3
Trinidad and Tobago		85.0
Chile	82.3	84.8
Barbados	84.2	90.9
Argentina	74.7	77.8
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	70.2	77.3
Montserrat	76.3	98.2
Dominica	76.0	96.7
Saint Lucia	72.3	74.0
Mexico	71.0	72.0
Antigua and Barbuda		70.3
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	69.5	76.1
Jamaica	63.6	84.1
El Salvador	63.2	65.3
Panama	50.4	62.2
The Dominican Republic	48.4	57.6
Ecuador	56.0	73.0
Paraguay		51.1
Guatemala	46.3	47.6
Belize	46.6	49.9
Honduras	37.9	39.4
The Bahamas	28.6	34.5

Legend: ● Circa 2015   ● Circa 2020

Note: For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Antigua and Barbuda and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2014), and for Paraguay (2016). The data for 2020 are from that year except for Anguilla, Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Mexico, Montserrat, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay (2019); for Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Grenada, the Cayman Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands (2018); and for Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2017).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 2.4. Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (SDG indicator 4.2.2) Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2020
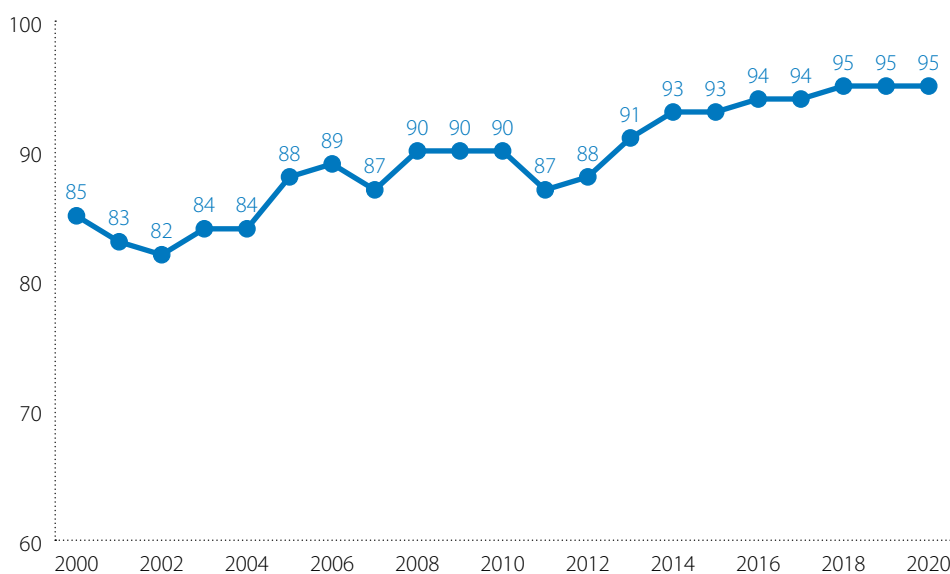
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

attending school at this level. There is very low private sector participation in these countries.

Each group faces different challenges related to expanded access to pre-primary education in each of the countries.

Returning to exclusion in the final year of pre-primary education, **figure 2.6** presents the values of the indicator for rural and urban areas. Thus, it is possible to observe the degree to which access opportunities are lower in rural areas. These differences may be associated with the lack of pre-primary educational offerings in rural areas.

Between 2000 and 2019, opportunities for attendance have expanded for children in rural and urban areas, and the gaps that separate them have decreased intensely from 17.8 to 4.8 points. The reduction of this gap slowed over the past five years. This is related to the fact that communities are approaching coverage levels of over 90%. As the indicator approaches universal coverage, the improvement speed tends to decrease.

By 2020, the majority of countries had reached high levels of parity, even some with high percentages of rural population, such as Paraguay and Ecuador. In others, gaps in access persist by area along with low coverage levels for both urban and rural populations. Colombia and El Salvador are in this situation.

In the case of the inequalities associated with socioeconomic level, there are broader gaps (**figure 2.7**). By 2019, 88.7% of children in the lowest-income quintile had access to at least one year of pre-primary education in the region. That percentage was 96.9% for the highest-income quintile. This 8.2 percentage point difference has dropped only 2 points since 2015. By contrast, a look at the longer period reveals that it has dropped nearly 24 points since 2000 and presented a particularly intense reduction between 2006 and 2010.

Again, growth slowed between 2015 and 2019. These gaps are still present in the majority of countries. This suggests that the current configuration of pre-primary education provision is excluding the most vulnerable communities, which are in fact the ones that most need this educational stage in order to strengthen their experience as they enter primary education. Some countries have achieved coverage of over 95% of low-income children in recent years, including Chile, Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Guyana.

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting that estimates of access to the final year of pre-primary education show very high levels of gender parity during the period. The adjusted gender parity index (GPIA) of indicator 4.2.2 is 1.01 for 2015 and 1 for 2020, which

Figure 2.5. Gross early childhood enrolment ratio in pre-primary education programs (SDG indicator 4.2.4b) and participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (SDG indicator 4.2.2). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2020.

Bubble size = Percentage of students in private schools

Zone 1   Zone 2   Zone 3   Zone 4   Zone 5
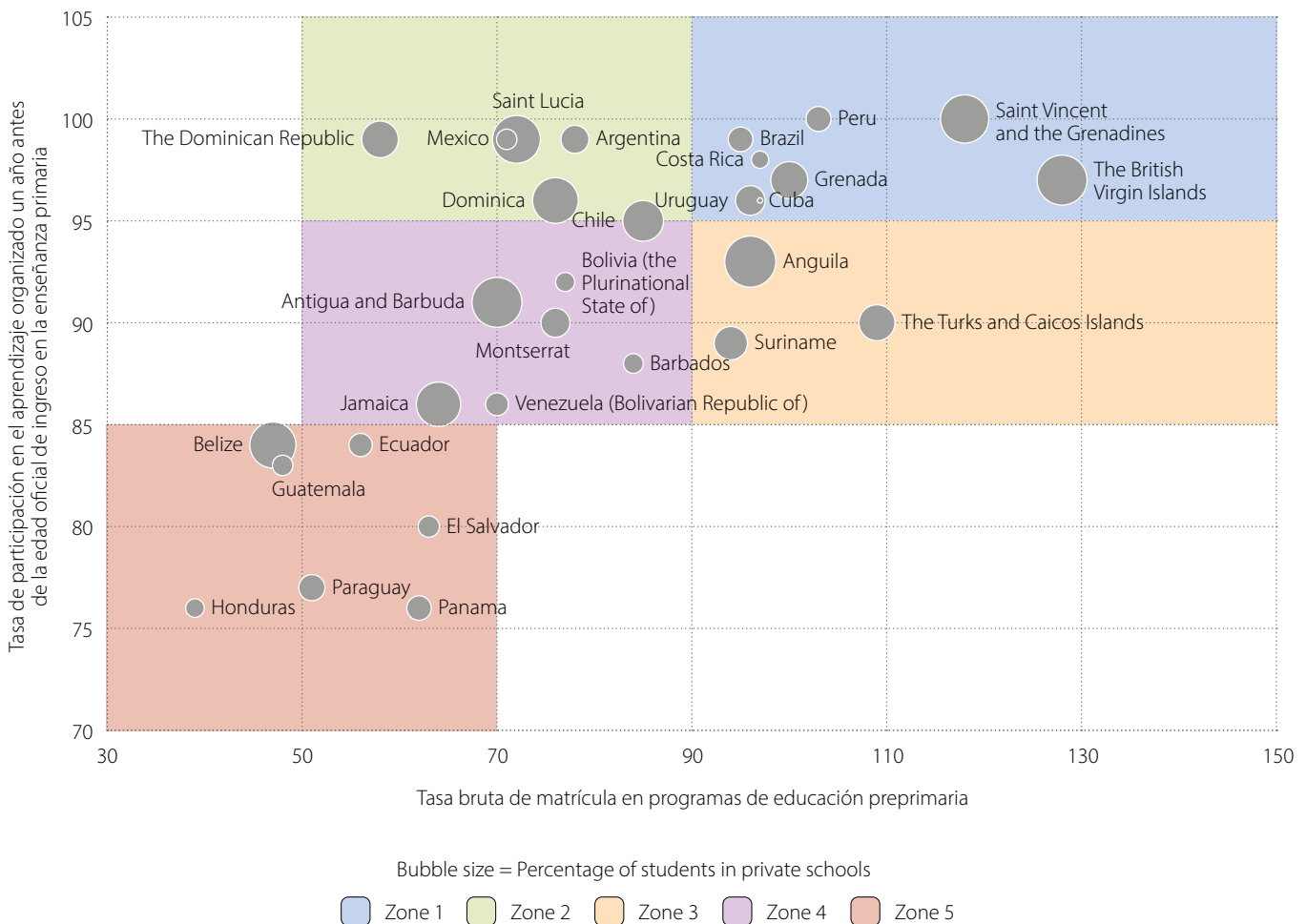
Note: For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Colombia (2014), Monserrat and Paraguay (2016). For the years around 2020, data from that year were used except for Anguilla, Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Montserrat, Suriname and Uruguay (2019), Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the Turks and Caicos Islands (2018), and for Panama and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2017).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

shows very even opportunities for boys and girls.[3]

As it has already been mentioned, the first years of life are a critical window of opportunity for child development setting the foundations for learning and influence children's physical and emotional wellbeing. As such, the Incheon Declaration and 2030 Framework of Action for Education stress that countries must guarantee quality early childhood education, care and development (UNESCO, 2015a). To complement a statistical description of participation, data must be incorporated that can reflect the comprehensive

development of children during their first years of life. Monitoring this target is a challenge in the region as there are limited measurements, and a set of methodological and conceptual dilemmas stand as obstacles to the production of current and comparable data (The Dialogue, 2019).

As explained in **Box 2.1**, UNICEF has designed an indicator to describe early childhood development as part of the global framework for monitoring SDG4. It constitutes a powerful resource for describing progress made and pending challenges.

Also designed by UNICEF and used for thematic monitoring of SDG4 is indicator 4.2.3, which is

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3 Information obtained from the UIS database (updated through September 2021).

Figure 2.6. Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (SDG indicator 4.2.2) by area and country. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2000-2020

2015   **2020**

Percentage of rural population

Country	2015 Urban	2015 Rural	2020 Rural	2020 Urban	% rural population
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	66.2	54.5	72.7	85.3	30 %
Brazil	92.2	87.5	93.6	95.4	13 %
Chile	97.5	93.6	92.7	96.8	12 %
Colombia	83.9	78.3	82.9	90.7	19 %
Costa Rica	82.5	71.1	97.1	99.8	19 %
Ecuador	92.6	91.5	86.1	86.5	36 %
El Salvador	93.1	89.2	88.3	94.6	27 %
Honduras	79.4	72.5	77.7	85.8	42 %
Mexico	96.4	95.3	95.6	98.0	19 %
Panama	91.4	75.9	83.1	96.9	32 %
Paraguay	100.0	96.8	98.4	100.0	38 %
Peru	97.7	93.6	96.5	98.1	22 %
The Dominican Republic	79.8	79.0	97.7	98.0	17 %
Uruguay	100.0	100.0	98.4	98.4	8 %

- 🟦 Rural
- 🟩 Urban
- 🟥 Difference between urban and rural

Countries average

Note: Values for circa 2020 for rural Paraguay and Uruguay should be considered indicative as the estimate is based on a sample of fewer than 150 cases. For the years around 2020, data from 2019 were used except for Chile (2017) and Mexico (2018). For circa 2015, values from that year were used. The 2015 values for Mexico were estimated based on linear projections of data in adjacent years. For simple averages, data from Peru, the Dominican Republic, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Paraguay, Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia, Honduras, Chile and Mexico were used. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. Estimates for 2019 were obtained from ECLAC processing for this project. In some countries, the estimates present slight differences in regard to the UIS data, which may have a slight impact on the comparison.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Figure 2.7. Participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age (SDG indicator 4.2.2), by income quintile and country. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2000-2020

	2015		2020	
Argentina	100.0 / 96.2		97.4	100.0
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	67.7 / 53.4		69.2	89.8
Brazil	96.4 / 88.9		92.2	98.3
Chile	98.1 / 95.7		94.7	96.9
Colombia	86.9 / 76.9		79.3	95.9
Costa Rica	92.8 / 71.5		98.0	100.0
Ecuador	98.2 / 89.0		90.0	93.4
El Salvador	95.7 / 87.1		88.4	98.6
Guyana	95.3 / 93.0		95.2	98.6
Haiti	96.6 / 69.6		65.6	95.9
Honduras	76.2 / 62.6		72.2	88.5
Mexico	98.9 / 92.6		94.6	99.0
Panama	97.9 / 75.5		83.9	100.0
Paraguay	99.6 / 99.3		97.9	99.0
Peru	99.1 / 93.2		95.7	100.0
The Dominican Republic	96.1 / 77.7		96.5	100.0
Surinam	97.6 / 90.0		89.7	96.2
Uruguay	98.1 / 97.6		99.1	100.0

- Lowest-income quintile
- Highest-income quintile
- Difference between quintiles

Countries average

Note: Values for circa 2020 for Honduras and Paraguay for quintile 1 and data for quintile 5 for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay should be considered indicative because the estimates are based on samples with fewer than 150 cases. For the years around 2020, data from 2019 were used except for Chile and Haiti (2017) and Mexico and Suriname (2018). For circa 2015, values from that year were used. The 2015 values for Mexico, Guyana, Haiti and Suriname were estimated based on linear projections of data in adjacent years. For simple averages, data from Peru, the Dominican Republic, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Panama, Paraguay, Ecuador, El Salvador, Colombia, Honduras, Chile and Mexico were used. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. Estimates for 2019 were obtained from ECLAC processing for this project. In some countries, the estimates present slight differences in regard to the UIS data, which may have a slight impact on the comparison. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Box 2.1

The new frameworks for producing the Early Childhood Development Indicator (ECDI)

In the context of global monitoring of SDG4, there is a specific indicator to represent the development level of children during their first years of life based on various areas of wellbeing. The responsibility for the technical formulation was assigned to UNICEF. This is SDG indicator 4.2.1, which refers to the proportion of children aged 24-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial wellbeing.

UNICEF undertook a process of methodological development that lasted for several years in order to identify the best technical solution for presenting the measurement objectives. These definitions are set out in a new tool for measuring indicator 4.2.1 called the 2030 Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI). It was officially unveiled in March 2020.

The 2030 ECDI addresses the need for national and international representative data on early childhood development which are gathered in a standardized manner. It captures the progress made towards key

development milestones by children between 24 and 59 months of age. A module of 20 questions is posed to mothers or primary caregivers regarding how their children behave in certain daily situations and regarding the skills and knowledge that they have acquired.

This indicator has replaced the ECDI since 2020, which was the proxy indicator used since 2015 to monitor SDG4.2. It was not completely aligned with the definitions required for this role. Based on a recent UNICEF study developed using this indicator, 83.1% of the children in the region are making good developmental progress (the estimate is based on data collected in 17 countries between 2010 and 2016.) This would mean that 3.6 million children aged three and four present developmental delays (UNICEF, 2019a).

Experts anticipate that countries can produce information to report on this indicator in the coming years through the application of MICS surveys or the incorporation of these questions into national surveys. For more information on the 2030 ECDI indicator, see "Early Childhood Development Index 2030," UNICEF, which is available at https://bit.ly/36Y6H29.

defined as the percentage of children under five years experiencing positive and stimulating home learning environments. This indicator focuses on the environment that households provide for the social, emotional and cognitive development between the ages of three and five in order to describe the degree to which the adults in the household interact with children in meaningful and stimulating ways so as to promote learning and preparedness for school.

The indicator determines the presence of mothers, fathers or other adult household members who engage children through specific practices such as reading or looking at illustrated books, telling stories, singing songs, taking them to places outside of the home, playing, naming, counting or drawing. This type of affectionate and sensitive care helps children feel valued and accepted, which promotes healthy reactions and a model of acceptable social relationships and contributes to their development.

It is possible to calculate indicator 4.2.3 based on the implementation of the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) or USAID Demographic and

Health Survey (DHS), which collect the necessary data. Data are available for the countries that participated in one of these two surveys between 2015 and 2020. In some cases, these indicators were included in national surveys, so they can be calculated without participating in these surveys.[4]

The results of the indicator (**figure 2.8**) show that not all children in the region have the same opportunities at home with situations that are stimulating for their development. Furthermore, there are broad differences among countries. The socioeconomic context— represented by the differences between income quintiles 1 and 5—is an important factor as it is related to wide gaps.

There are also minor differences between boys and girls. These are generally scant, but are more widespread in countries in which the indicator has

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4 This is the case of the National Health and Nutrition Survey (*Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Nutrición*, ENSANUT) in Mexico, which incorporated the questions necessary to calculate the indicator into its forms in 2019.

Figure 2.8. Percentage of children under five years experiencing positive and stimulating home learning environments (SDG4.2.3) Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean

Guyana 2020
- Total: 87,6
- Males: 88,9
- Females: 86,1

Cuba 2019
- Total: 89,2
- Males: 87,9
- Females: 90,4

Belize 2015
- Total: 87,6
- Males: 88,9
- Females: 86,1
- Lowest-income quintile: 79,6
- Highest-income quintile: 94,4

Costa Rica 2018
- Total: 76,9
- Males: 78,3
- Females: 75,3
- Lowest-income quintile: 68,1
- Highest-income quintile: 86,8

Mexico 2019
- Total: 70,8
- Males: 70,8
- Females: 70,7

Surinam 2018
- Total: 66,5
- Males: 64,1
- Females: 68,9
- Lowest-income quintile: 46,4
- Highest-income quintile: 79,1

Paraguay 2016
- Total: 63,7
- Males: 62,4
- Females: 65,1
- Lowest-income quintile: 40,2
- Highest-income quintile: 90,1

Haiti 2017
- Total: 54,2
- Males: 51,8
- Females: 56,9
- Lowest-income quintile: 33,8
- Highest-income quintile: 79,3

Legend: ● Total ● Males ● Females ● Lowest-income quintile ● Highest-income quintile

Data sources: UNICEF. UNICEF Data Warehouse. https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and UNICEF. UNICEF Global Databases. https://data.unicef.org/topic/early-childhood-development/home-environment/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

lower values (Suriname, Paraguay, Haiti). In these cases, boys have fewer opportunities to develop in stimulating environments.

Access to and completion of primary and secondary education

One of the key elements for monitoring the protection of the right to education under the conceptual frameworks set out by SDG4 is focused on guaranteeing universal access to quality primary and secondary education based on criteria of equity. This block of 11 or 12 years of basic education is the minimum foundation required to give children and adolescents the knowledge, skills and values necessary to live with dignity, build their own lives and contribute to the societies in which they live.

Monitoring of opportunities to access primary and secondary education can be broken down into three complementary areas. The first refers to the degree to which the population accesses these educational levels

at the proper ages. The second refers to the degree to which they manage to complete them. The third involves observing educational pathways to identify bottlenecks associated with exclusion. This chapter addresses indicators that reveal the progress made in the region and related challenges.

Figure 2.9 presents the periods of expansion of access to primary and secondary education in the region. There are historic trends in primary education coverage that are close to universal. In 2015, 97% of primary education-age children were attending school in the region, and there has been very little growth since then.

In lower secondary education, there was an upward trend through 2008, which stabilized at around 93% or 94%. There have been some subsequent variations, but coverage has not improved beyond those levels. In the case of upper secondary education, there was a sustained upward trend through to 2013, when it seems to have stalled. Over the course of the next seven years,

Figure 2.9. Total net rate of attendance for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education in Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2020
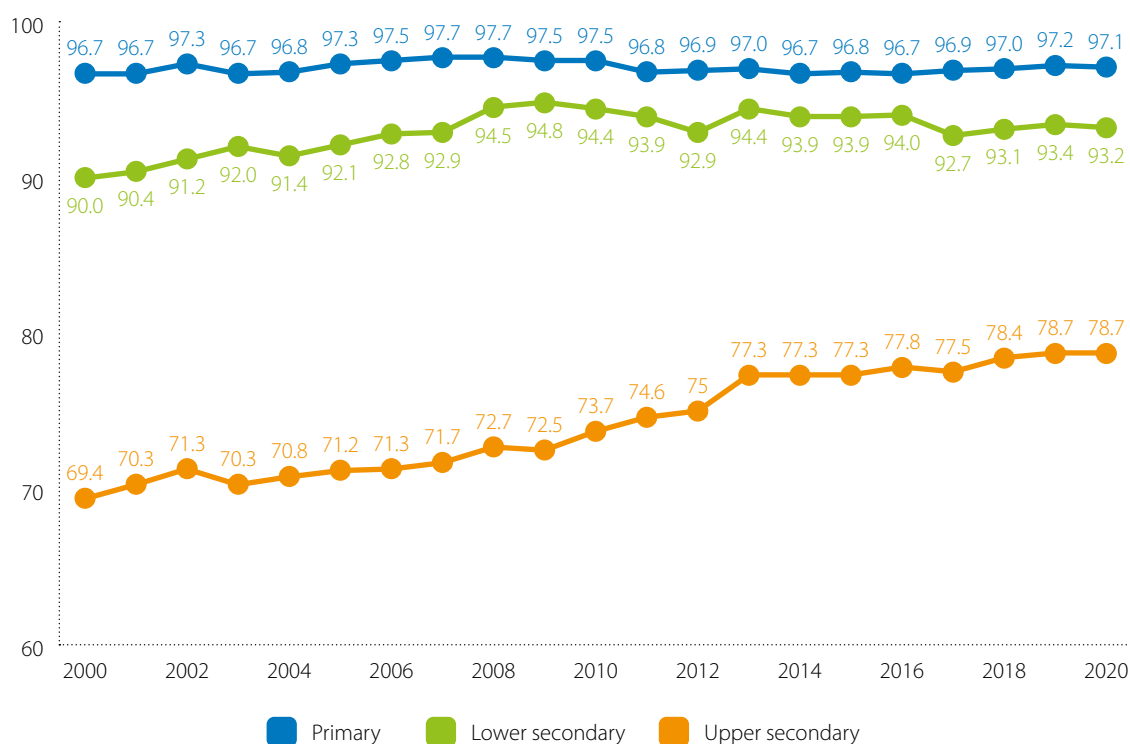
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

the total net rate of attendance grew by 1.4 percentage points to 78.7% of the population in 2020.[5]

The relative stability of participation indicators— particularly for primary and lower secondary education—points to the difficulty of achieving universal enrollment. While one would expect the improvement to be slower as the region approaches universality, there is a relatively stable group of out-of-school children and adolescents that points to the limitations of inclusion policies. Estimates suggest that 10.4 million children, adolescents and youth were excluded from access to education in 2019: 1.7 million in primary education age, 2.3 million in lower secondary education age, and 6.4 million in upper secondary education age.[6] Frameworks like the Out-

of-School Initiative[7] and tools like the GEMR's World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) (2013) are paths to expanding the description of this hard nucleus of exclusion and to identifying the most affected populations, their characteristics and location.

SDG indicator 4.1.4 monitors the out-of-school rate, which centers in this excluded population. The data from **figure 2.10** show that although primary education is nearly universal in the region, some countries continue to face difficulties when it comes to including all children from this age range. As the age of the population increases, the gaps among countries grow and the challenges of inclusion become more complex.

For example, some countries include a high percentage of students who are at the age corresponding to upper secondary education. This is the case of Chile, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Dominican Republic. In other countries, one in four adolescents is excluded. In Honduras, this percentage exceeds 40%

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5 The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 2011) establishes two educational levels for secondary education: ISCED 2 and ISCED 3, which correspond to lower and upper secondary education, respectively. Each country defines a cut-off point between the two based on the characteristics of the national structure of education levels and how these align with ISCED definitions. The most common age of attendance for the last year of ISCED 2 is 14 (UIS, 2013a).

6 Information obtained from the UIS database (updated through September 2021).

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7 The Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) is a joint initiative by UNICEF and the UNESO Institute of Statistics that provides a methodological framework of reference for analyzing profiles of the out-of-school population and identifying factors that operate as "barriers" that limit inclusion (UNICEF, 2015).

Box 2.2

The COVID-19 pandemic and early childhood care

A recent UNICEF report (2021) developed on the basis of UNICEF (2021b) states that the COVID-19 pandemic has had negative impacts on short- and long-term early childhood development. The suspension of in-person learning has limited children's access to stimulating environments managed by educators. In addition, social distancing has had a negative impact on the benefits of social interaction. As ECLAC has stated (2021c), closing care centers limited access to key services for development (such as nutrition and early intervention in response to vulnerability, etc.), which has caused a care crisis.

Furthermore, care tasks have been left exclusively to households and specifically to women, which has impacted work activities, generating an overload and thus affecting living conditions and the affective climate at home. It also has generated concerning situations linked to children's overexposure to screens.

Early on in the pandemic, UNICEF (2020a) alerted the public of how COVID-19 could threaten the progress that had been made through so much effort. The entity also warned that already fragile services would be tested, increasing risks and various forms of inequality. The pandemic also revealed "hidden" aspects such as mental health, domestic violence and the care crisis. The pandemic emerged as a multidimensional challenge that is hard to understand using traditional parameters.

Figure 2.10. Out-of-school children and adolescents (SDG indicator 4.1.4) Primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020
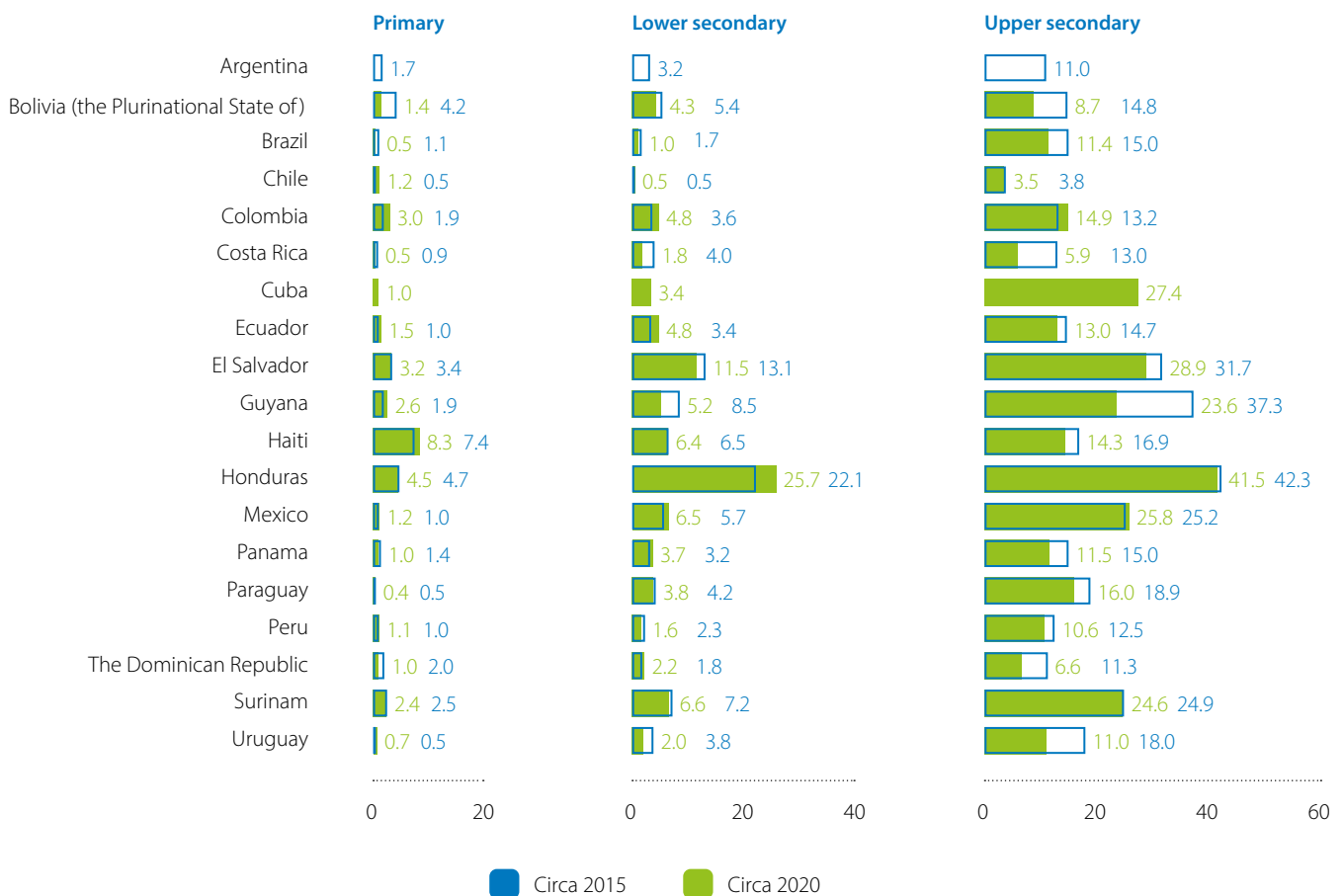
Note: For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Guyana and Mexico (2014). The 2015 values for Haiti and Suriname were estimated based on linear projections of data in adjacent years. For the years around 2020, values from 2019 were used except for Guyana (2020), Colombia, Mexico and Suriname (2018), and Chile and Haiti (2017). Estimates for 2019 were obtained from ECLAC processing for this project. In some countries, the estimates present slight differences in regard to the UIS data, which may have a slight impact on the comparison. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

of the population, and exclusion increased during the period.

This indicator also presents a certain level of stability for both primary and lower secondary education, which once again underscores the difficulties that the region faces when it comes to reducing the "hard nucleus" of exclusion. Estimates for Latin America and the Caribbean show that the out-of-school population dropped from 3.2% to 2.9% in primary education

and increased from 6.1% to 6.8% in lower secondary education between 2015 and 2019. There was a slight improvement for upper secondary education, as this rate dropped from 22.7% to 21.3%.[8]

High levels of coverage do not necessarily mean high rates of education levels completion because the

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8 Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

Box 2.3

The COVID-19 pandemic and out-of-school children

The suspension of in-person learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced the regional education systems to offer learning continuity through remote formats. However, not everyone has had the same opportunities to access education. In the context of a survey conducted in 2021, 79% of countries in the region reported that remote learning had not reached all primary and secondary students, and 17% reported that at least one in four students had been excluded.[*]

Many children in the region have been excluded from education because they did not have the necessary conditions to participate in these remote formats. Those who managed to maintain the school connection were unable to do so regularly and in a sustained manner over time.

Although precise information on the number of students who dropped out due to the pandemic is not yet available, estimates for the region point to the seriousness of the problem. In 2020, UNESCO estimated that 3.13 million pre-primary through higher education students were at risk of dropping out (UNESCO, 2020d). In the meantime, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) estimated that 1.2 million children between the ages of six and 17

would drop out, which represents a 15% increase (IDB, 2020b).

Some countries reported 2020 school attendance in their household surveys, which can be compared to 2019 (**figure 2.11**).

The first estimates show a marked decrease in attendance in the case of early childhood education—though this estimate is based on only a few countries—with an eight percentage points decrease in pre-primary education and nearly four in that level's last year. By contrast, in primary and secondary education, the variations were very slight, standing at 1.5 points in primary education and less than one point for secondary.

On the one hand, this information shows that early childhood education has been the most affected by the pandemic, and that younger children starting primary education have been the most excluded. On the policy side, evidence shows that the countries' educational responses to the pandemic have focused more on primary and secondary education, leaving pre-primary education behind (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022). On the other hand, they point to the weakness of traditional indicators in terms of adequately reflecting the complexity of the situation. Attendance data during the pandemic can be misleading, as the population may have enrolled but was not studying from home in practice (Acevedo *et al.*, 2021).

In the context of the pandemic, two key elements for thinking about these indicators are the existence of an uncertain number of children and adolescents who have not been connected to school during the pandemic, who have certainly increased the exclusion rates, and those who sustained a labile, intermittent or unstable connection, which could represent situations closer to being out of school.

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* Results obtained from the processing of the UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and OECD survey on national education system responses to COVID-19 for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The results from the third round, which was applied between February and April 2021, are included here. The question was: What percentage of students (at each education level) were engaged in distance learning during the period in which schools were closed in 2020 approximately? For more information, see www.tcg.uis.unesco.org/survey-education-covid-school-closures/

Figure 2.11. Attendance rates for early childhood, primary and secondary education Latin American countries. 2015, 2019-2020

Gross attendance rates for early childhood education and development

8.3	
11.2	
6.7	

Gross attendance rates for pre-primary education

57.8	
67.8	
59.6	

Adjusted net attendance rate one year before the start of primary education

89.7	
94.4	
90.6	

Net attendance rate for primary education

98.5	
98.8	
97.5	

Net attendance rate for lower secondary education

96.4	
96.9	
96.4	

Net attendance rate for upper secondary education

85.5	
88.7	
88.8	

● Circa 2015　● Circa 2019　● 2020

Note: The values are an average of the countries with information available for the period. Data was used from Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay except for the indicator of early childhood educational development programs, which was calculated as an average of the values for Argentina, Chile and Costa Rica. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

relationship between the students' age and the level that they attend is not linear. High levels of delay in the region cause many children and adolescents to attend school at grade levels that are lower than the appropriate for their age.

SDG indicator 4.1.2, completion rate by education level, focuses on one of the monitoring key aspects: the estimated degree to which countries manage to guarantee that their entire child and adolescent population will complete the educational levels for the 12 years of education proposed as a goal in the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015a).

As **Figure 2.12** shows, 92.7% of the adolescent population completed primary education in 2020 in the countries for which data were available, and the value is very similar for 2015. For lower secondary education, the improvement is a little less than two percentage points on average. For 2020, 79.1% of the adolescent population had completed this level. In the case of upper secondary education, the situation

is also positive, with a 2.4 percentage point increase in the completion rate at 63.7% in 2020. A third of the region's youth did not manage to complete secondary education.

At the primary education level, the completion rates are almost universal in most of countries, with percentages above 95%. With few exceptions, these coverage levels remained stable in recent years. However, this territorial disaggregation allows us to focus on the countries showing that some children do not complete primary education. For example, the completion rates are low in Haiti (53.1%), Jamaica (83.4%), Guyana (85.7%) and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (86.2%).

These gaps tend to be concentrated in rural areas, where the difference is 5.3 percentage points on average impacting the poorest members of society. On average, one in every ten children from the lowest-income quintile does not complete primary education in the region. In some countries, the level of inequity is very serious. The percentage of the low-income population

Figure 2.12. Completion rate (SDG indicator 4.1.2). Primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020

	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
Argentina	95.3 – 96.1	71.0 – 73.0	61.3 – 64.0
Barbados	99.0 – 99.2	99.0 – 99.3	94.0 – 95.5
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	96.9 – 98.4	89.3 – 92.3	68.4 – 70.4
Brazil	95.2 – 97.0	85.7 – 87.4	67.3 – 69.7
Chile	96.3 – 96.7	95.1 – 95.9	84.5 – 85.8
Colombia	92.0 – 93.0	76.1 – 76.6	72.0 – 72.7
Costa Rica	94.7 – 98.5	68.2 – 73.0	52.6 – 58.1
Cuba	99.3 – 99.5	97.5 – 97.9	78.0 – 80.2
Ecuador	98.1 – 98.6	88.7 – 91.5	67.1 – 72.3
El Salvador	88.5 – 89.7	72.6 – 75.1	55.5 – 59.2
Guatemala	78.0 – 83.4	48.2 – 54.5	34.5 – 38.1
Guyana	98.3 – 98.4	83.2 – 87.0	59.8 – 61.9
Haiti	53.1	26.8 – 30.7	11.7 – 13.7
Honduras	84.8 – 85.7	50.8 – 56.5	42.6 – 46.9
Jamaica	99.7 – 99.9	96.2 – 97.2	90.2 – 92.9
Mexico	96.1 – 97.9	85.4 – 88.6	51.4 – 58.7
Nicaragua	74.4 – 78.5	49.3 – 53.4	36.3 – 39.9
Panama	95.6 – 95.4	80.9 – 85.1	62.4 – 63.8
Paraguay	90.5 – 93.9	79.3 – 79.4	61.9 – 63.6
Peru	96.5 – 96.5	87.4 – 87.7	81.2 – 82.5
The Dominican Republic	89.6 – 91.8	82.5 – 86.0	56.2 – 60.5
Saint Lucia	99.5 – 99.7	95.8 – 98.0	85.1 – 90.8
Suriname	84.4 – 86.2	54.9 – 54.9	27.6 – 28.9
Trinidad and Tobago	96.0 – 96.6	94.0 – 95.8	86.9 – 90.0
Uruguay	96.9 – 97.3	66.5 – 68.7	35.1 – 42.3
Average	92.7 – 93.3	77.3 – 79.1	61.3 – 63.7

■ Circa 2015   ■ Circa 2020

Note: For the years around 2020, values from 2020 were used except for Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay (2018) and for Chile and Haiti (2017). For the years circa 2015, values from that year were used.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

finishing primary education is 20 points lower than the rate for the higher income population. This is the case for Honduras (74.4% and 97.4%, respectively) and Suriname (68.3% and 98.6%, respectively).

The heterogeneity of situations expands in lower secondary education both in terms of the rate of completion values and trends over time. Some countries have managed to universalize level completion, while others have different levels of delay in meeting that goal. The important point is that the gaps are narrowing. Between 2015 and 2020, the ten countries with the highest levels of completion grew by 1.5 points, while the five most delayed improved by 3.

By contrast, no country managed to reach universal completion of upper secondary education. In some countries, over 90% of the adolescent population

finishes secondary education, while that rate is less than half in other nations. Nearly all of the countries presented in **Figure 2.12** have improved their rates, with an average increase of 2.4 percentage points between 2015 and 2020 and a trend towards a reduction in the gaps among countries. The ten most delayed countries grew twice as much—in percentage points—as the ten most advanced.

Figure 2.13 presents the five-year variation of the coverage and completion rates of lower and upper secondary education for a group of countries for the 2000-2020 period. These data show two interesting aspects that will allow the understanding of the past five-year dynamic in a broader cycle. First, the expansion of secondary education slows over the course of the period, which is expressed in the growing

Figure 2.13. Five-year changes in the completion rate (SDG indicator 4.1.2) and total enrolment rate (in percentage points). Primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2000-2020
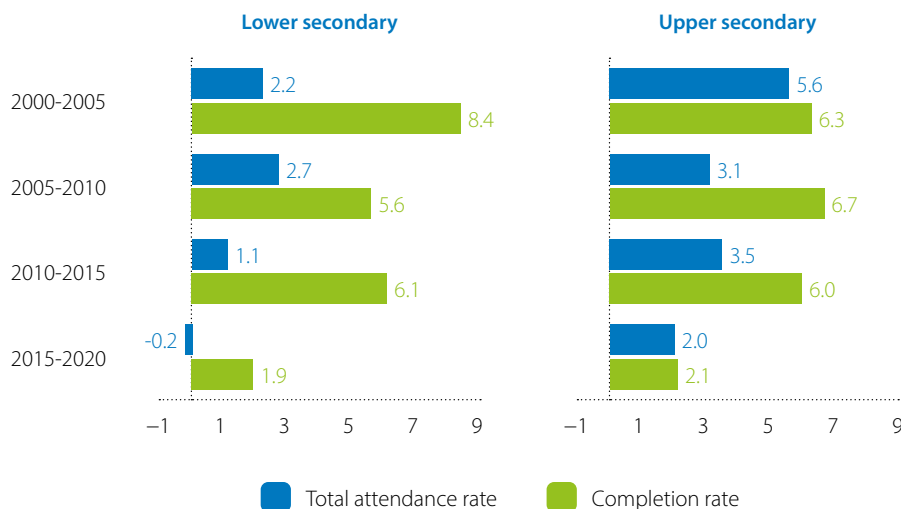
Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available for the period. Values from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay were used. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

behavior of these two indicators. In particular, there was a very abrupt decrease of the improvement rate in the completion indicator for both levels over the past five years.

Second, throughout the period, the expansion of the level completion is greater than the increase in coverage for the previous period. In principle, we might think that both data should behave similarly, or that the second could be greater than the first one: improved coverage should result in improved level completion after a few years. However, that is not the case. Level completion improves more. This is a sign that other processes have impacted the expansion of opportunities to complete lower and upper secondary education—two in particular: improvements in pathways, which results in greater efficiency in the transition between the levels, and the presence of completion opportunity expansion policies that serve as alternatives to traditional education.

The low-income population is the most excluded from secondary education completion opportunities. As **figure 2.14** shows, the differences in the region are daunting. While 84.6 % of students from the highest-income quintile get to finalize secondary education, this is true for only 44.1% of the lowest-income quintile. This is expressed in the intergenerational reproduction of poverty, as adolescents who are excluded from

education will have fewer job opportunities and chances to fully exercise citizenship.

Figure 2.14 also shows the two cycles of reduction of inequities that have developed in the region over the past 20 years. Between 2000 and 2015, gaps in access have dropped systematically, which indicate that education systems have expanded to cover a growing percentage of students from lower income groups. This expansion tended to stall towards the end of the period.

Although equity in coverage for this level improved between 2000 and 2010, this did not occur for the completion indicator: the rate grew for the highest and lowest income quintiles, but the differences remained almost the same. Over the past decade, and particularly over the past five years, there have been very clear signals of a slight decrease in inequalities. The gap decreased by eight percentage points over ten years.

Upper secondary education completion rates by area, which are presented in **Figure 2.15**, are lower than those analyzed by socioeconomic level, though they are considerable. The general trend for this period is a reduction in gaps.

Attendance gaps have improved by 11 percentage points, which is greater than the completion rate gaps. This means that progress has been made towards more access opportunities, though the challenge

Figure 2.14. Total attendance rate and completion rate (SDG indicator 4.1.2) by income quintile. Upper secondary education. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2000-2020
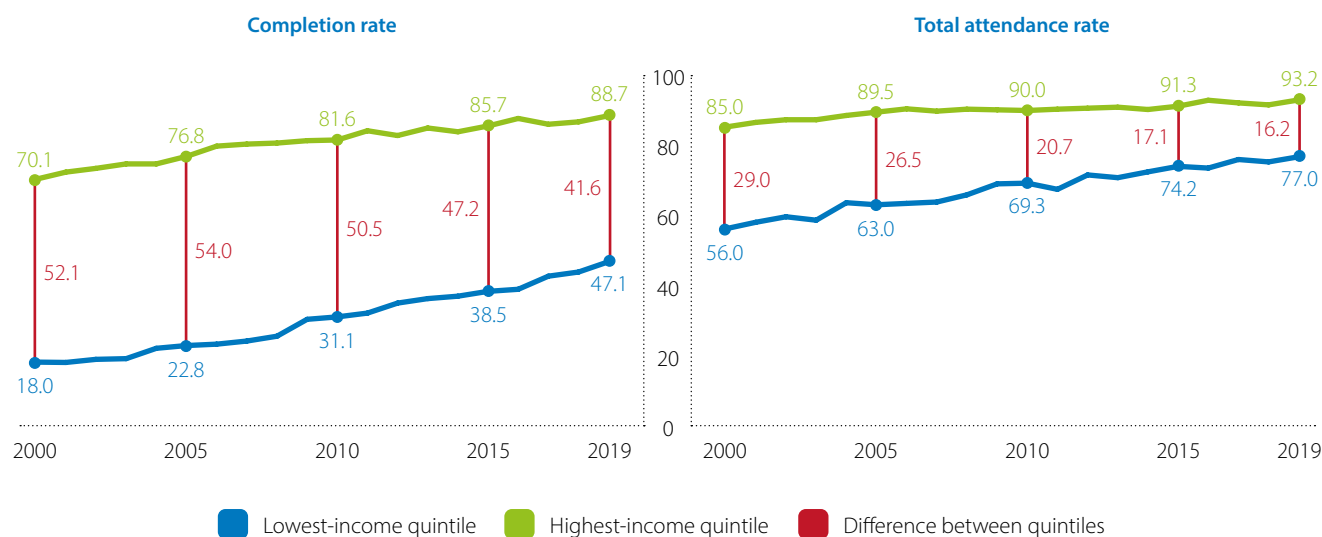
Completion rate

Total attendance rate

- 🟦 Lowest-income quintile
- 🟩 Highest-income quintile
- 🟥 Difference between quintiles

Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available for the period. Values from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia were used for the attendance rate. The completion rate also included data from Guyana. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. For the 2000 average, data from 2001 were used for Brazil, Paraguay and Honduras, data from 2002 were used for Colombia, data from 2001 were used for Ecuador and data for 2002 was used for Costa Rica only for the attendance rate. Estimates for 2019 were obtained from ECLAC processing for this project. In some countries, the estimates present slight differences in regard to the UIS data, which may have a slight impact on the comparison.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Figure 2.15. Total attendance rate and completion rate (SDG indicator 4.1.2) by area. Upper secondary education. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2000-2020
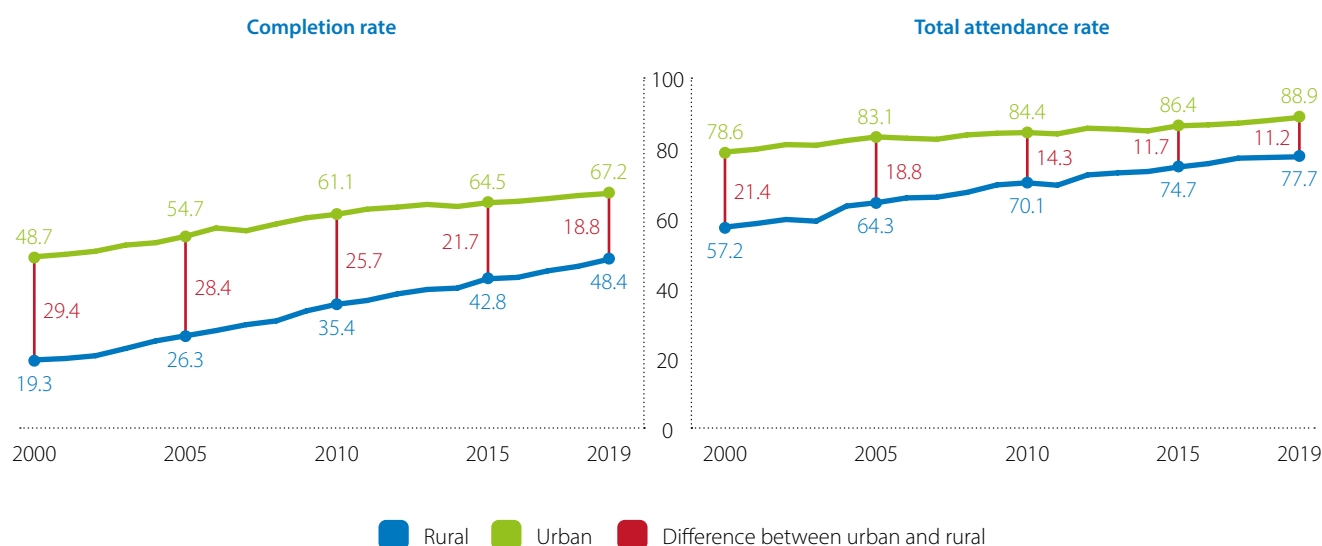
Completion rate

Total attendance rate

- 🟦 Rural
- 🟩 Urban
- 🟥 Difference between urban and rural

Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available for the period. Data from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru were used for the attendance rate. The completion rate also included data from Guyana and Suriname. In these countries, data from 2018 were used for the 2019 average. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. For the average for 2000, data from 2001 was used for Brazil, Paraguay and Honduras. For 2000 average attendance rate, 2002 values were also used for Colombia and Costa Rica. Estimates for 2019 were obtained from ECLAC processing for this project. In some countries, the estimates present slight differences in regard to the UIS data, which may have a slight impact on the comparison.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

of continuing to improve completion in rural areas remains. While 66.6% of the urban population completes upper secondary education on average, this is true for only 46.4% of young people living in rural areas.

Gap reduction slowed for both indicators during the last five-year period. Access to and completion of the level continued to increase, but inequities did not decrease.

In the majority of the countries of the region, the differences in the completion rate for upper secondary education favor women (**Figure 2.16**). On average, the percentage that manages to complete the level is 5.3 points higher in regard to men for the last available year. This is due to the fact that the male population experiences more difficulties during their

Figure 2.16. Differences in the upper secondary education completion rate (SDG indicator 4.1.2) between women and men (in percentage points) by area. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020
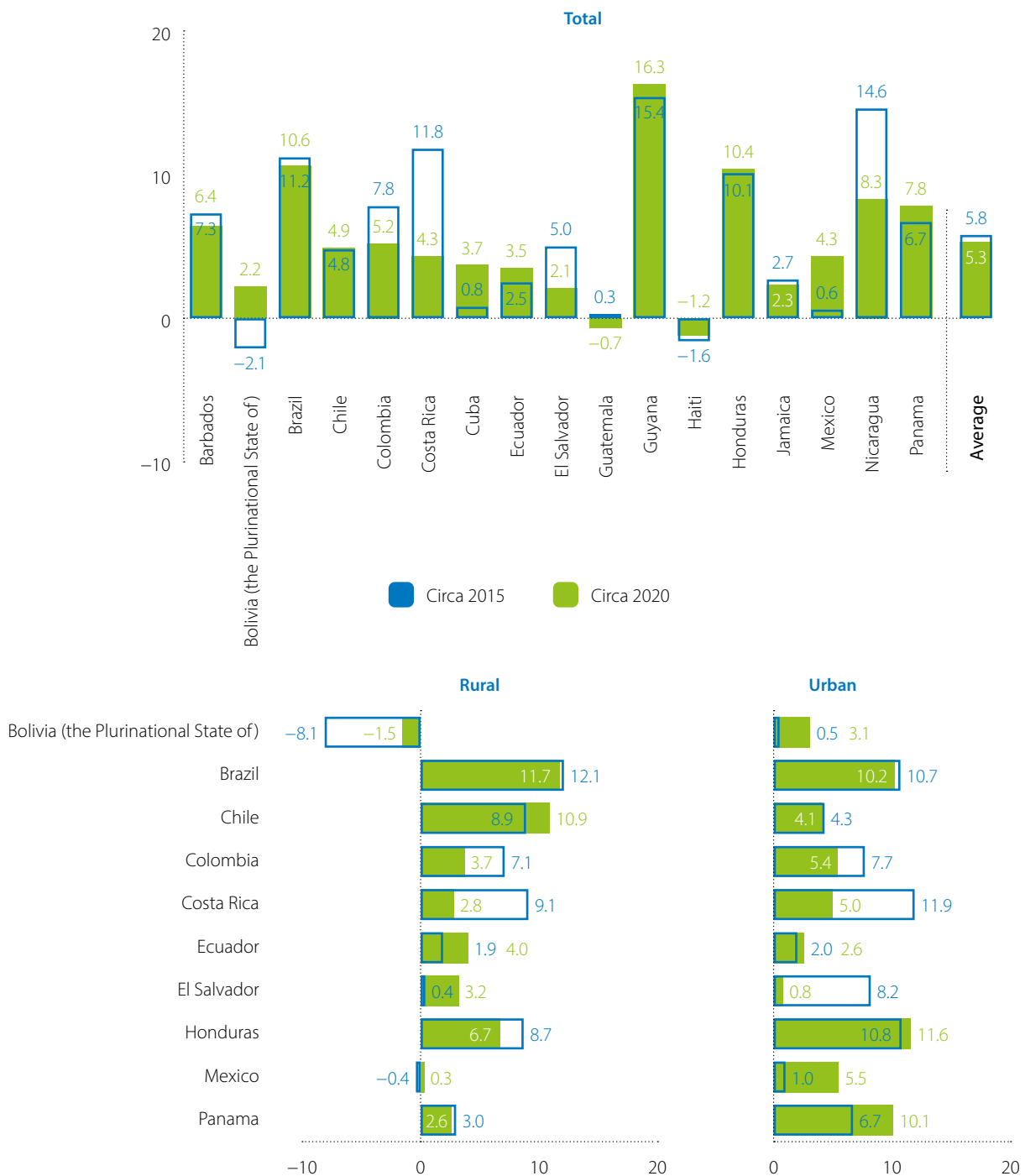
Note: The data for 2015 are from 2014, and the data for 2020 are from 2018.
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

education pathways, mainly higher levels of repetition and dropping out over the course of primary and secondary education.

These differences vary a great deal across countries. Guyana, Brazil and Honduras present the largest gaps. There has also been a marked reduction in inequities in some countries over the past five years. Costa Rica and Nicaragua are the most noteworthy cases.

In rural areas, these gaps are higher than the average in some cases (such as Brazil or Chile) and are closer to parity in others (such as Panama, Honduras or Costa Rica). The Plurinational State of Bolivia is the only country in the region that presented marked inequity for women in rural areas in 2015. Female students were much less likely to complete upper secondary education than men. Over the past few years, the country has managed to reduce this situation of relative disadvantage.

In some countries, the gaps continue to expand. For example, the difference between men and women

increases in favor of women in rural parts of Chile and urban areas of Panama.

This heterogeneous and complex scenario reveals the pending challenges for guaranteeing equitable conditions of access, progress and completion in primary and secondary education for men and women. Improving this requires an understanding of the factors that impact these behaviors in each of the contexts, which are represented in **Figure 2.16** (Hernández and Alcaraz, 2018; Miranda, 2019). Factors such as teen motherhood have a particularly significant effect on women (Monrroy Pardo, 2019), while the need to leave school early for work and the school culture rejection affect men more (Rodríguez and Blanco, 2015).

The indigenous population also presents high levels of educational exclusion, which is represented by the completion rate for upper secondary education in **Figure 2.17**. 59% of the indigenous population and 72.4% for the non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant

Figure 2.17. Completion rate for upper secondary education (SDG indicator 4.1.2) by indigenous and non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant population. Latin American countries. Circa 2010, 2015 and 2020
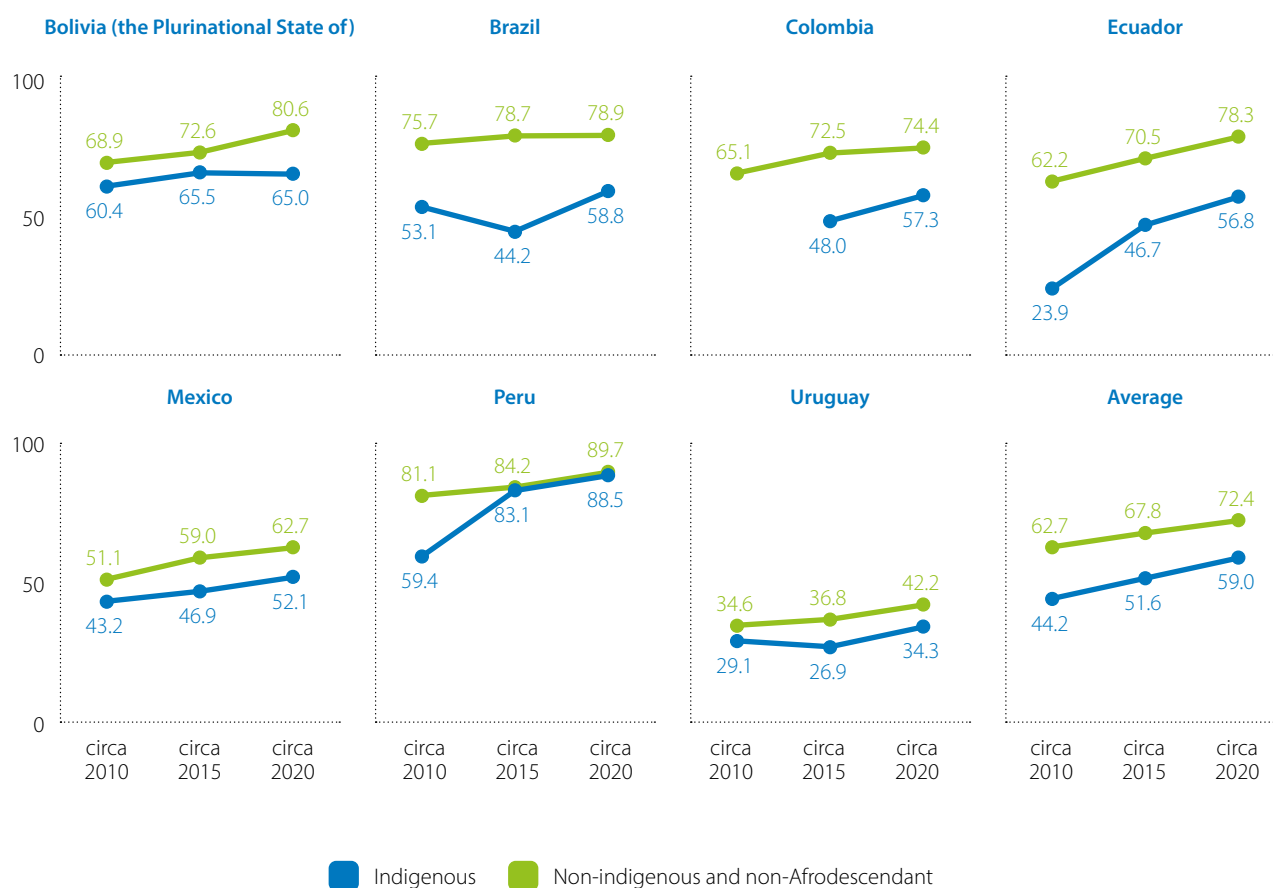
Note: The values for 2010 are from that year except for the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Brazil (2011). The values for 2015 are from that year except for Mexico (2016). The values for circa 2020 are from that year except for Mexico (2018).
Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Box 2.4

Inclusion of persons with disabilities

Meeting SDG4 requires overcoming barriers to access to quality education that currently affect persons with disabilities. The region continues to present enormous challenges when it comes to guaranteeing adequate conditions. For example, on average, adolescents who have a disability and are between the ages of 12 and 17 are 10% less likely to attend school than those with no disability. Furthermore, erroneous perceptions and segregation persist, together with the need for structural changes in the teaching organization, study plans, teaching and learning strategies, and building and infrastructure conditions, to name just a few key aspects (UNESCO, 2020e).

One troubling aspect is the existence of a widening of gaps for pre-primary and secondary education access for persons with disabilities. While only a small number of countries have information on the topic, estimates show that access remained practically stable between 2015 and 2020. In the meantime, attendance for persons without disabilities increased, which means that the differences also increased. For

example, the average difference in access for this set of countries was 8.6 percentage points in 2015 for upper secondary education. That difference increased to nearly 14 points in 2020 (**Figure 2.18**).

These data point to a recent setback that may be manifesting in the region around inclusion of persons with disabilities. Turning back this trend and strengthening opportunities for inclusion is a necessary step towards the true universalization of quality education that SDG4 promotes.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated prior conditions of exclusion, only contributes to this troubling context. Persons with disabilities are exposed to greater direct impact risks from the pandemic (more likely to contract COVID-19, greater risks of physical impact and mortality due to the virus or related complications) and indirect risks, which affect various areas of their daily life and social insertion (UN, 2020). In the education field, persons with disabilities are less likely to benefit from distance learning and have been the subject of limited policies aimed at facilitating access to learning continuity (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

Figure 2.18. Attendance indicators for the population of persons with disabilities in Latin American countries. Circa 2015 and 2020
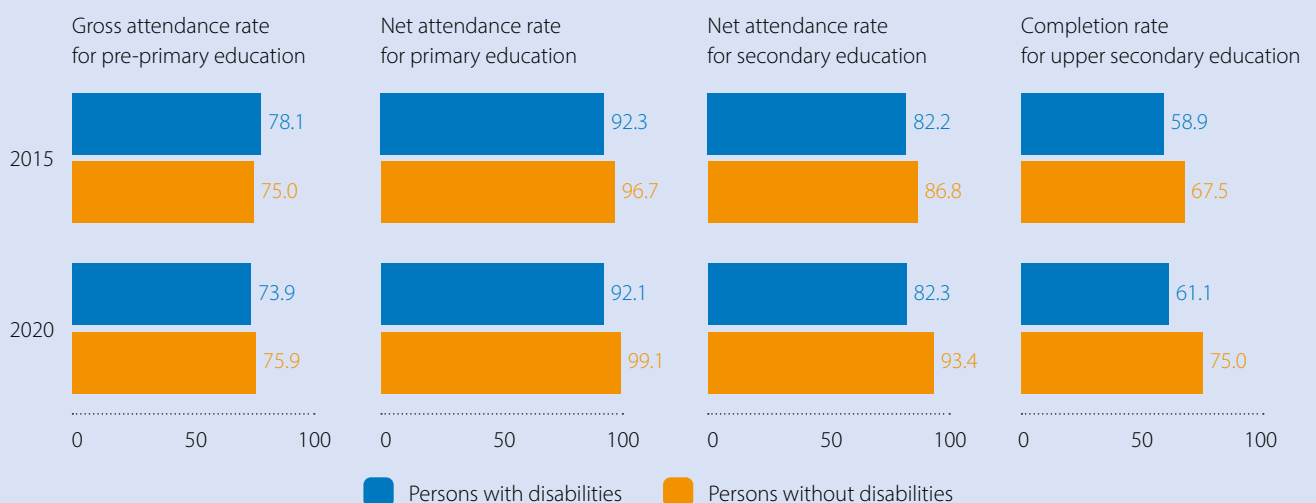
	Gross attendance rate for pre-primary education	Net attendance rate for primary education	Net attendance rate for secondary education	Completion rate for upper secondary education
2015 (Persons with disabilities)	78.1	92.3	82.2	58.9
2015 (Persons without disabilities)	75.0	96.7	86.8	67.5
2020 (Persons with disabilities)	73.9	92.1	82.3	61.1
2020 (Persons without disabilities)	75.9	99.1	93.4	75.0

■ Persons with disabilities ■ Persons without disabilities

Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available for the period. Chile (2015-2017) and Mexico (2016-2020). Costa Rica and Peru are included for primary and secondary education estimates (2015-2019). In these values used to calculate averages, the data for the population with a disability in Costa Rica and Peru was based on a sample of fewer than 150 cases for upper secondary education.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Household surveys database.

populations completes the educational level, based on the average for countries for which data were available. This 13.4 percentage point gap points to pending equity challenges for these groups.

On average, the trend over time has been marked by the reduction of gaps. These differences were 16.2 percentage points in 2015 and 18.5 in 2010. Peru is the only analyzed country that has achieved parity between indigenous and non-indigenous populations thanks to a marked increase in inclusion between 2010 and 2015. The gaps persist in the other countries with varying levels of intensity. By contrast, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the rate of completion remained practically unchanged for the indigenous population (2015-2020), while the situation for the non-indigenous population improved, which implies an expansion of the gaps. Brazil, Ecuador and Colombia present the greatest disparities, as they are also countries with a high percentage of indigenous population.

The analysis of each situation expressed in dichotomous variables should not leave aside the challenge of identifying and providing services to populations that face intersecting or multiple exclusion situations. This may be the case of indigenous women in rural areas. The World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) of the GEMR (2013) offers data with combined breakdowns, which enables to look at this characterization in depth.

Primary and secondary education pathways

The region's education systems organize educational programs in an annualized progression that may be interrupted when expected goals are not met over the course of a year. This results in repetition or students leaving school temporarily or for good. Over-age enrollment during a given year expresses the accumulation of these interruptions in previous years for the school population because each of these experiences is due to enrolling for the same grade when the student is a year older. Entering the school system older than each country's regulations specify also represents a form of disruption of expectations for progress.

The practice of monitoring indicators linked to school pathways is important because it expresses the difficulties that students face in terms of completing educational levels. Being over-age is also associated with a greater risk of dropping out, and is thus a tool for early exclusion detection (UIS, 2012; UNICEF, UNESCO

and UIS, 2012). On the other hand, the low efficiency of educational systems leads to excess costs that impact the availability of resources that could be redirected to other purposes with a greater positive impact on quality. SDG indicator 4.1.5 focuses on the percentage of students who are two or more years over-age, and their estimates are presented in **Figure 2.19**.

For 2020, 7.8% of primary education students and 13% of secondary education students are two or more years over-age. These indicators have presented an intense downward trend in recent years. In the case of grade repetition, 3.6% of students enrolled in primary education are repeating a year (4.7% if one considers only the first grade in the level). This is true for 4.5% of students in secondary school based on the average for the countries. These indicators have also improved in recent years, though less intensely.

The complete time series shows that over the past 20 years, the situation of students has improved systematically in terms of being over-age. The indicator drops steadily over time beginning in 2008 for primary education and since 2013 for lower secondary education.

This trend suggests that conditions for moving through a level have substantially improved. This is directly connected to the decrease in grade repetition, which is characterized based on the simple average of information available for some countries.

At the primary level, the intense and sustained reduction in over-age children is associated with a drop in grade repetition. This improvement in pathways is greater during the level's first years, when repetition rates were historically very high. The percentage of repeaters decreased from 10% in 2000 to 4.7% in 2018 in the 21 countries for which data are available, markedly reducing the gap regarding the total for primary education.

In the case of lower secondary education, the indicator shows a downward trend beginning in 2010 for the countries on average, and drops from 6.6% to 3.6%. At this level, the entry of cohorts of students from primary school with a lower presence of over-age students also contributes to the decrease in repeaters.

The period 2015-2020 is characterized by the continuation of this downward trend in over-age students, with an intensity similar to the previous period. A 2.0 percentage point decrease in primary education and 2.4 points decrease in lower secondary education were observed.

Figure 2.19. Percentage of children over-age for grade (SDG indicator 4.1.5) and average percentage of repeaters. Primary education and lower secondary education. Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2020.

Percentage of children over-age (Latin America and the Caribbean)

Percentage of repeaters (Average for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean)

● Primary   ● Lower secondary   ● First grade of primary
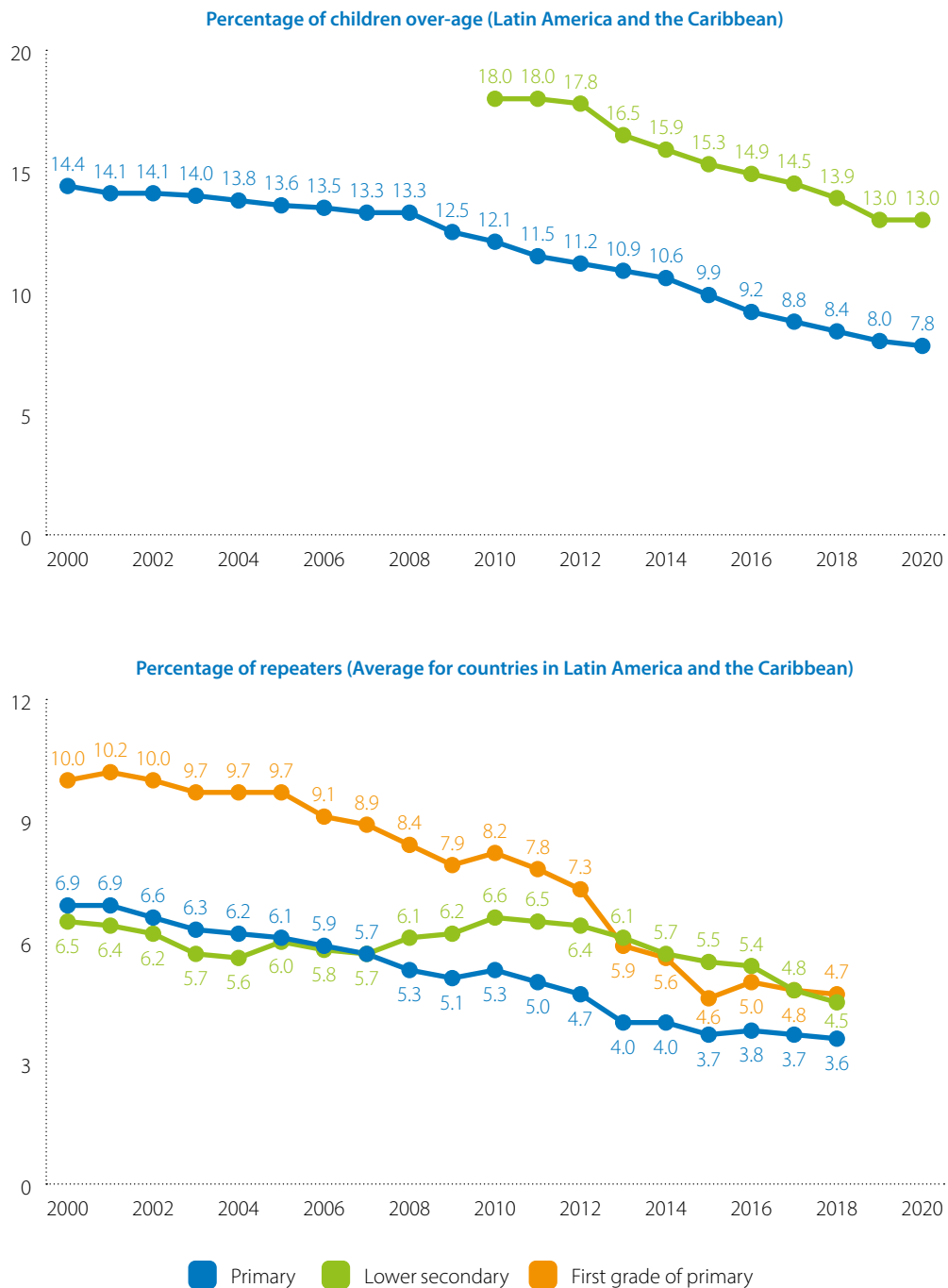
Note: For the simple average of the percentage of repeaters, data were used from Argentina, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. For the 2018 average, data from 2017 were used for El Salvador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Peru (primary), 2016 data were used for Panama, and 2015 data for Uruguay.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

During this most recent five-year period, the drop in primary education stopped for the average of the countries analyzed in regards to repeaters. The values have been relatively stable during the years under study, which shows that pathways have not improved. The presence of over-age children is expected to continue to decrease in the years following stabilization of grade repetition.[9] By contrast, improvement at the secondary education level is accelerating. Between 2015 and 2018, the percentage of repeaters dropped by an average of one percentage point, which is the largest reduction observed during the period.

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9   Students mainly become over-age through repetition, though this sometimes occurs due to starting school late or temporarily dropping out. Students can experience repetition at any point in their pathway. As such, a cohort of over-age students in 2020 may be related to levels of repetition observed during all of the previous years starting with the beginning of their school experience. The rate of over-age students may decrease for a given year due to a drop in repetition manifested a few years earlier.

Data for each country (**Figure 2.20**) show that over-age students pose a serious problem in several education systems in the region, particularly in Central America. In other cases, there is practically no delayed school attendance. This is mainly observed in Caribbean countries.

Despite these differences, overall improvements regarding this indicator can be seen. Nearly all of the countries analyzed present a decrease during the period. There have been substantive improvements, especially in lower secondary education. The most noteworthy cases are Honduras, Costa Rica, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the British Virgin Islands. These improvements speak to a strong decrease in repetition at those education levels.

On the other hand, there is no direct relationship with the presence of over-age students across education levels. The presence of over-age students is greater in lower secondary education than primary education. This is a logical fact given that, with few exceptions such as

Box 2.5

Student pathways in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

The ways in which countries have responded to the educational crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted the foundations that configure educational pathways and thus the suppositions that sustain the educational indicators that represent them.

Most countries have chosen to concentrate or reduce teaching contents in certain priority areas (mainly reading, writing and literature; mathematics; social studies; and the natural sciences) and to reorganize or increase the flexibility of assessment or accreditation criteria of education levels (UNESCO and IIEP, 2021; UNESCO et al., 2021). These changes in teaching and assessment can impact accreditation processes for the year of study and graduation.

As such, while we do not yet have comparable regional information, it is possible to anticipate that pathway indicators have been impacted by the exceptional policy decisions made in this context. For example, the indicators may improve exceptionally during 2020 as a result of the implementation of automatic promotion measures, increased flexibility or the delay of graduation decisions.

In other cases, there may be an abrupt increase in the percentage of repeaters and, as a result, the number of over-age students, as an expression of the difficulties that students have faced in regard to following teaching proposals and responding to accreditation requirements.

As such, the analysis of educational pathways during this period will require more contextualized data readings that consider the decisions made by each country in the pathway regulations and the way in which they may impact trends.

This context generated new demands for information that could be used to face the emerging challenges. This impacted information systems and led to changes in the way that educational processes— such as attendance, promotion and learning—were measured (UNESCO OREALC, 2021g). This, in turn, impacted the data.

The monitoring of these indicators after the pandemic will require opening up the discussion of the value of classic statistical indicators for capturing these complex new phenomena or new ways of conceiving traditional indicators. This requires rethinking how pathways and learning within the education system are measured.

Figure 2.20. Percentage of children over-age for grade (SDG indicator 4.1.5) Primary education and lower secondary education Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020

Primary education		Lower secondary education

Primary 2015	Primary 2020	Country	Lower sec 2015	Lower sec 2020
0	0	The Cayman Islands	0	0
0	0	Montserrat	0	1
1	1	Anguila	1	1
0	0	Cuba	1	2
0	0	Barbados	1	3
2	1	Mexico	2	4
1	1	Jamaica	3	3
1	1	Saint Lucia	2	5
2	2	Puerto Rico	4	4
4	1	The Turks and Caicos Islands	3	3
5	2	Ecuador	5	10
7	3	Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	8	17
2	2	Grenada	9	9
7	4	Peru	7	11
6	5	Bahamas		
5	4	Chile	8	9
1	1	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	13	13
6	3	The British Virgin Islands	11	21
4	2	Antigua and Barbuda	12	18
3	2	Argentina	12	15
10	7	Panama	10	14
14	8	Paraguay	11	14
8	8	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	12	12
6	3	Uruguay	13	19
9	7	Brazil	15	18
8	5	Costa Rica	20	27
8	8	Belize	17	18
16	9	Honduras	18	33
19	10	The Dominican Republic	19	22
17	12	El Salvador	18	23
15	13	Colombia	21	23
	10	Curaçao		26
19	14	Guatemala	23	28
21	18	Surinam	35	37

■ Circa 2015 ■ Circa 2020

Note: The 2015 values correspond to that year except for lower secondary education in Montserrat (2016). The 2020 values are from that year except for Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Mexico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Uruguay and Montserrat for primary education (2019), Grenada, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Puerto Rico and Montserrat for lower secondary (2018) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2017). The 2015 values are estimated based on linear data projections in adjacent years for Anguilla and Paraguay in primary and lower secondary education and for Panama for lower secondary education.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

skipping grades, students carry the situation of being over-age with them throughout their studies. As such, given similar values in primary education, the situation in lower secondary education can be very different.

These variations express the unique way in which education pathways are taken up in each country in the region and the educational levels and years of study that present the greatest difficulties, which sometimes present as bottlenecks that reduce opportunities for access, permanency, progress and learning.[10]

Key education policies between 2000 and 2015

This chapter complements the analysis of trends in indicators with a comprehensive and multi-dimensional description of policies. This logic is also used in later chapters. In this case, this systematization refers to educational inclusion and equity (UNESCO, 2020e). It presents governmental analyses and social efforts around early childhood education; the improvement in primary education pathways; access and equity at the secondary level; and comprehensive programs that have been created to address various types of inequities and guarantee the right to education for historically excluded populations. First, a more long-term perspective on education policy trends is offered, followed by a review of the specific period between 2015 and 2021.

One key issue on the education agenda since the early 21st century has been the development of new opportunities for early childhood (UNESCO and WCECCE, 2010). By 2015, Latin American and Caribbean countries already had longstanding early childhood development and education programs, and few countries in the region still lacked national policies at that time. Cuba is recognized around the world for its universal program for families: Educate Your Child (*Educa a tu hijo*). For its part, Jamaica is known for providing comprehensive early childhood development programs—including parenting support services—through well-coordinated governance dating back to the 1990s. Colombia stands out because of its From Zero to Always (*De Cero a*

Siempre) comprehensive national policy strategy. Its intercultural mode was launched in 2012, allowing for local adaptation of the lines of action, favoring improved quality based on local practices and the inclusion of the voices of diverse communities and identities.

Based on the International Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, the countries of Latin America and Caribbean have been moving towards legal frameworks and public policies that prioritize early childhood and children's rights. For example, Brazil's National Child Education Policy is designed to guarantee the right to education for children aged zero to six. It was first implemented in 2006 (Ministry of Education and Brazilian Primary Education Secretariat, 2006).

The legal frameworks for both pre-primary and secondary education were a key piece of the new set of policies designed to expand the right to education (UNESCO, 2014). The thematic indicators for monitoring SDG4 include a specific dimension related to regulatory frameworks, including one on monitoring the number of years of compulsory and free education.

The way in which each country defines free and compulsory education is linked to the creation of favorable conditions for meeting SDG4. SDG indicator 4.1.7 and SDG indicator 4.2.5 focus on data for monitoring this dimension.

Figure 2.21 presents two clear cycles of expansion of the right to education in the region. The period 2001-2011 was marked by a sustained increase in the number of years of compulsory primary and secondary education, which increased from 9.1 to 10.3 years on average. For its part, the 2005-2013 period presents an expansion of compulsory and free pre-primary education. This monitoring report covers the period (2015-2021) that is characterized by marked stability, with practically no changes in these trends.

While the majority of countries guarantee 11 years of free and compulsory primary and secondary education, some do not even manage to guarantee nine. This is especially prevalent in the Caribbean.

The situation of pre-primary education is even more diverse. Twenty countries have not set a compulsory year for the level, and another seven have set a one-year requirement. There is a wide variation on this topic: while 12 countries do not include any free pre-primary education, the other 11 offer three free years in their educational systems (**Figure 2.22**).

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[10] The concept of "bottleneck" is taken from the methodological framework of the Out-of-School Children Initiative. The concept refers to the existence of certain stages of schooling in which exclusion processes intensify. These tend to involve an increase in indicators of repetition or dropping out during certain years of study. The initiative's regional report for Latin America and the Caribbean analyzes the main bottlenecks associated with exclusion (UNICEF, UNESCO and UIS, 2012).

Figure 2.21. Average number of years of free and compulsory pre-primary education (SDG indicator 4.2.5) and primary and secondary education (SDG4.1.7) (in average years). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020

Pre-primary education

Primary and secondary education
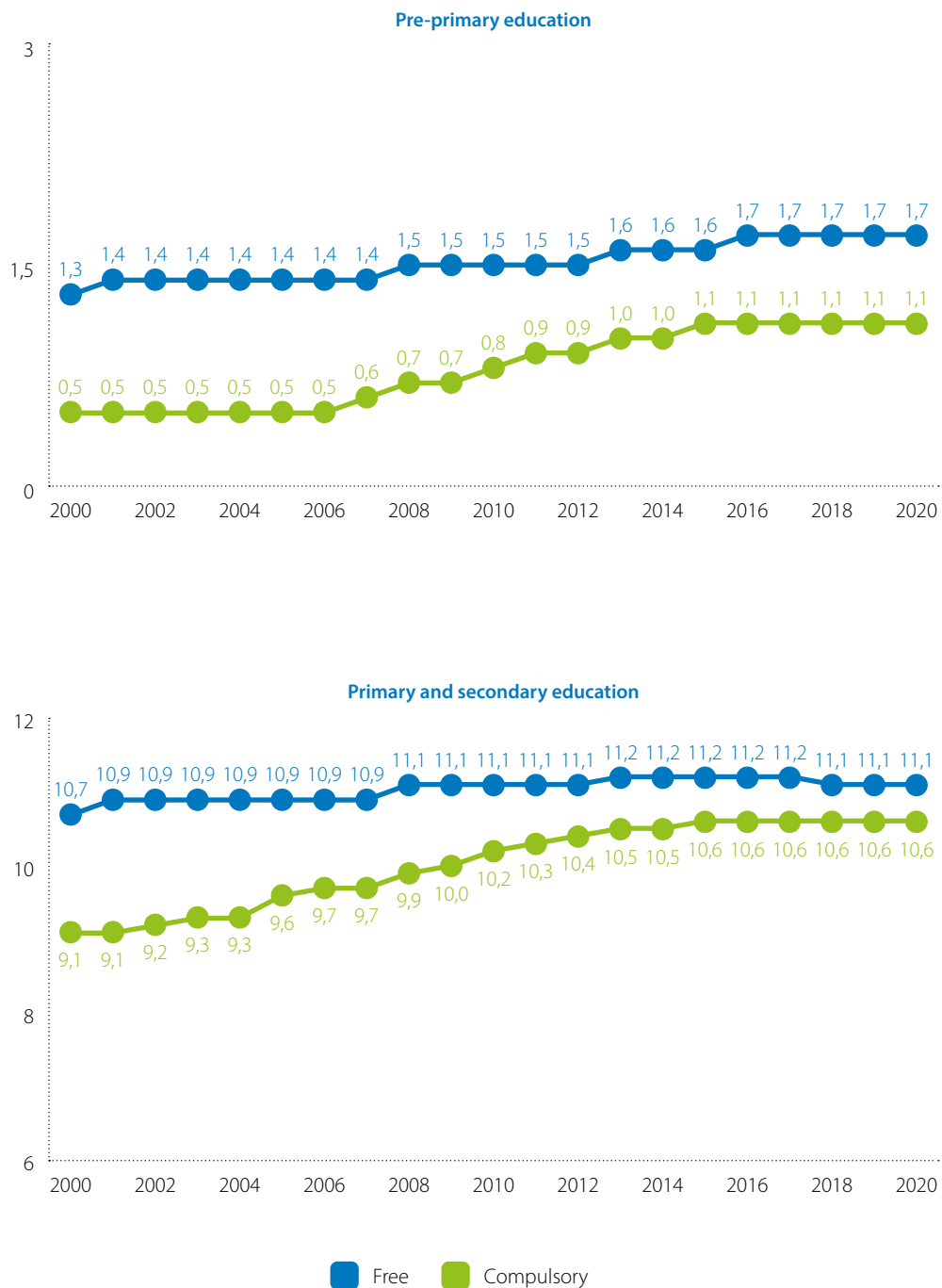
■ Free   ■ Compulsory

Note: For the simple average of years of compulsory education, we used data from Anguilla, Argentina, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. For years of free education, we also used data from Antigua and Barbuda, the Netherlands Antilles, Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, Sint Maarten (the Dutch part), Trinidad and Tobago and the Turks and Caicos Islands. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds

Figure 2.22. Average number of years of free and compulsory pre-primary education (SDG indicator 4.2.5) and primary and secondary education (SDG indicator 4.1.7), by country. 2020

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

Policies for strengthening access and permanence for more disadvantaged groups of the population were part of a major social shift in education systems that began in the 1990s (Reimers, 2001), together with the expansion of compulsory education. The emergence of compensatory policies with strong public resources was the first visible expression of this break in the historic homogeneity of education offerings, addressing the inequalities of origin that impacted students. Social, ethnic and cultural issues became key in education policy discussions focused on expanding rights and resources for protecting them (Rivas, 2015).

The emergence of Conditional Cash Transfer Programs (*Programas de Transferencias Condicionadas*, CTPs) was a key connection between economic redistribution policies and the creation of economic incentives for attending school. Programs like Brazil's Bolsa Familia (which was replaced by the program *Auxilio Brazil* in 2021), Mexico's Progresa (which was replaced by the program *Oportunidades*), Families in Action (*Familias en Acción*) in Colombia, *Chile Solidario*, the Universal Child Allocation (*Asignación Universal por Hijo*) in Argentina, Together in Peru (*Juntos in Peru*), Progressing with Solidarity (*Progresando con Solidaridad*) in the Dominican Republic or Ecuador's Human Development Bonus (*Bono de Desarrollo Humano*) are examples of the exponential growth in conditional cash transfers to the poorest groups of the population (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009; ECLAC, 2011). Experts estimate that CTPs covered 20% of the population in 2011 with a cost of around 0.4% of regional GDP (Cecchini, 2014).

Scholarships were created for the lowest income students for both secondary education and access to university. School-based nutrition programs were another redistributive policy that became popular in a context of economic growth. For example, Brazil's National School Meals Program (*Programa Nacional de Alimentación Escolar de Brazil*) managed to reach the entire education system (Education Ministry, 2018).

New compensatory educational policy programs emerged in this context. For example, Chile passed the Preferential School Subsidy Law (*Ley de Subvención Escolar Preferencial*) to allocate more resources to schools that include students from lower socioeconomic levels, changing the incentives in a demand-based funding model. This policy seems to have improved learning in the most at-risk schools (Irrarázabal *et al.*, 2012; Raczynski *et al.*, 2013). Mexico launched the Quality Schools (*Escuelas de Calidad*) program focused on low-income schools, which was later combined

with the Emergent Program for Improving Educational Achievement (*Programa Emergente para Mejorar el Logro Educativo*). In Colombia, the Let's All Learn (*Todos a Aprender*) plan began in 2012 in schools with weak SABER test results. Schools received teaching materials and support for instructors selected based on their teaching achievements. The Comprehensive Program for Education Equality (*Programa Integral para la Igualdad Educativa*) in Argentina created resources and additional support for schools in more vulnerable contexts.

These actions were combined with policies for rural populations to strengthen bilingual intercultural education (UNICEF, 2008) and the improvement of students' educational pathways (Del Bono *et al.*, 2017). In Colombia and Uruguay, the programs School Seeks Child (*La Escuela Busca al Niño*, see Calvo, Ortiz and Sepúlveda, 2009) and Community Teachers (*Maestros Comunitarios*, ANEP, 2013) provided additional support to low-income students directly in their homes.

Many of these policies were combined and strengthened with the help of members of civil society. Some historic programs in the region achieved major pedagogical transformations in contexts of high risk through alliances between the State and social organizations. Mexico's Tutoring Networks (*Redes de Tutoría*, Elmore, 2016) and Colombia's New School (*Escuela Nueva*, McEwan, 1998) are examples of massive scale policies that reached high levels of continuity and innovation.

Another axis that changed drastically over the past two decades in the region has been the protection of students' education pathways. Some studies report that repetition in Latin America impacted 30.9% of primary education students in the late 1980s, highlighting a historic problem that affected the most vulnerable groups of the population (UNESCO and UNICEF, 1993). Repetition is a costly mechanism. It has a significant psychological impact that tends to increase the likelihood that students will drop out (Mingat and Sosale, 2001; Pôle de Dakar, 2002; UNICEF, 2015).

The notable decrease in repetition of primary education is the result of a set of new policies and support for students' educational pathways. In particular, several countries in the region made progress towards creating new assisted promotion systems or systems based on cycles during the first decade of the 21st century. They also added a pro-literacy cycle for first and second grade and boosted more generalized beliefs in teachers

to combat repetition with strategies for teaching in heterogeneous classrooms (Estrada, 2020).

Secondary education was also a major focus of education policy agendas. During the 2000s, most countries made progress on expanded access to education through reparations, building new schools, granting more scholarships and supporting students from more disadvantaged groups, and reducing historic systems of exclusion, such as entrance examinations and other selective requirements. In some cases, progress was also made on a second generation of secondary education reforms that included the review of the academic promotion and assessment system, the creation of initiatives for teachers to focus on a single school and the extension of the school day with new curricular proposals that aligned more closely with young people's lives (Acosta and Terigi, 2015; Rivas, 2015).

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

The progress made, which has varied greatly across countries but is strong overall, continued during the period analyzed in greater detail in this report, through policies aimed at achieving greater inclusion, equity and socioeducational justice. The rights approach drove important efforts to recognize invisible and marginalized groups inside and outside of the education system. However, the expansion of policies and marked changes in government administrations contributed to an increased fragility of the continuity of actions that was hard to sustain due to the increased fiscal limitations that the region experienced.

During the period 2015-2021, early childhood education (ECE) expanded at the global level. This growth is probably linked to the role of ECE in SDG4 of the 2030 Agenda. Some countries managed to refocus their previous efforts in this direction.

For example, El Salvador has a long history with ECE that dates back to 1941 and has recently committed to consolidating State activity through the National Policy to Support Early Childhood Development "Growing Together" (Crecer Juntos) passed in 2021 (Remarks from the First Lady of the Republic, 2021). Costa Rica passed the General Comprehensive Care Centers Law (Ley general de Centros de Atención Integral) in 2000 and launched an Early Childcare and Development Network (Red de Cuidado y Desarrollo Infantil) in 2018 to bring together the efforts of the Children's Board (Patronato Nacional de la Infancia, PANI), the National Directorate of Education and nutrition centers and comprehensive child care centers (centros de educación y nutrición y centros infantiles de atención integral, CEN-CINAI) of the Health Ministry, and the Combined Social Assistance Institute of Costa Rica (Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social de Costa Rica) of the Education Ministry. Making child development programs and services more comprehensive and cross-cutting was the goal (Combined Social Assistance Institute of Costa Rica, 2018). Jamaica (see **Box 2.7**) and Chile made progress with comprehensive policies with broad prior development.

Teacher training has been important in some cases, such as training for preschool teachers in Ecuador, in-service teacher training programs in Brazil, and specialized courses on diversity in El Salvador. As a strategy for improvement, Mexico began increasing professionalization for its pre-primary educators through initial teacher training programs (the educational level prior to preschool for children between 0 and 3 years of age). Cuba, which has high levels of professionalization, launched a national evaluation of the impact of teacher training on pre-primary educators (Ávila, López and Martínez, 2019).

Family involvement is key for child development as long as it does not challenge the State's responsibility as a rights guarantor. In this regard, both the Cuban Educate Your Child program (*Educa a tu hijo*) and the Panamanian Schools for Parents (*Escuelas para Padres y Madres de Familia* program) set the goal on families providing stimulating environments for their children. This makes the commitment made at the Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017 effective on the expansion of quality ECE programs, particularly for marginalized or excluded children "based on quality offerings that promote children's comprehensive development with the active participation of families and communities" (UNESCO OREALC, 2017a).

The progress that the region is showing is noteworthy in terms of legal frameworks and public policies for early childhood rights. Comprehensiveness has been positioned as a strategic approach to ensuring child protection and development (López Roca, Moyá and Presno, 2019). In 2020, Mexico launched an early childhood care policy strategy in an effort to achieve greater integration of protection, health and nutrition, early childhood development and education. There are several common points with the Early Childhood Care Commission set up in Jamaica in 2003. The Mexican government also created a standing committee on early childhood.

Box 2.6

Expert survey results

The analysis of the survey of experts in the region (see Methodological Annex, p. 211) shows that policies focused on inclusion and educational equity have maintained their importance during the period 2015-2021 (**Figure 2.23**). In relation to actions designed to expand access to early childhood education, the experts reported that this topic had had a major presence on the agenda: 69% of survey respondents stated that it was an important issue in their country.

Actions aimed at expanding access to secondary education have also been an important topic. It was described as a key area by 59% of respondents, but only 19% believed that these actions have been intense. In contrast to policies focused on early childhood education, access to secondary education seems to have been a less important topic in the countries of the region. Actions for expanding access to secondary education were described as not important by 24% of survey respondents (compared to 13% in regard to the early childhood level).

Actions aimed at decreasing repetition and lowering the dropout rate between 2015 and 2021 seem to have a more limited presence: only 17% of experts stated that there had been intense actions in their countries. By contrast, 43% reported that there were partial actions.

The specific policies of the period aimed at reducing the dropout rate after the pandemic seem to have occupied a limited place on countries' agendas. The experts were divided in this regard. Twenty one percent reported that it had been the object of intense actions, 25% stated that there were partial actions and 54% stated that there were no concrete actions or that it was not an important topic (the survey was conducted in July and August 2021.)

In regard to specific inclusive education policies for disadvantaged populations, only 9% of those surveyed believed that it was an important focus area with intense actions in their country, while 32% stated that there were partial actions. This suggests that the issue was less important than other education policy issues addressed in the survey. In fact, 54% of experts stated that there were no important actions related to this topic in their country.

Figure 2.23. Importance of policy focus areas by topic according to the experts in the region's countries (in percentage of responses by importance category)

Topic	Very important / intense actions	Important / partial actions	Important agenda item / no concrete actions	Not an important policy focus area
Actions to expand access to early childhood education	30	39	18	13
Actions to expand access to secondary education	19	40	17	24
Actions to decrease repetition and the dropout rate 2015-2020	17	43	22	18
Actions to reduce the post-COVID dropout rate	21	25	27	27
Specific inclusive education policies for disadvantaged populations	14	32	28	26

- ■ This has been a very important policy focus area with intense actions
- ■ This has been an important policy focus area with partial actions
- ■ It is an important agenda item but has not led to concrete actions
- ■ This has not been an important policy focus area

Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Expert survey for the SDG4-Education 2030 Regional Monitoring Report, 2021.

Box 2.7

Early childhood education in Jamaica

Jamaica has achieved comprehensive coordination by forming a multisectoral health, labor and education commission that works with a group of academics and civil society experts to develop and manage programs and services from children from the prenatal stage through age 8 (The Early Childhood Commission, 2021). In order to improve teachers' professional development, Jamaica offers a conference on early childhood education and care each year. In addition, it introduced quality standards in 2019 in order to discontinue ECE programs that do not align with them. Although this has not led to the termination of any public policies, the regulation encouraged the participation and commitment of the stakeholders involved as to achieve quality improvements. The specific initiatives that Jamaica has undertaken include providing more space for learning through play in ECE after launching a manual for teachers in 2019 and establishing an annual event called "Play Day JA" (Tortello, 2020). On the other hand, it is important to mention the Jamaican strategy based on neuroscientific evidence: Brain Builder, for children ages 0 to 3. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Jamaica implemented innovative communication tools, using WhatsApp, TV, radio and a website that offered ready-to-print materials. The country also supported community activities such as "I Spy" (Tortello, 2020; The Early Childhood Commission of Jamaica, 2021).

Colombia, which prioritizes the most vulnerable children through its Colombian Family Welfare Institute (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*, ICBF), has coordinated the early childhood policy with the Education Ministry, focusing on improved quality and the adaptation of local programs and services.

In 2020, Panama signed the Comprehensive Early Childhood Protection and Early Child Development Law (*Ley de Protección Integral a la Primera Infancia y al Desarrollo Infantil Temprano*). It covers children from birth to age 8 and establishes the Comprehensive Early Childhood Attention Route as a policy strategy. This effort creates a single professional network for those who work in comprehensive care centers for early childhood (*centros de atención integral de primera infancia*) and those who work in preschools managed by the Ministry of Education.

The clear decrease in grade repetition in primary education was sustained through educational support policies aimed at at-risk students during the period analyzed. The incorporation of support staff, extension of the school day and monitoring of education pathways were common policies in the countries of the region. An example of this is the Permanency, Reincorporation and Educational Success Unit in Costa Rica and Uruguay's Educational Pathways Protection System (*Sistema de Protección de Trayectorias Educativas*, see **Box 2.8**) or the program Everyone Can Learn (*Todos Pueden Aprender*) that was implemented in the Formosa province in Argentina.

Various actions were undertaken to reach excluded students who had dropped out of secondary education. Examples include Colombia's We Change by Educating Interactive System (*Sistema Interactivo Transformemos Educando*) and the I Return to School (*Vuelvo a Estudiar*) program in the Santa Fe province in Argentina (Sánchez and Coto, 2016).

In Honduras, the We Can All Progress (*Todos Podemos Avanzar,* TPA) program focuses on prevention, protection, inclusion and social justice for students who are at risk of being left out of the system. It is centered on students who are at risk of failing more than one subject, those who return to school as migrants, or those who faced difficulties during their first semester.

Social support continued to be a decisive mechanism for protecting basic rights that favor continuity of school attendance and learning. Jamaica's Advance program is an example of coordination between healthcare and education that includes school meals. In Panama, the Family Food Stipends (*Bonos Familiares para la Compra de Alimentos*) directed at those living in extreme poverty are linked with school attendance. The Dominican Republic and El Salvador extended school days, thereby providing opportunities to comprehensively improve the situation of at-risk students by enhancing their daily meals.

Other actions have sought to create a more holistic vision of school nutrition. The Sustainable Schools program promoted in 12 countries through *Cooperación Brazil* and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) used a methodology of involving

Box 2.8

Educational pathway protection systems

The initiatives designed to protect educational pathways are focused on student monitoring and identifying risks and early interventions in order to protect and support compulsory education throughout the students' career and avoid them from dropping out. The system takes responsibility for creating a pedagogical situation in which everyone can learn, creating actions and strategies that contribute to understanding an integrated education system that coordinates and creates strategies at all educational levels (initial, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary). This implies monitoring cohorts, an inter-cycle and a connections policy across the various educational levels, as well as a territorial dimension and information management through computer systems.

There are various experiences for avoiding dropout in the region. However, the 2020 pandemic posed an additional challenge: the need to establish educational continuity through remote learning (UNESCO OREALC, 2021f).

Over time, different experiences have emerged in the region that vary in terms of their scale and funding. Colombia, for example, has the Information System for Monitoring, Prevention and Analysis of School Dropout Rates (*Sistema de información para*

el monitoreo, prevención y análisis de la deserción escolar); Chile created the Early Warning System for Schools (*Sistema de Alerta Temprana escolar*); Peru developed the School Alert (*Alerta Escuela*) in response to an increase in the likelihood that students would drop out due to the pandemic; Uruguay has the Education Pathways Protection System (*Sistema de Protección de Trayectorias Educativas*); Guatemala has the National Strategy for a Successful Transition (*Estrategia Nacional para la Transición Exitosa*, ENTRE) to address student dropout during the transition between primary and secondary education (Perusia and Cardini, 2021); and Costa Rica has a Unit for Permanence, Reincorporation and Educational Success (*Unidad para la Permanencia, Reincorporación y Éxito Educativo*).

These early warning systems (EWS) and the use of educational information and management systems (EMIS) consider individual variables (academic performance, attendance, employment); family variables (teenage pregnancy, early marriage); institutional variables (school climate, overcrowding); and the context (vulnerability conditions and manifestations of violence). In this sense, the pandemic has had a paradoxical effect by both highlighting the importance of protecting educational pathways, while revealing the urgent need to develop and strengthen this type of program in the context of the public health crisis at the same time.

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the community in food and nutrition linked to local family farms through 2019.[11]

Efforts continue to be made to extend and transform secondary education programs towards more inclusive system through new rules, curricular adjustments, specific programs, pilot programs and the creation of more flexible models. Some interventions have reinforced the logic of integration with a broader offering of secondary schools, or with the expansion of a shared lower secondary education curriculum. Other policies have sought to achieve educational inclusion by segmenting the offered programs. For example, Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Mexico created new programs specifically designed to expand secondary education coverage in rural areas (Acosta, 2021).

The two simultaneous policy paths expanded the dilemmas of secondary education, which are extended through alternative educational models, generating new forms of socioeducational segmentation. For example, Jamaica combined the expansion of secondary education—from five years to seven—with a new approach called Alternative Pathways that created various educational circuits to support the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in a pathway separate from that for students with more advantages (UNESCO, 2020e).

In some cases, this dichotomy has been overcome through secondary schools with strong programs and resources in at-risk areas. Examples include the innovative programs of Rio de Janeiro's Schools of Tomorrow (*Escuelas del mañana*); the Comprehensive Time Schools (*Escuelas de Tiempo Integral*) in Pernambuco, Brazil; the New School for Adolescents (*Nueva Escuela para Adolescentes*, PLANEA) program

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11 For more information, see "Sustainable Schools," United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, https://bityl.co/Bihg.

in Tucumán, Argentina; and the Advanced Secondary Education Program (*Programa Avanzado en Educación*, PROA) in Córdoba, Argentina.

Education policies also sought to advance in the recognition of various disadvantaged populations rights. Starting with the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education, progress was made on new frameworks for the right to inclusive education.

The region is relatively advanced in the area of inclusive education from a diversity perspective (UNESCO, 2020e). For example, Chile introduced the School Integration Program (*Programa de Integración Escolar*) for students with special learning needs. With the support of the Italian government, El Salvador adopted an inclusive school model that offers full-time services to children with special needs. They are placed in schools located close to each other so that resources can be shared (Campuzano, Padilla Espinosa and Fernández, 2016; El Salvador Education Ministry, 2016).

In 2020, Trinidad and Tobago launched an innovative inclusive school project with the support of non-governmental organizations (UNESCO, 2020e). Jamaica has undertaken a special education reform process in order to comply with the 2014 Disabilities Law (UNESCO, 2020e). Grenada's special education program provides personalized services to students with special needs, so that they can be part of mainstream classrooms (UNESCO, 2020e). Costa Rica passed the Pact for an Accessible and Inclusive Country (*Pacto por un País Accesible e Inclusivo*) in 2014, which includes a national inclusive education policy for all persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 2020e).

However, recent studies show that more work must be done to make inclusive education a reality for persons with disabilities. There are insufficient resources and infrastructure; individuals are identified too late; teacher training is often inadequate; and there is a lack of technology for supporting learning (Hincapié, Duyea and Hincapié, 2019).

Policies regarding the rights of indigenous people, Afrodescendants and linguistic minorities are part of bilingual intercultural education, self-education or ethnoeducation in the region (Corbetta, 2020). Peru's Intercultural and Bilingual Education Policy (*Política Sectorial de Educación Intercultural y Educación Intercultural Bilingüe*) (2016) is an example of policies in this area during the period studied, which seeks to improve access and educational permanence

through intercultural programs with various levels of decentralized management. This includes a process of opening up quotas for higher education and creating intercultural universities, the first of which is the National Intercultural University of Amazonia (UNESCO, 2020e).

Suriname's 2017-2021 Development Plan seeks to create an educational system that reflects a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual society, with more accessible and inclusive education programs (Suriname Planning Bureau Foundation, 2017).

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the 2016-2020 Sectoral Plan for the Comprehensive Development of Education for Living Well (*Plan Sectorial de Desarrollo Integral de Educación para el Vivir Bien*) promotes inclusive, participatory, intracultural, intercultural and multilingual education. The Plurinational Institute for Research on Language and Culture (*Instituto Plurinacional de Estudios de Lenguas y Culturas*, IPELC) and its 28 Language and Culture Institutes design strategic actions for the development of indigenous languages and cultures (Corbetta *et al.*, 2020).

Colombia is an interesting example of interventions directed at minorities at risk of educational exclusion. The country explicitly defined itself as multicultural, pluriethnic and biodiverse in 2016, which allowed the reformulation of the curriculum and create ethno-education teacher training policies (Peralta *et al.*, 2019; Corbetta *et al.*, 2020). The Education Ministry's cross-sector Projects and Populations Directorate (*Dirección de Poblaciones y Proyectos Intersectoriales*) is responsible for ethnoeducation, and the National Pedagogical Commission of Black Communities (*Comisión Pedagógica Nacional de Comunidades Negras*) establishes policies directed at Afro-Americans (Corbetta *et al.*, 2020).

In 2018, Colombia also adjusted its regulations to enable an easier access for the migrant population—particularly those from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela—to the right to education (UNESCO, 2020e). Costa Rica created a rule in 2018 that favors inclusion of the migrant population, given that 4% of students are foreign nationals, most of them from Nicaragua. This process also included a national campaign against xenophobia in the classroom.

Rural schools represent over 30% of the region's schools, and they serve a population with more unmet social needs (UNESCO, 2016b). Schools in which students

from various grade levels share a classroom has been a traditional response for these populations, though they face various problems related to prior training of school staff (UNESCO, 2020e). Some countries have created new models of satellite schools with a main school that has better resources and staff and several smaller, complementary schools. The nucleus schools in the Plurinational State of Bolivia are an example of the model that promotes bilingual intercultural education (UNESCO, 2020e).

Community support policies have been very important for creating stronger bonds for protecting the right to education in rural areas. For example, Brazil's for Young Land Knowledge (*Pro Joven Saberes da Terra*) provides public research to schools that offer secondary education focused on family farming through alternative teaching approaches. Other programs like the Family Farm Schools (*Escolas Familia Agricola*) promote community participation in the education process (Rolón and Figueiredo-Vleira, 2020).

Gender inequities were also an important focus area for some countries in the region. It is worth highlighting the disadvantages caused by teen pregnancy and parenthood and the distribution of care work in Latin American and Caribbean societies, which have a negative impact on women's education pathways.

For example, in Costa Rica, the Third Plan of Action of the National Gender Equality and Equity Policy (*Tercer Plan de Acción de la Política Nacional de Igualdad y Equidad de Género)* (2015-2018) proposed improving teaching on gender equality and equity with a participatory and intercultural approach. This is combined with other measures, such as the National Care Network (*Red Nacional de Cuido*), a labor or education insertion strategy for parents introduced in 2017. In El Salvador, the Gender Equity and Equality Implementation Plan (*Plan de Implementación de la Política de Equidad e Igualdad de Género*) (2016-2020) combats various forms of sexism and gender violence in education (UNESCO, 2020e). In Mexico, progress was made on scholarships to support basic education for young and expectant mothers.

Countries' ability to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic varied in the region (UNESCO OREALC, 2021d). In an uncertain context, there is a marked heterogeneity in regard to how the school closure and reopening experiences presented. There are no shared strategies, and this influenced the number of days affected (UNESCO OREALC, 2021d).

In this context, there were uneven responses shaped by the characteristics of the education system. For example, the recommendations for opening schools include aspects such as school safety related to infrastructure, social distancing and sanitization; human resources, which implies considering high-risk groups and teacher availability; and other recommendations regarding remote learning, technological resources in the home and funding (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

Connectivity and access to digital devices has been a key area that requires a broader understanding of the right to education, particularly during periods in which in-person learning was interrupted. **Box 2.9** analyzes the situation in the region since the beginning of the pandemic.

In regard to nutrition, approximately 85 million students in the region receive some type of food at school. As such, it has been important to ensure continuity of school nutrition programs (ECLACS, 2020a).

Specific cases of national policies designed to bring students back into the education system include Argentina's Accompanying: Bridges of Equality (*Acompañar: Puentes de Igualdad*) and the Early Warning System (*Sistema de Alerta Temprana*, SAT) for Chile's education system, including the creation of a contact tracing tool and periodic reports regarding absenteeism. Chile's Grow with You (*Crece Contigo*), one of the most renowned comprehensive child protection systems in the region, gives students expedited access to services and benefits designed to meet their needs and support their development at every stage of growth. It also supports families and the communities in which children grow and develop in order to provide inclusive, welcoming conditions for meeting their specific needs (Torres *et al.*, 2018). Along these same lines, El Salvador's Growing Together Program (*Crecer Juntos*) defines early childhood care from a multidisciplinary and inter-institutional perspective. In addition to creating early learning opportunities, it addresses areas such as health, nutrition, care, protection and safety (Inter-American Dialogue Education Program and UNICEF El Salvador, 2021).

Future challenges

The profound social inequalities that the region is facing are a decisive condition for achieving the 2030 Agenda goals. Education policies are not enough to address social origin situations and multiple and parallel forms of exclusion based on ethnic or linguistic factors,

Box 2.9

Digital development and school: Progress and challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic had a serious impact on the education system due to the prolonged closure of schools. This unexpected change tested the use of technologies in the educational sphere. Investment in digital infrastructure and the introduction of digital tools into learning have been important, but there is no question that these had been used to support teaching and learning practices before the crisis but that traditional educational practices had not necessarily changed. Understanding how this emergency transformed the education system is key for evaluating and effectively making use of the innovations that have driven new forms of learning and teaching (Area and Adell, 2021).

SDG4.a refers to the minimum requirement involved with having access to equipment and digital connectivity in schools given that the hope is providing education facilities that are child-, disability- and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.* **Figure 2.24** shows the proportion of schools with Internet access for educational purposes, and it reveals major differences among the countries of the region and across primary and secondary levels. The data also show that no major progress was made in terms of the regional average between 2015 and 2018. On one extreme, there are countries in which 100% of schools have Internet access for at least one of two educational levels. There are also nine countries in which fewer than 50% of schools have connectivity at the primary education level, and three countries (El Salvador,

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* Indicator 4.a.1 refers to the "Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service." Two services analyzed involve ICT access: access to a computer for educational purposes and access to the Internet for educational purposes.

Figure 2.24. Proportion of schools with Internet access for educational purposes (SDG indicator 4.a.1) by education level. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2018
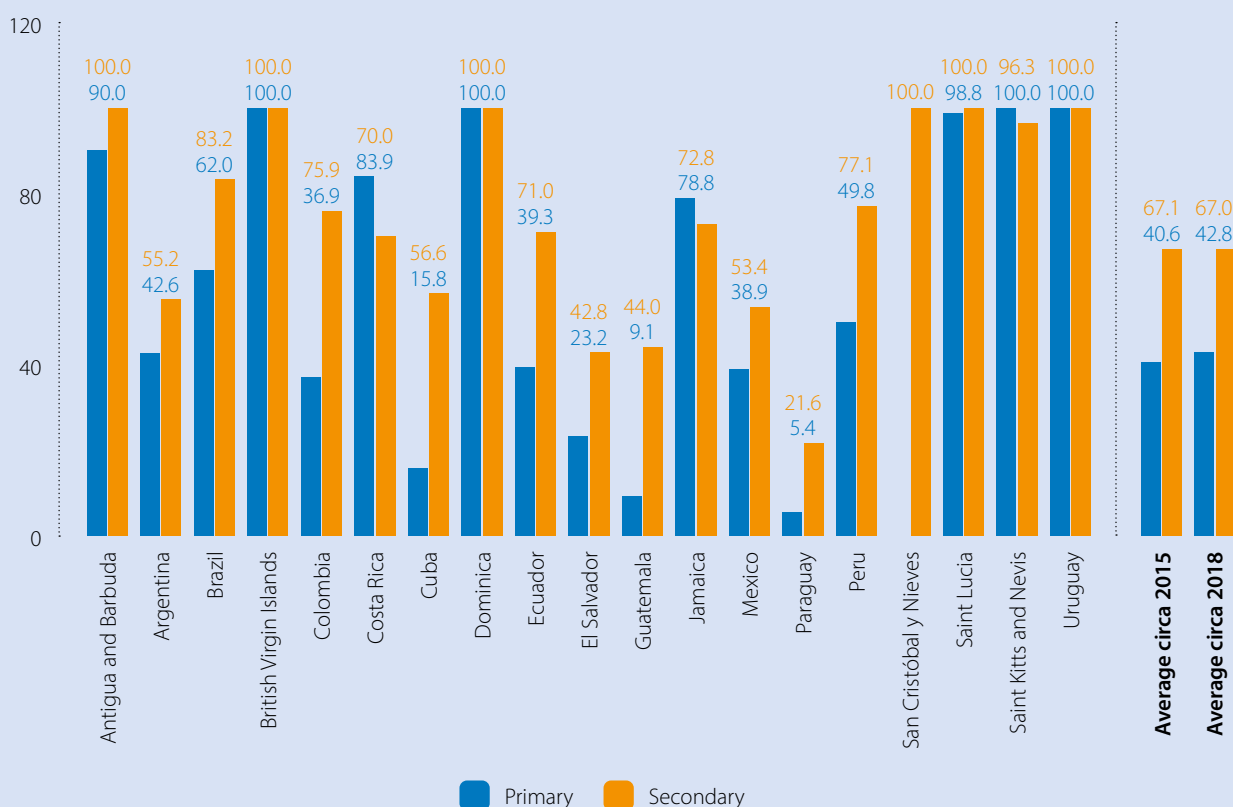
1. The average for Latin America and the Caribbean corresponds to upper secondary education.

Note: Data for 2018 are from that year except for Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Peru and Saint Lucia (2019), Brazil and Jamaica (2017) and Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay and Saint Kitts and Nevis (2016).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

Guatemala and Paraguay) fail to provide internet connectivity in 50% of secondary schools. The data show that the challenge of in-school connectivity persists. This means that digital elements cannot be part of the teaching process, and that there have been learning delays over the last two years.

Access to connectivity and digital equipment within the home has been key during the pandemic for synchronous educational activities and for receiving emails or messages regarding asynchronous activities. Home Internet access is fairly heterogeneous and very unequal for children and teenagers, which reveals major income differences and discrepancies among countries (ECLAC and UNICEF, 2021).

In addition to physical access, the opportunity to use digital tools in the educational process requires both physical and cognitive skills. Target 4.4 aims to substantially increase, by 2030, the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. **Figure 2.25** shows indicators related to the monitoring of this goal, which measures "The proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill."[†] For the countries for which information is available, less than 50% of youth and adults have the selected skills. As the data predate the pandemic, they show how unprepared the population was to face the changes involved with organizing activities like remote work and education.

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† This is defined as the percentage of people who have undertaken specific activities related to ICTs in the past three months. The indicator is expressed as a percentage. The monitoring indicator is comprised of nine skills. For more details, see "SDG indicator metadata," United Nations Organization at https://bityl.co/BjTG.

Figure 2.25. Percentage of youth and adults who can search, download, install and configure software; create electronic presentations using presentation software; and connect and install new devices (SDG indicator 4.4.1). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2019
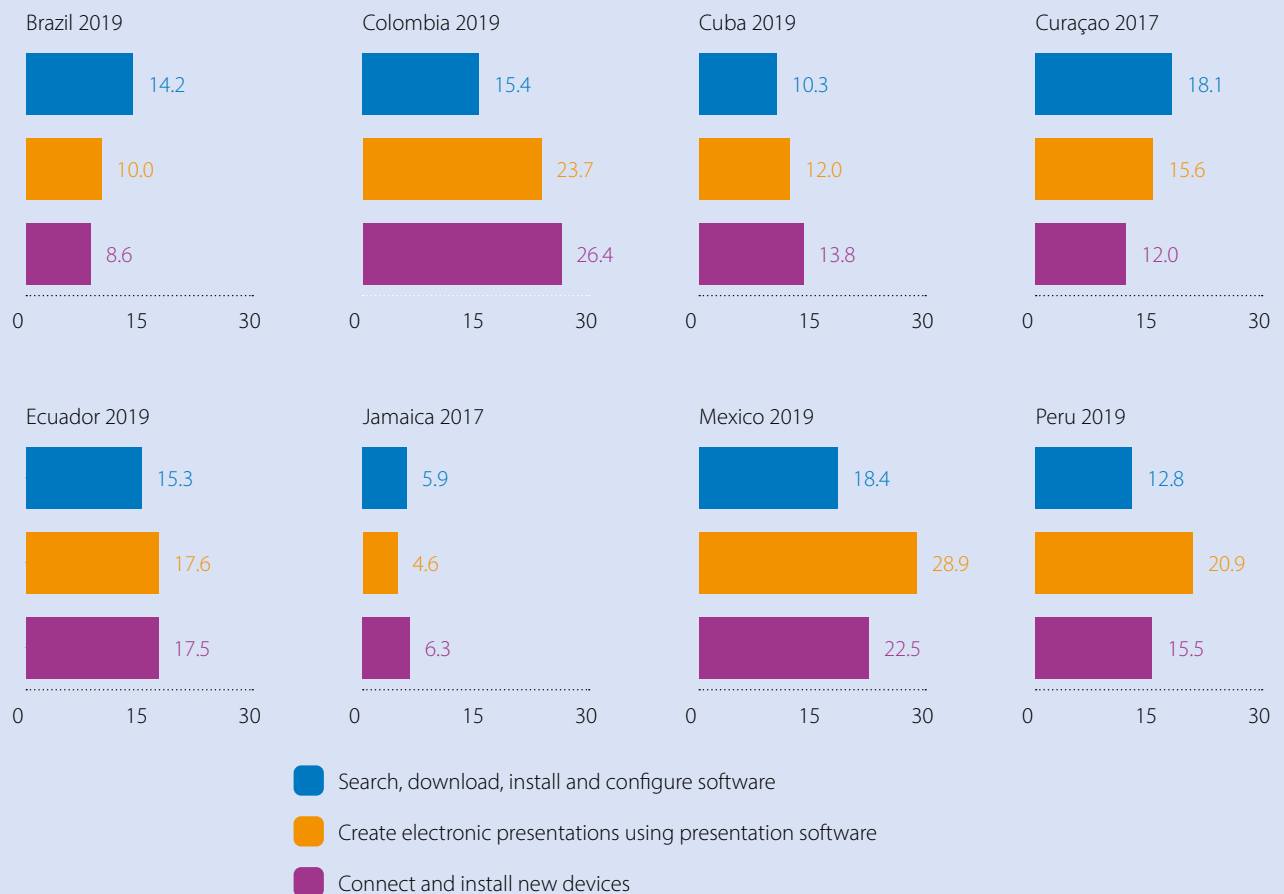
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic affected progress towards reaching the SDG goals by 2030. However, the digital sphere offers an opportunity to make effective the use of technologies in education.

The region faces a wide range of challenges. There is no question that a great deal more must be done in regard to physical access, in terms of both Internet and devices access that will allow individuals to make use of every learning opportunity on offer. Various studies have shown that the type of device is not neutral (Cabello *et al.*, 2021) and that the use of computers or tablets allows for more effective and efficient use of the digital space than cell phones.

Advances in technology can transform teaching practices, creating opportunities for innovation that favor recovery, which will be critical for the current generation of children and adolescents. For example, the use of artificial intelligence in education can support individualized learning based on children's characteristics, which offers better learning options (Area and Adell, 2021).

Quality learning means that technological and connectivity-related inclusion goes hand in hand with a safe, friendly environment with relevant content that will motivate students and give them the skills for the future.

Developing digital skills involves the entire educational community, not just the children and adolescents themselves. On the one hand, teachers need tools that they can use for learning. On the other, parents and caregivers also need tools and skills that allow them to support and guide the path to connectivity from home. Various studies describe the importance of adult mediation in digital inclusion processes, particularly in more disadvantaged contexts (Martínez *et al.*, 2021).

gender, beliefs or the living space. Broader visions that consider the social structure and economic and distributive policies are vital for achieving better living conditions and continuing to reduce extreme poverty in the region (Tedesco, 2012). As the reference document on inclusive education states, "Forging more inclusive systems requires a strong commitment to work towards a more just, equitable and peaceful society" (UNESCO, 2008). Coordination with other policies designed to protect and guarantee children's rights and provide social protection to families with dependent children is essential for improving efforts to reach at-risk families (ECLAC, 2022c).

Given such a challenging context, it will be necessary to engage in comprehensive coordination of educational inclusion policies in the region. As one prior study suggests:

> Inclusion involves a systemic reform process that brings about changes and modifications to content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and educational strategies in order to overcome the obstacles with the vision that all students from the pertinent age groups have an equitable and participatory learning experience and the best possible environment base on their needs and preferences (Román, 2013, our translation).

Comprehensive visions are strengthened by identifying the processes that reproduce social inequalities in the education system. For example, the study *Completar la escuela: Un derecho para crecer, un deber para compartir* (UNICEF, UNESCO and UIS, 2012) developed a list of disparities that increase educational exclusion and proposed a series of education policy actions. These included cash transfers, covering transportation and nutrition costs, providing materials, eliminating quotas, improving infrastructure, increasing educational demand and creating campaigns for families, eliminating discrimination in the group-class configuration and generating teaching strategies that address sustained inequality, integration and social and cultural diversity. In order to make the compulsory education on offer truly viable, we need material conditions, infrastructure and basic equipment.

These actions require a sustained effort to fund education and prioritize the distribution of resources to the most vulnerable groups of the population. Thus, it is vital to have precise information about the different situations in which rights are violated and about the population's socioeconomic level. The progress of digital technology may be a key ally for enhancing EMIS in terms of collecting, organizing and using data to calibrate educational approaches in order to improve inclusion, equity and education quality (UNESCO, 2018). Both topics are addressed in chapter 8.

The politics of educational inclusion require working in various areas and considering the beliefs of stakeholders inside and outside of schools. The

reproduction of inequalities is strongly rooted in biased visions of students' capacities. Improving education justice cannot simply be a matter of providing resources. It also involves multiplying ideas of inclusion, social and cultural diversity, solidarity and social equity. A humanist vision of education is based on inclusion policies (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2020).

Finally, the path to recovery for education systems after the pandemic cannot simply be a trip to the past. The acceleration of social, cultural and technological changes requires profound reconsiderations of what is learned in schools and how it is learned. The pandemic also disrupted education system columns. It even created a need to revisit basic definitions: How is coverage understood in contexts of virtual education? How do we measure year repetition in a prolonged period without in-person learning? How is learning understood and recognized beyond the classroom? (UNESCO OREALC, 2021g). Educational policy will make use of the break that the COVID-19 pandemic created to reach each student who was left behind and to rethink inclusion as the education system core focused on its students' future.

Student learning

Learning in SDG4, Education 2030

Learning quality is one of the key dimensions that SDG4 has positioned at the core of educational systems. Access, pathways, and completion of the different educational stages, analyzed in Chapter 2, are the necessary, yet insufficient, bases for achieving equitable and effective learning on a systemic scale. This chapter explores the learning outcomes measured in standardized assessments, and the actions underway to achieve better learning as a decisive step forward in the comprehensive attainment of the right to education.

The concept of quality advocated by the Incheon Declaration in its specific component on learning, fosters

creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills. It also develops the skills, values and attitudes that enable citizens to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, make informed decisions, and respond to local and global challenges through education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED) (UNESCO, 2015a).

This approach to the quality of learning suggests a comprehensive view that goes beyond those dimensions that can be represented as an indicator. Based on this dynamic and holistic approach, the monitoring of SDG4 requires certain objective measures to capture the central dimensions of learning in language and mathematics, the two main areas of knowledge. UNESCO acknowledges the importance of standardized assessments as a source of information for education policy decision-making.

The monitoring framework defined for this target revolves around SDG indicator 4.1.1, and focuses on learning in early primary education (second and third grade), at the end of primary and lower secondary education.[1] In each case, an estimation is made of

the percentage of students achieving a minimum proficiency level in reading and mathematics, based on a globally defined standard. This monitoring is, therefore, a crucial task for the countries of the region. Thus, in recent years, the capacity to produce countrywide data on learning has expanded substantially. While 18 countries in the region had at least one representative national learning assessment in the monitoring dimensions of SDG4 by 2014, this figure increased to 26 in 2019.[2] This expanded availability of data resources for monitoring learning reinforces each country's capacity to pinpoint gaps and challenges. The specific nature of this data, however, does not allow for cross-country comparisons, as each national assessment responds to country-specific criteria and is not necessarily aligned with SDG4 definitions. This limitation makes these information resources of little use for regional monitoring. Consequently, this chapter analyzes the scores of regional and global learning assessment devices that are regularly implemented in several countries across the region: the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (*Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*, ERCE) assessments for primary education, and the PISA assessments for lower secondary education. The Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning (GAML), under the technical guidance of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and GEMR, has worked on defining global standards for minimum proficiency levels for the monitoring of the SDG indicator 4.1.1 (ACER and GEMR, 2019) and their correspondence with ERCE and PISA international assessments (UIS,

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[1] The SDG4-E2030 monitoring framework also includes other learning indicators, as technically defined by the Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning (GAML); however, these are not discussed in this report due to the lack of comparable datasets from different

countries that would otherwise facilitate a region-wide approach. These are: SDG indicator 4.4.2, "Percentage of youth/adults who have achieved at least a minimum level of proficiency in digital literacy skills"; SDG indicator 4.6.1, "Percentage of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills"; SDG indicator 4.7.4, "Percentage of students by age group (or education level) showing adequate understanding of issues relating to global citizenship and sustainability"; and SDG indicator 4.7.5, "Percentage of 15-year-old students showing proficiency in knowledge of environmental science and geoscience."

[2] Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

2019).[3] Finally, it should be noted that at present, Caribbean countries lack supranational standardized assessments under this framework, thus preventing their incorporation into regional monitoring of learning in line with SDG target 4.1.

Although standardized assessments are a key resource for monitoring learning, the limitations of these instruments should not be overlooked. Assessments provide a limited representation of learning, often failing to capture areas of vital importance in students' lives, and even the use of their scores can sometimes generate undesired effects that undermine equity (UNESCO, 2019c). It is, therefore, important to understand the scores in terms of country-specific contexts and their curricular priorities, and to interpret them within a broader set of indicators.

Against this background, this chapter characterizes the status and recent changes in student learning, based on the ERCE and PISA assessments, as well as equity levels.

Learning in primary education

The information produced by the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (*Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación*, LLECE), through the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Studies, enables the identification of learning outcomes for grade 3—which generally coincides with the stage when initial literacy is established along with mastery of basic numeric operations—and for grade 6, which tends to coincide with the final year of primary education. These are also the measurement points for SDG indicator 4.1.1, global monitoring of the target, enabling the harmonization of the diagnosis with SDG4.

As these studies have undergone methodological changes that affect their comparability over time, they can be monitored in two stages: on the one hand, by observing the trends of the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Studies in 2006 (*Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*, SERCE) and 2013 (*Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*, TERCE); and on the other hand, the assessments of 2013 (TERCE) and 2019 (*Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo*, ERCE). Each of these comparison periods has its own scale: in the former, the scores are standardized around a mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100,

while the latter uses a mean of 700 and a standard deviation of 100.[4] Both are shown in **Figure 3.1**. A comparison of both assessments reveals a marked difference between the two periods. While student performance improved in all areas and grades evaluated over the seven years between the SERCE and the TERCE, over the following six years the scores remained stable or changed only slightly.

Although the scores from 2006 to 2013 are only partially comparable, the data show an improvement in performance over the period, particularly in mathematics and especially in grade 3, with differences of almost 30 points in the assessment scale. In contrast, between 2013 and 2019 there are virtually no differences in assessments for both grades 3 and 6. The absence of improvements in learning outcomes—in the seven years separating the two studies—is a cause for concern in this case.

As noted earlier, these scores are also shown as a percentage of students achieving minimum proficiency levels, as set out in the SDG4 targets.[5] The scenario outlined by the figures above is even more worrisome: if we consider the countries that participated in both assessments,[6] in 2019 only 54.6% of grade 3 students achieved minimum proficiency levels in reading, and 50.9% in mathematics. In 2013, these values were slightly higher for reading (58.5%) and identical for mathematics (50.9%).

These results reveal two basic challenges linked to learning development in early primary education: first,

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3 GAML recently developed a protocol for countries to report indicator 4.1.1 from national assessments (UIS, 2021d).

4 Due to these methodological changes, the scores of the 2013 TERCE assessment cannot be directly compared with the 2006 version (SERCE). As decided by the coordinating body formed by the participating countries, LLECE produced two sets of scores: one that reflects the assessment's performance and includes these methodological improvements, and a second one adjusting the scores to make them comparable with the SERCE. Two measurement scales are used to tell them apart: a scale of mean 500 and standard deviation 100 for the comparable data, and a scale of mean 700 and standard deviation 100 for the TERCE scores that included these innovations. This second scale was used as reference for future implementations of ERCE studies (UNESCO OREALC, 2015a, 2015b).

5 The ACER and GEMR (2019) document provide a global profiling of the minimum proficiency levels to be considered for monitoring SDG indicator 4.1.1, and a mapping of international assessment results to these definitions, prepared by the Global Alliance for Monitoring Learning (GAML). "Minimum proficiency levels", United Nations, available at https://bityl.co/Bl0x.

6 These averages exclude El Salvador and Cuba in the ERCE, and Chile in the TERCE, as these three countries did not participate in both assessments.

Figure 3.1. Reading, mathematics and science assessment scores for grades 3 and 6 in SERCE, TERCE and ERCE assessments (in average scores). Latin American countries. 2006, 2013 and 2019
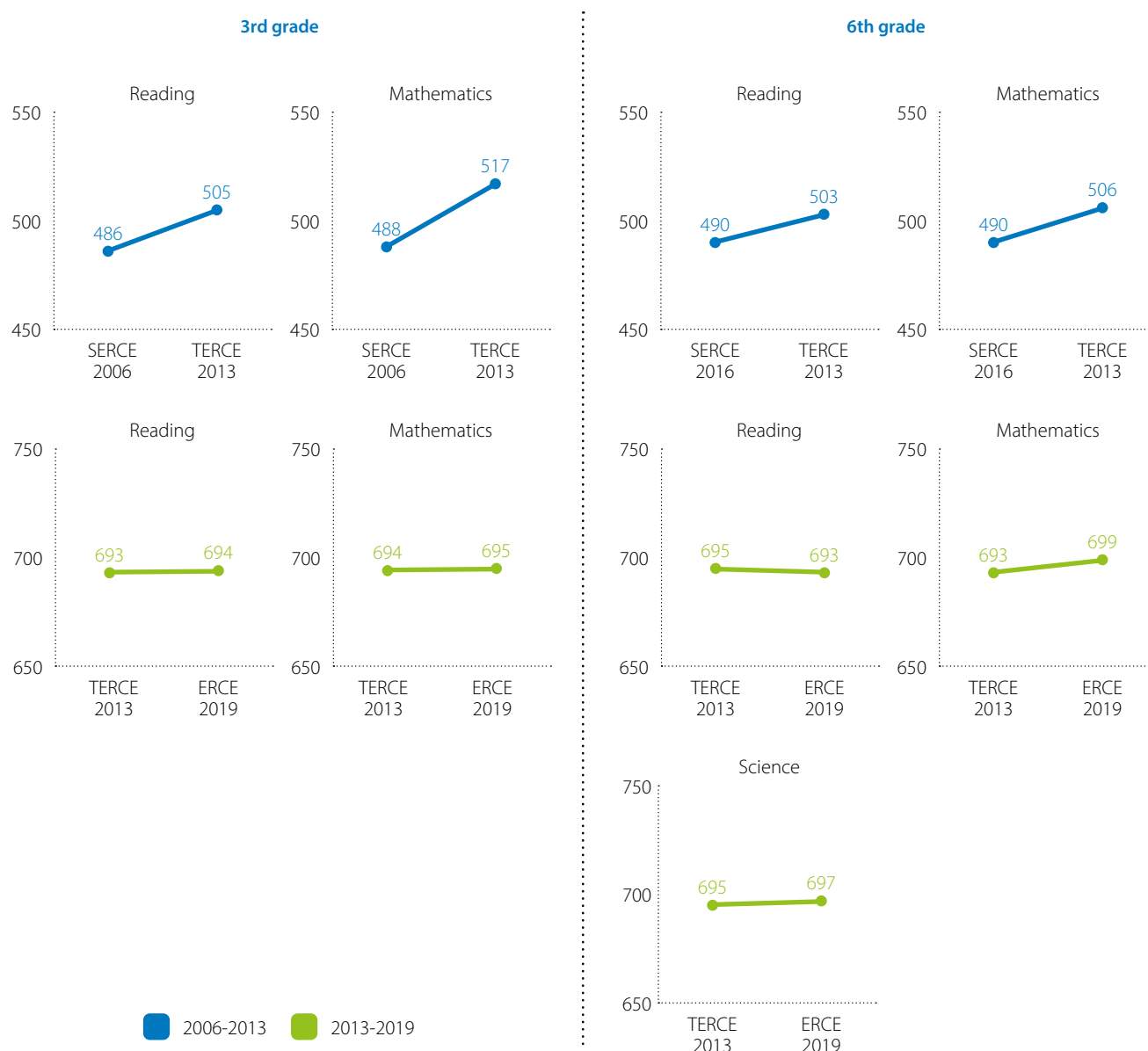
Note: TERCE 2013 scores are expressed in two units of measurement: on a scale of mean 700 for comparison with the ERCE 2019, and a second scale of mean 500 for partial comparison with SERCE 2006. The LLECE science assessment applies only to grade 6; in 2006 it was conducted in only a very limited number of countries, which is why it is not shown in the graph. The values are simple averages of the countries with information available in the three assessments: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE 2006). https://es.unesco.org/fieldoffice/santiago/projects/llece/bases (accessed 1 December 2021) and UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Studies (TERCE 2013 y ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

nearly half of primary level students fail to achieve the expected learning levels, which in these grades focus mainly on achieving basic literacy and numeracy skills (UNESCO OREALC, 2021e). On the other hand, we may observe a lack of improvement, and even a decline in reading when analyzing the changes over time in the countries that participated in both assessments.

In grade 6, the percentage of students reaching minimal proficiency is 31.3% in reading and 17.2% in mathematics. These figures are lower than those for grade 3, revealing a major learning progression issue throughout primary education: less than one third finish primary with the minimum expected level of proficiency. In the 2013 TERCE, these results were 27.9% and 15.2%, respectively, suggesting a slight

improvement for all the countries that participated in both surveys.

These results warn about learning stagnation at rates well below the expected goals, as cautioned by the LLECE (UNESCO OREALC, 2021e). Even if we disregard the impact of the education crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the region is far from achieving the goals set for 2030, not only because of the low levels of learning, but also because of the lack of improvement in the last five years.

Looking at each country (**Figure 3.2**),[7] there are some outstanding cases of improvement. Peru is the most interesting case, as a country that has sustained a rising trend in learning achievements according to PISA scores for several years, as well as in its national assessments (Rivas and Scasso, 2017). In 2019, it was one of the highest performing countries. Countries such as Brazil, Paraguay (only in grade 3) and Honduras (only in mathematics) have also increased their performance and the Dominican Republic and Ecuador to a lesser extent.

Meanwhile, it is possible to observe some noticeable setbacks, especially in grade 3. At this stage, some countries have even seen a reduction of 10 percentage points in the proportion of students with minimum proficiency levels. Such is the case of Guatemala in reading, or Argentina and Costa Rica in mathematics. In grade 6, the most pronounced lags were observed in mathematics in Argentina, and science in Argentina, Colombia, and Nicaragua.

To better understand the existing challenges and the unequal learning opportunities, it is important to explore inside the country averages, in order to assess existing inequalities and determine the most challenged population groups.

As proposed by LLECE (UNESCO OREALC, 2021e), a first approach to inequality can be based on the relationship between outcomes (vertical axis in **Figure 3.3**) and their internal variation (horizontal axis). The variation is expressed as the standard deviation, and shows the

extent to which the results of all students represented in an average aggregate value are similar to each other, or very unequal. Countries to the right of the vertical dotted line have the highest standard deviation. This reflects greater internal heterogeneity in their results and, therefore, greater inequalities. It is often the case that the countries with the highest scores also have the greatest internal dispersion, which tends to position them on a diagonal. This illustrates the challenge for the best-performing countries, where there is a significant percentage of below-average underachievers.

Countries breaking away from this trend are worth a closer look. On the one hand, there are countries that achieve high scores with low dispersion, as in the case of Costa Rica in all tests, or Cuba for grade 3 reading scores. On the other hand, some countries perform moderately or poorly on the assessment and exhibit greater internal inequality in their scores, such as Argentina and Paraguay for both subjects in grade 3, or Cuba in mathematics in grade 6. These countries face the twofold challenge of improving both learning quality and equity.

Other countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Panama, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras, have generally low scores, but less internal inequality. In these cases, the analysis focuses more on the mean than on dispersion, since the greatest challenge is to achieve a generalized improvement in learning.

To further analyze the existing inequalities in the region in terms of learning, an analysis was made of the differences observed in test performance according to certain characteristics of the students, their environments and schools. **Figure 3.4** summarizes these achievement gaps, expressed as a percentage of students reaching minimum proficiency levels.

The main driver for inequality has to do with the population's socioeconomic level. If we consider students in the lowest-income quintile, only 40% achieve minimum proficiency levels in grade 3, while this exceeds 70% in the highest-income quintile.

This inequality is also patent in grade 6, albeit with some distinctive features: first, the percentage achieving minimum proficiency is much lower than in grade 3, but is generally more pronounced in the lowest-income quintile. In turn, the difference between quintiles is greater in reading (40 points) and smaller in mathematics (24 points).

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7 The global definition of *minimum proficiency levels* for monitoring SDG4 refers to reading and mathematics (ACER and GEMR, 2019). The ERCE science results lack this methodological framework, so there is no underlying subject-wide process that can define a "minimum level of performance". However, when publishing the ERCE 2019 results, science scores were aligned to those in reading and mathematics, for more consistent reporting of the results. Science scores have been included in this analysis to expand our scope on learning monitoring.

Figure 3.2. Proportion of children and young people achieving at least a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1) in reading, mathematics, and science, by country. Grades 3 and 6. Latin American countries. 2013-2019

3rd grade reading

Country	TERCE 2013	ERCE 2019
Argentina	62	54
Brazil	67	72
Colombia		63
Costa Rica		75
Cuba		70
Ecuador		58
El Salvador		56
Guatemala	54	39
Honduras		47
Mexico		62
Nicaragua	44	36
Panama	50	42
Paraguay	43	49
Peru	68	76
Dominican Republic	26	27
Uruguay		65

6th grade reading

Country	TERCE 2013	ERCE 2019
Argentina	32	32
Brazil	37	44
Colombia		38
Costa Rica		54
Cuba		45
Ecuador		26
El Salvador		29
Guatemala	19	16
Honduras		16
Mexico	42	42
Nicaragua	14	13
Panama	21	17
Paraguay		19
Peru	31	49
Dominican Republic	8	16
Uruguay		44

3rd grade mathematics

Country	TERCE 2013	ERCE 2019
Argentina	61	51
Brazil	63	69
Colombia	53	57
Costa Rica	77	67
Cuba		76
Ecuador		57
El Salvador		50
Guatemala	40	34
Honduras	45	53
Mexico	70	65
Nicaragua	32	35
Panama	40	32
Paraguay	34	39
Peru	60	71
Dominican Republic	15	19
Uruguay	69	63

6th grade mathematics

Country	TERCE 2013	ERCE 2019
Argentina	21	13
Brazil	17	28
Colombia		16
Costa Rica		20
Cuba		20
Ecuador	14	23
El Salvador		8
Guatemala	9	7
Honduras	6	11
Mexico	37	38
Nicaragua	3	3
Panama		3
Paraguay		6
Peru	22	39
Dominican Republic	1	2
Uruguay		38

6th grade science

Country	TERCE 2013	ERCE 2019
Argentina	21	14
Brazil	20	25
Colombia	30	21
Costa Rica		39
Cuba		49
Ecuador	20	26
El Salvador		19
Guatemala	15	10
Honduras		12
Mexico	30	28
Nicaragua	11	5
Panama	15	12
Paraguay	9	10
Peru	20	25
Dominican Republic	5	6
Uruguay		31

■ TERCE 2013   ■ ERCE 2019

Note: TERCE data were not included for countries, grades and areas where the differences between TERCE and ERCE are not statistically significant.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 3.3. ERCE reading and mathematics scores and standard deviation, by country (in mean scores). Grades 3 and 6. Latin American countries. 2019
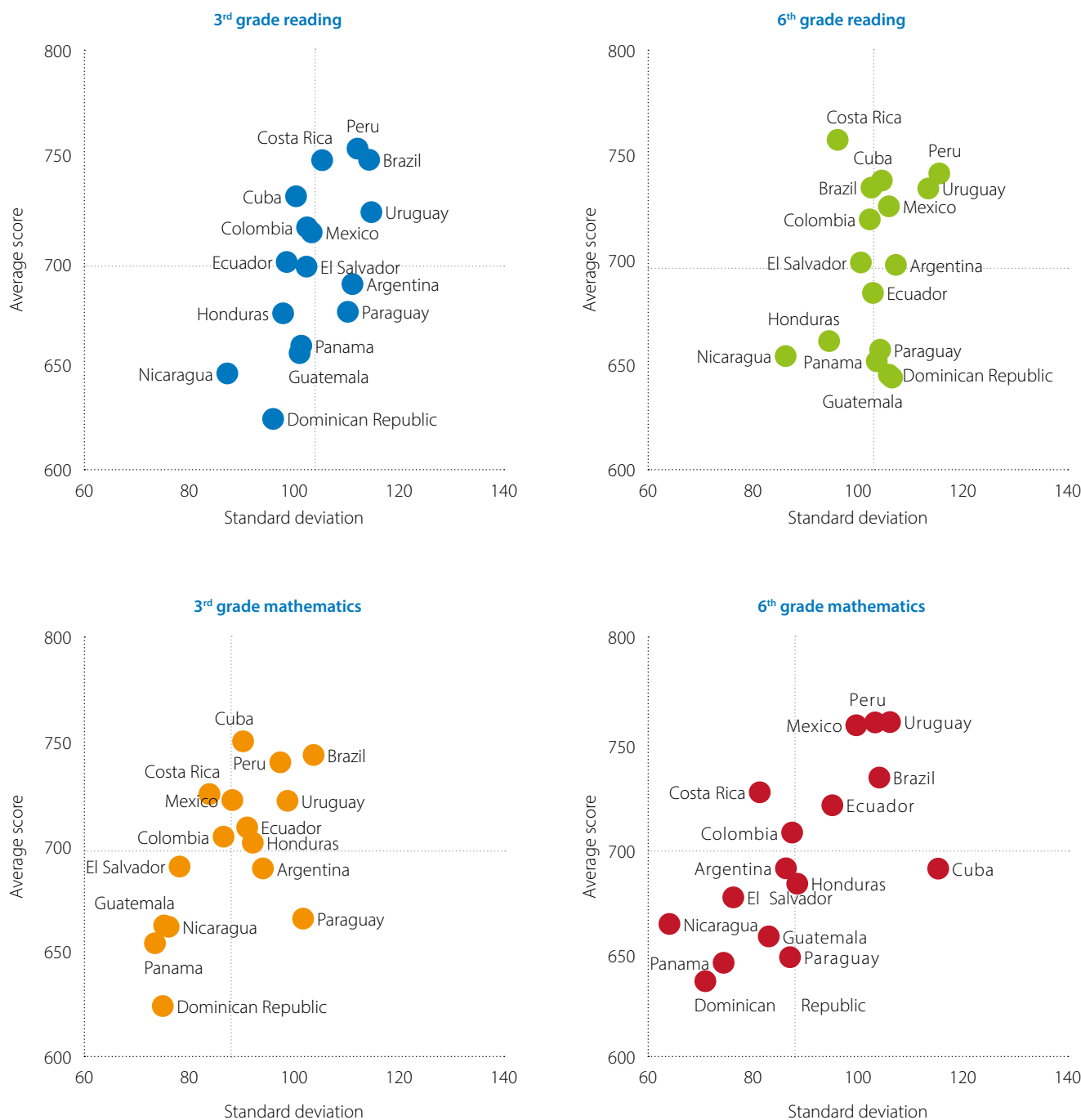
Note: The dotted lines represent the simple mean of the countries for each axis.

Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Two significant aspects for measuring inequality are revealed: first, difficulties in mathematics are more widespread than in reading. Second, that the learning gaps in mathematics shrink because the higher-income population has lower scores, not because the lower-income quintile has improved. Some studies report that the educational level of the household has a greater influence on reading than on mathematics performance (Castro, Giménez, & Pérez, 2018).

There are also notable differences between rural and urban schools, albeit of a lesser magnitude. According to the analyses conducted by LLECE, these gaps are substantially reduced if we adjust for socioeconomic level, which enables us to assume that most of these

Figure 3.4. Proportion of children and young people achieving at least a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1) in reading and mathematics, by population group. Grades 3 and 6. Latin American countries. 2019
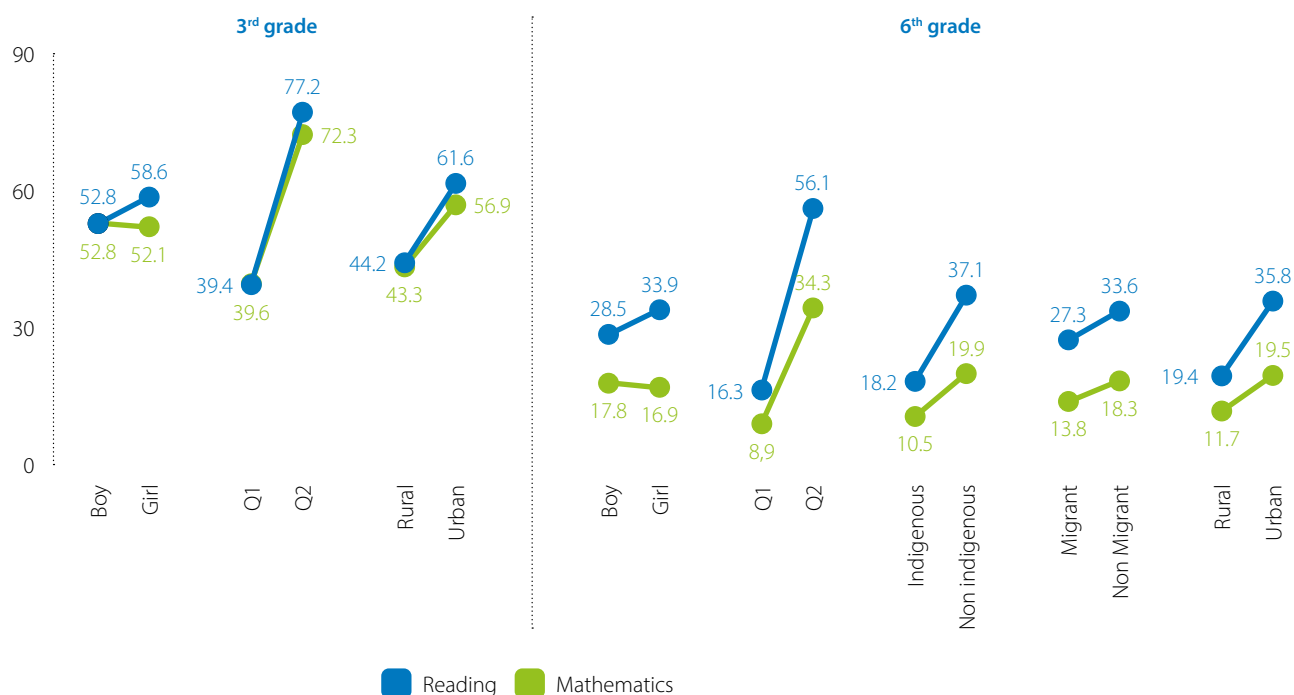
Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with available data: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay.

Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/

differences can be explained by living conditions (UNESCO OREALC, 2021).[8] Both sexes had similar results in mathematics, but there was a noticeable difference in the percentage of students with minimum proficiency levels in reading, in both years, which was poorer for boys. This warns of the need to improve the learning opportunities offered to children when it comes to reading.

The data also enables to determine to what extent indigenous and migrant populations are exposed to fewer learning opportunities. These gaps are present in both populations, which only have data for grade 6. In the case of the indigenous population, this gap is larger for reading, which suggests some specific challenges linked to language proficiency and the weakness of the bilingual intercultural education strategies implemented (UNESCO OREALC, 2017b; Castro, Giménez, & Pérez, 2018).

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8 **T**he correlation between school management and learning achievement is only significant in six or fewer of the participating countries in all tests and grades (with the exception of third grade reading, which is significant in nine countries) when accounting for socioeconomic status (UNESCO OREALC, 2021e), and in these cases the link is much weaker.

Learning in lower secondary education

In regard to secondary education, the monitoring of learning in the region is based on the OECD's PISA test. This test is administered to 15-year-old students in countries in different regions of the world. There are 10 Latin American countries that participated in the latest version of PISA (in 2018); 6 of them have participated regularly since its first implementation in 2000. While this information provides a two-decade snapshot of learning trends, this chapter will focus on variations between 2015 and 2018.

Defining the target population in terms of age means that, unlike at the primary level, the framework of reference for scores does not fully match the completion of lower secondary education, as defined by SDG indicator 4.1.1. First, because the theoretical age of completion for this grade varies from one country to another across the region.[9] On the other hand, given the high levels of grade repeaters in LAC countries, profiling

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9 The theoretical matching age for the final year of lower secondary education is 13 years old for 11 countries, 14 years old for 33 countries, and 15 years old for only 3 countries. Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

the 15-year-old population requires accounting for the learning of students who are attending different school grades. For example, in 2018, only 64 % of students assessed in participating countries across the region attended the modal grade corresponding to their age, or higher grades. Thirteen percent of the 15-year-old students assessed were two or more years behind their modal grade.[10]

Figure 3.5 displays the region's performances in the PISA 2015 and 2018 assessments, considering the mean values of the countries participating in both surveys.

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10 This estimate is based on data processed from the PISA 2018 database and those published in the PISA-D scores report (OECD, 2018). According to these estimates, the percentage of students in the modal grade for each country is as follows: Argentina: 66%; Brazil: 41%; Chile: 74%; Colombia: 61%; Costa Rica: 45%; Dominican Republic: 58%; Mexico: 79%; Panama: 69%; Peru: 78%; Uruguay: 64%; Ecuador: 74%; Guatemala: 61%; Honduras: 58%; Paraguay: 68% (OECD, 2018a).

Minimum proficiency levels in line with SDG4 target 4.1 are highlighted.

According to these estimates, last year roughly half of students aged 15 achieved the minimum proficiency levels on the PISA tests. This proportion is slightly lower for science,[11] and drops to one-third of students for mathematics, pointing to lower learning achievements in this field.

These results paint a worrying picture. In each subject, about one fifth of the students (in mathematics, one third) failed to achieve even level 1 learning, placing them at the lowest performance threshold. In turn,

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11 As is the case for primary education, here it is also worth noting that the PISA science results lack a proper methodological framework that determines a "minimum performance level" under SDG4. Nevertheless, there was a decision to include them in this report, using the same minimum performance level for reading and mathematics, in order to broaden the scope of learning monitoring.

Figure 3.5. Proportion of children and young people at each PISA performance level in reading, mathematics, and science, and proportion of students achieving a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1). Latin American countries. 2015-2018

Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available in the two assessments: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay.
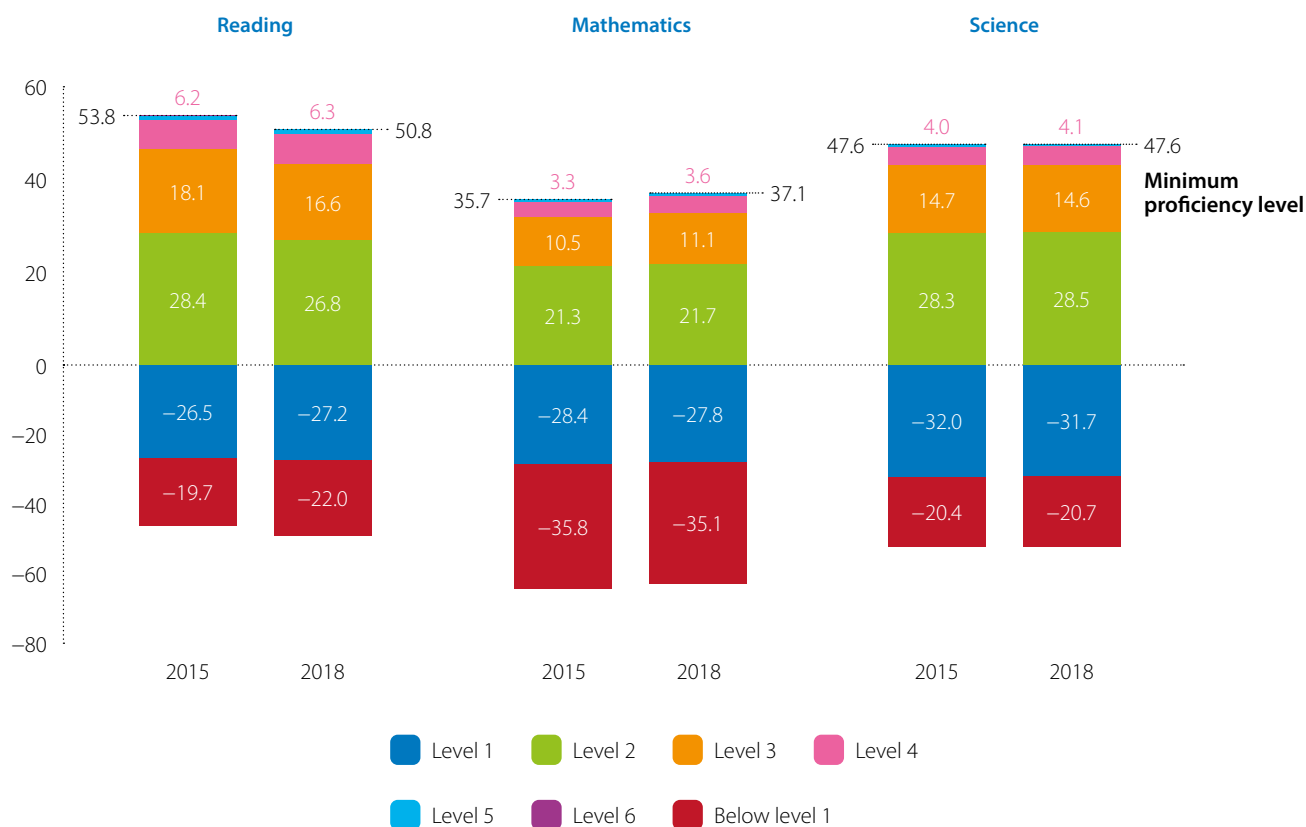
Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OECD (2015), PISA 2015 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

more than half of the students who achieved minimum proficiency levels were placed in level 2. The low percentage of students in levels 4, 5 and 6 reveals a relative dearth of highly educated students.

The results also reveal that the performances have remained virtually unchanged between 2015 and 2018 in all three subject areas, considering the country average. As observed at the primary level, the overall balance for the period shows a stagnation in learning development, at least for the group of countries that can be monitored.

In PISA's pre-2015 versions, the performances of the region's countries in reading and mathematics had remained remarkably stable since at least 2006, if scores were rescaled to compare them over time (Rivas and Scasso, 2021). In other words, there are no clear indications that student learning had improved substantially in the decade prior to the period under analysis.

The following section focuses on the results between countries. In this case, it also includes those that participated in 2018, and the four countries that were assessed in PISA for Development (PISA-D), in its student assessment component,[12] whose scores are shown on the same PISA scale.[13] In most countries, the percentages of students with minimum proficiency levels remained stable between 2015 and 2018 in

reading (**Figure 3.6**), replicating the same trends observed at the aggregate level. There was even a drop in Colombia and the Dominican Republic, where a statistically significant decline in performance could have taken place.

In 2018, Chile was the only country where more than 60% of students achieved the minimum proficiency learning level set out in SDG4. Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay were also high achievers in comparison with the rest of the countries.

The situation is even more dire in mathematics (**Figure 3.7**), since there is a high percentage of students who failed to achieve the minimum proficiency levels. In Panama, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras and Paraguay, more than half of the population assessed was below level 1, which deals with basic problem-solving skills. In Chile and Uruguay, slightly less than half of the students exceed the threshold of minimum proficiency levels. In Mexico, and to a lesser extent in Costa Rica and Peru, this indicator is around 40%.

The trends between 2015 and 2018 once again look stable. Peru is the only country to show statistically significant progress in these years, with an improvement from 33.8% to 39.7% in the percentage of students with minimum proficiency levels. This improvement is in line with achievements in both reading and mathematics from previous versions of the PISA test, and scores from other assessments (Rivas, 2015).

As in primary education, **Figure 3.8** provides a first approach to inequality based on an analysis linking the results to their internal variation or standard deviation. Once again, the distribution reveals that, in general, high-performing countries have higher standard deviations, which suggests that there is greater internal heterogeneity in countries with higher levels of learning. This relationship can also be observed in OECD countries as a whole (OECD, 2019).

Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina showed the greatest internal dispersion in their 2018 scores, mainly in reading. Chile also exhibits a high dispersion in mathematics. The situation does not seem to have changed substantively since 2015, illustrating how persistent these inequalities are in the results.

Costa Rica generally shows low dispersion magnitudes for the achieved scores, which is an encouraging sign in terms of equity. In 2018, Mexico also exhibits medium-high scores with relatively lower levels of dispersion in reading and mathematics, and Ecuador in reading.

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12 PISA for Development (PISA-D) was created as a pilot project spun off from PISA, specifically aimed at determining the educational situation of middle- and low-income countries. PISA-D seeks, among other things, to bring into the PISA model an assessment targeting out-of-school young people. This component consists of a 50-minute test administered to these people in their homes, based on a representative sample. PISA-D also assesses 15-year-old students attending grade 7 or higher, who are administered a test whose results are reported on the PISA scale. Five Latin American and Caribbean countries participated in 2017: Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Panama (only in the out-of-school population assessment component, as it also participated in the 2018 version of PISA) and Ecuador (only in the student assessment component). Data from these countries are included in the summary, since the scores of the student assessment component of PISA-D can be compared to those of the PISA versions. For more information, see "PISA for development", Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, available at https://bityl.co/Blpg.

13 The PISA-D learning assessment intended for 15-year-old students was based on the 2015 PISA test. More than half of the items were identical. The remaining items were adapted PISA items—for example, with extended scoring rubrics—and items used in other OECD assessments under the PISA frameworks. This enables to report the results on the PISA scale through scale-linking methods, and present them comparatively to other countries (OECD, 2018b).

Figure 3.6. Percentage of children and young people at each PISA performance level in reading, and proportion of children and young people achieving a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1). Latin American countries. 2015 to 2018

1. The PISA-D scores in the figure correspond to the part of the assessment aimed at 15-year-old students.

Note: The 2015 scores for Argentina have not been included, since the OECD does not deem them comparable given a low coverage of the sampling frame (OECD, 2017).

Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021), OECD (2015), PISA 2015 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OECD (2017), PISA for Development Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-development/database/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 3.7. Percentage of children and young people at each PISA performance level in mathematics, and proportion of children and young people achieving a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1) by country. Latin American countries. 2015 to 2018
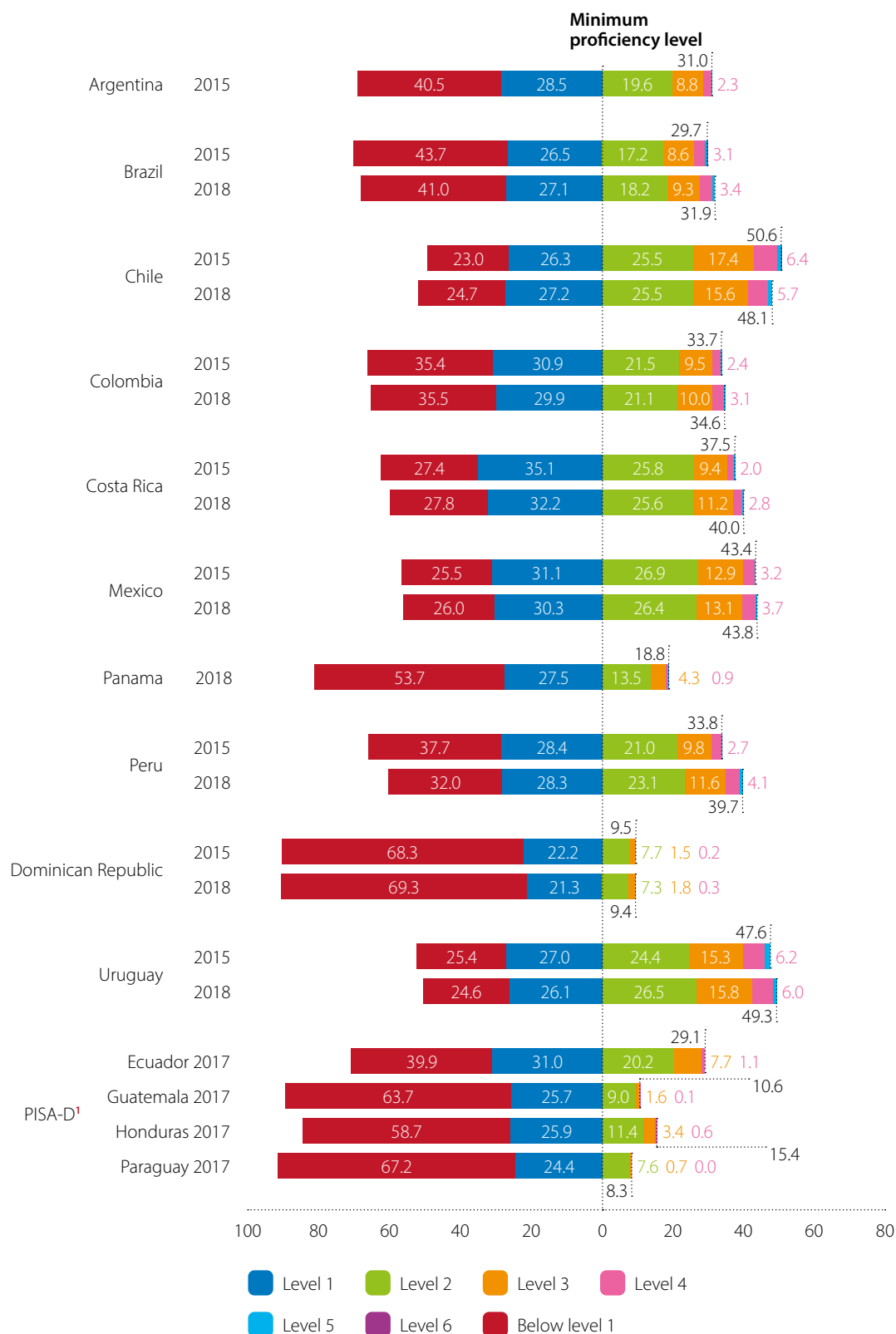
1. The PISA-D scores in the figure correspond to the part of the assessment aimed at 15-year-old students.

Note: The 2015 scores for Argentina have not been included, since the OECD does not deem them comparable given a low coverage of the sampling frame (OECD, 2017).

Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021), OECD (2015), PISA 2015 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OECD (2017), PISA for Development Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-development/database/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 3.8. PISA reading and mathematics scores and standard deviation, by country (in mean scores). Latin American countries. 2015-2018
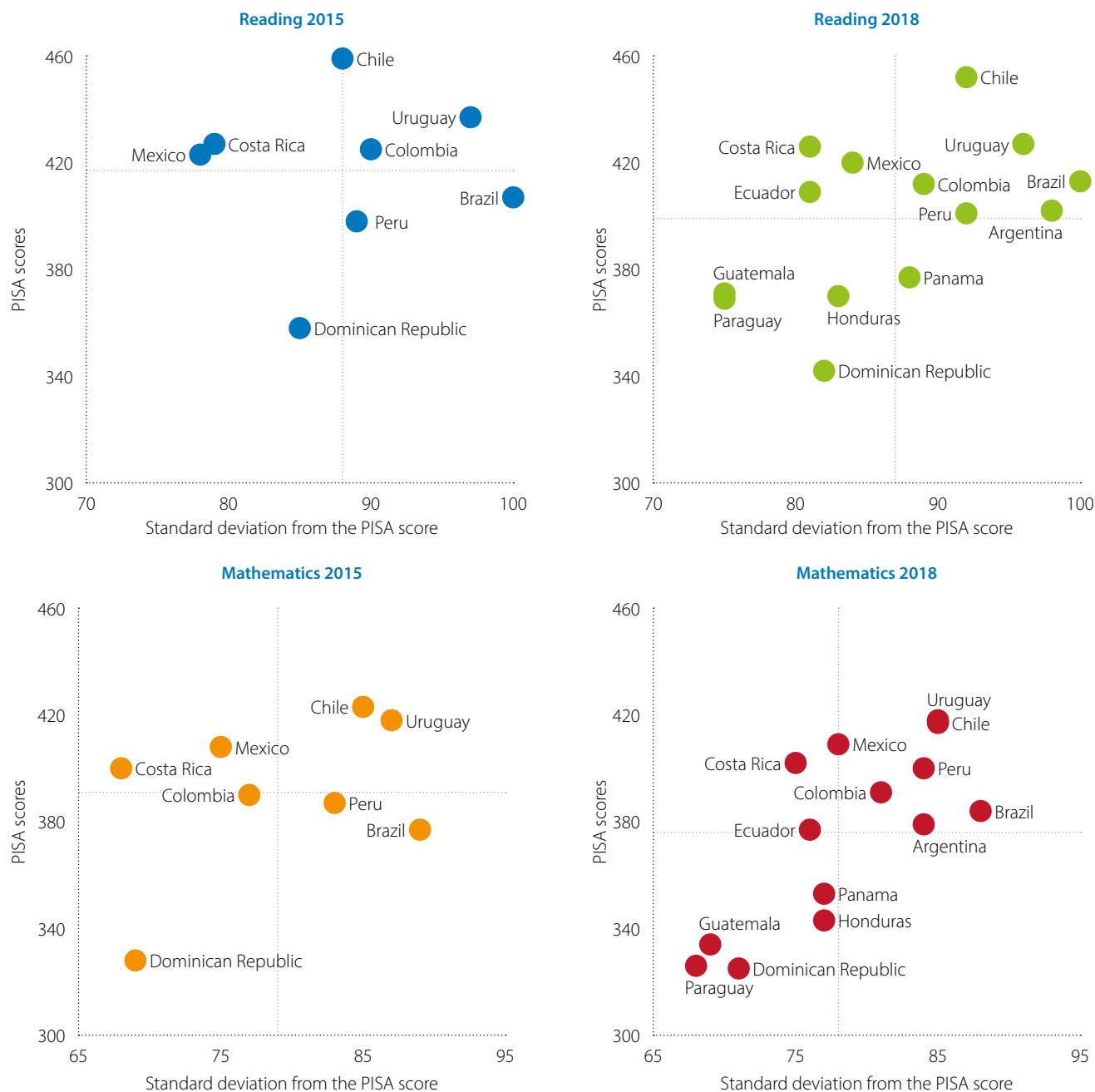
1. This figure includes 2017 results for the four countries that participated in PISA-D: Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Paraguay.

Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021), OECD (2015), PISA 2015 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OECD (2017), PISA for Development Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-development/database/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

In the lower left quadrant, where the results and dispersion are low, it should be noted not only that there is a more generalized distribution of under-performers in the population, but also the effect of a higher level of exclusion: as discussed below, many 15-year-old teenagers are out of school, most of them from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. By not participating in the assessment, the dispersion of results is reduced.

Figure 3.9 displays the achievement gaps associated with certain characteristics of students and their contexts, as a simple average of country data, in order to delve deeper into the main inequities that affect learning achievement in lower secondary education.

Disaggregation by socioeconomic level shows marked gaps in both areas: 75% of students in the highest-income quintile achieved minimum proficiency levels

Figure 3.9. Proportion of children and young people achieving at least a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1) in reading and mathematics, by different populations. Latin American countries. 2015-2018
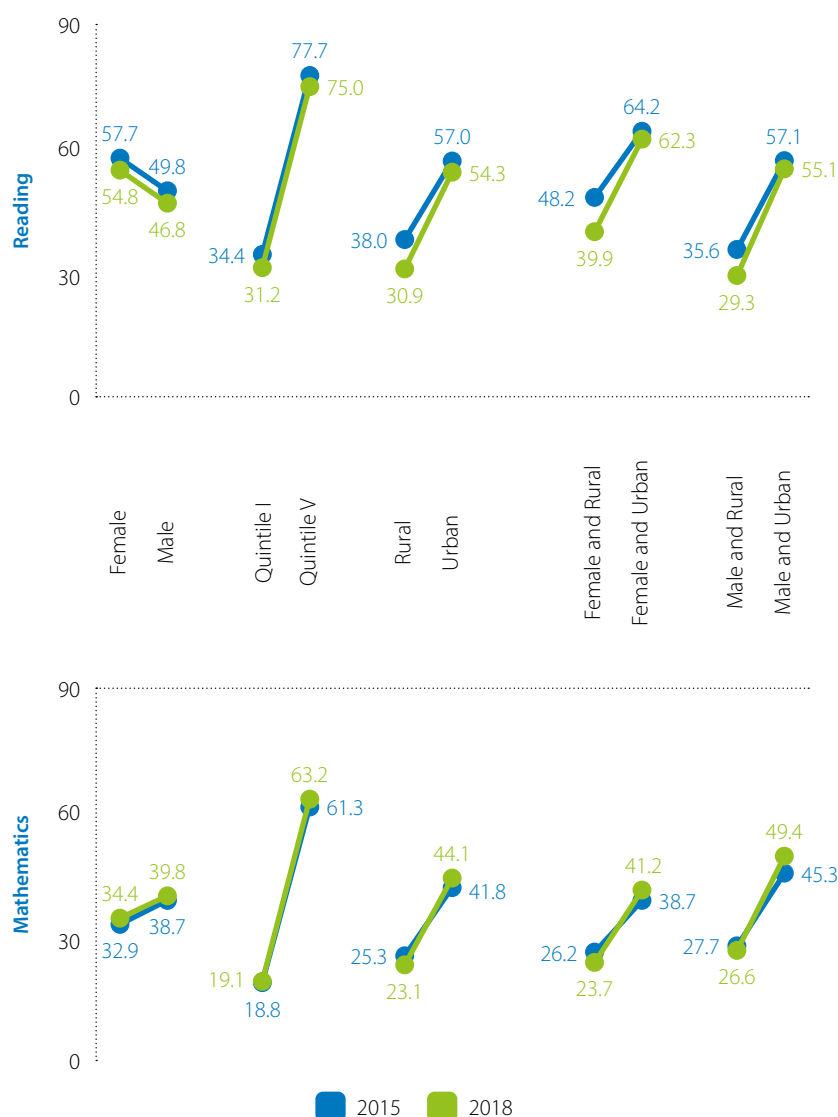
Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available in the two assessments: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay.

Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OECD (2015), PISA 2015 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

in reading and 63.2% in mathematics. But in the lowest-income quintile, these percentages drop drastically to 31.2% and 19.1%, respectively, warning of the poor learning opportunities available in the region for students from the most socially excluded populations. The lack of variation in the gaps between 2015 and 2018 is also quite concerning.

In rural areas, a deterioration of learning can be seen in the case of reading, with a widening of existing gaps: whereas in 2015 38% of students achieved minimum proficiency levels in reading (19 points below the results in urban areas), in 2018 this percentage stood at 30.9%, a drop of 7 percentage points. This resulted

in a larger gap of 23 points compared to students from urban areas.

In turn, the data reveal that this decline in reading has been greater among the female population in rural areas, whose performance in 2018 was worse than that in 2015. This suggests that gender-related inequality manifests itself more intensely in rural areas and, in turn, warns again of the need to push forward with studies that address combined exclusion factors.

The overall scores between males and females exhibit trends observed in past PISA tests, where females achieve better scores in reading and males in mathematics.

An important aspect to consider in this analysis and comparison of scores is the representativeness of the population being assessed. Both PISA and other standardized assessments report their results on students attending school at a given age or in a given year of study. Out-of-school populations are not represented in these data. Therefore, the existence of different educational coverage levels between countries—or within countries—biases the results. Consequently, when interpreting the learning achievements represented in the indicator, it is essential to take into account the proportion of out-of-school children (UIS, 2018a; UNESCO, 2020e).

Here, the mandate to universalize quality learning provided by target 4.1 creates a tension in the monitoring systems, since countries use different tools to measure school attendance and student learning outcomes. Technical proposals have been drafted in recent years to fill this gap by combining different data on educational level coverage or completion and test performance. These include, for example, the

UIS Children Not Learning (CNT) indicator (UIS, 2017), the World Bank and UIS Learning Poverty indicator (World Bank, 2019), or the recent SDG indicator 4.1.0 on future-ready children and adolescents (UIS, 2021e) proposed by the Technical Cooperation Group (TCG) on SDG4-E2030 indicators. Even the PISA-D project itself contained a component to assess the out-of-school population.

For the specific purpose of monitoring SDG4, the PISA score data should be contextualized in terms of the percentage of 15-year-olds out-of-school. As can be seen in **Figure 3.10**, the proportion of the population achieving minimum proficiency° levels in reading and mathematics assessments decreases dramatically when considering out-of-school children. This implies assuming that the out-of-school population fails to reach the minimum proficiency levels set out in the SDG4 monitoring framework, which is a likely assumption.[14]

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14 The PISA-D results of the four Latin American countries participating in the out-of-school population assessment component

Figure 3.10. Percentage of students assessed with minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics, in terms of the population assessed and in terms of the total population aged 15. Latin American countries. 2018

	Reading		Mathematics	
	Of assessed population	Of total population	Of assessed population	Of total population
Argentina	38.6	47.9	25.0	31.0
Brazil	32.5	50.0	20.7	31.9
Chile	61.0	68.3	42.9	48.1
Colombia	31.0	50.1	21.4	34.6
Costa Rica	36.4	58.0	25.1	40.0
Ecuador	29.9	49.4	17.6	29.1
Guatemala	14.2	29.9	5.0	10.6
Honduras	12.3	29.7	6.4	15.4
Mexico	36.7	55.3	29.0	43.8
Panama	19.1	35.7	10.1	18.8
Peru	33.4	45.7	29.0	39.7
Dominican Republic	15.3	20.9	6.9	9.4
Uruguay	45.3	58.1	38.4	49.3

● Of the assessed population   ● Of the total population

Note: Data for Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras correspond to 2017.

Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OECD (2017), PISA for Development Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-for-development/database/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Box 3.1

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning

The impact of the pandemic on learning loss is the most urgent and worrisome facet of the current educational crisis. Although the actual impact of the extended suspension of face-to-face classes is yet unknown, it is likely that all the scenarios described in this chapter have been deeply affected.

Remote learning arrangements have left some parts of the population with limited participation in organized learning, and this has affected the quality and scope of educational proposals (ECLAC and UNESCO, 2020; UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2021; UNICEF, 2021a; UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022). The crisis has hit the most vulnerable and marginalized students the hardest. The unequal conditions of access to technologies and to quality educational proposals have widened the pre-existing gaps, increasing the differences under analysis.

Different estimates and projections have emerged during this period regarding the impact of the pandemic on learning in the region. For example, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates that the effects of the pandemic will result in a 25% reduction in students with minimum learning outcomes, as defined in SDG target 4.1 (UIS, 2021b).

In 2020, the World Bank provided a simulation of three scenarios according to the number of face-to-face school days lost: an optimistic one, an intermediate, and a pessimistic scenario. In the intermediate scenario, the study predicts that the percentage of students below the minimum proficiency levels in lower secondary education in the region could be as high as 64% of the school population (World Bank, 2020).

The Inter-American Development Bank, for its part, presented a compilation of studies for the region revealing a sharp decrease in the number of hours per week that students devote to learning at home, with a greater incidence in the secondary education-age population (Acevedo et al., 2021).

Some countries, such as Chile (MINEDUC, 2020) or Mexico (De Hoyos, 2020), have carried out simulations of the impact of the pandemic on the

loss of learning, revealing critical scenarios in terms of backsliding results.

Some countries have recently advanced with implementing national standardized assessments to estimate learning loss, although their results are still too few to provide any real insights into the challenges faced by the region as a whole. This will require more data from a larger number of countries.

For example, the assessments of the School Performance Evaluation System of the State of São Paulo (*Sistema de Avaliação de Rendimento Escolar do Estado de São Paulo*, SARESP) in Brazil, show a sharp decline in scores in all the grades under study, as well as a drop in the percentage of the population assessed due to dropout. Participation in the test dropped nearly 6 points in primary education (7 points in fifth grade and 5 points in ninth grade) and 11 points in secondary education. The results exhibit a generalized regression, of varying magnitude. For example, the scores achieved in Portuguese language for the third year of middle school meet the levels considered as adequate for the eighth year of primary education. In mathematics, this lag is estimated at six years (*Secretaria da Educação*, 2021).

In 2020, Colombia implemented the Saber 11 test, whose results show little variation with respect to the 2019 performances, with some differences connected to the school calendar: students who attended classes from February to November showed very similar results between the two years, whereas a drop could be observed in students attending classes from September to June (ICFES, 2021). In the case of Uruguay, the Aristas 2020 test, administered to third and sixth graders, yielded similar results to those of 2017, which at first glance would not suggest a loss of learning. Nevertheless, the report highlights that a lower percentage of the population was evaluated (78.4% in 2020 versus 90.8% in 2017), for different reasons, such as higher dropout, higher non-attendance for the test, and more students excluded from the test for having special educational needs. Thus, there could have been a regression that was not reflected in the scores, as this population was excluded from the assessment (INEEd, 2021).

Learning monitoring should be a priority focus upon the return to face-to-face classes, in order to properly quantify the impact of the pandemic, the extent to which learning outcomes have been

compromised, and which populations have been most affected. Notwithstanding the estimates and projections outlined above, and the publication of texts discussing assessment methodologies in the current context (Fardoun *et al.*, 2020; Porlán, 2020; Picón, 2021), we have yet to develop a systematic and in-depth view of the effects of the pandemic on learning, a situation that conjoins several factors, such as the slow publication process in peer-reviewed journals, the availability of data, and the time required for any research that explores the traumatic effects of the pandemic (Moss *et al.*, 2021).

Adjusting for the out-of-school population, it can be estimated that only 31% of the population across the assessed countries achieves this goal in reading by the end of lower secondary education, and only 21% do so in mathematics. Moreover, by changing the distribution of the minimum proficiency levels, the relative situation of the countries also changes.

In some cases, those who reported high achievement levels are left behind when considering the out-of-school population, suggesting that the levels of exclusion are higher there, as in the cases of Colombia, Mexico and Costa Rica. On the other hand, this gap narrows much less in countries such as Argentina and Peru, which have lower levels of educational exclusion. Chile stands out for having higher learning outcomes and less educational exclusion than the rest of the region.

These findings highlight the importance of monitoring learning outcomes in light of inclusion achievements in Latin America and the Caribbean. Reading the assessment results in isolation, without context, can lead to biased interpretations. It is essential to monitor reading performance together with completion indicators for each educational level, as well as their changes over time, in order to achieve an adequate representation of SDG target 4.1. This reveals how countries assume different dynamics and it also shows what their specific challenges are.

This exercise is relevant for lower secondary education given the high levels of primary education completion across the region. This is suggested in **Figure 3.11**, which combines SDG indicators 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

For 2018, correlating learning and level completion indicators shows four scenarios: countries with low PISA scores with low completion rates (Guatemala and Honduras, participants in PISA-D), countries with high completion rates but low learning rates (Panama and the Dominican Republic), countries with above average performance but below average levels of coverage (Costa Rica, Uruguay, Colombia, and to a lesser extent, Argentina), and finally those with above average results in both (Chile, and to a lesser extent, Brazil and Mexico).

This enables us to identify which countries have the greatest gaps in terms of strengthening learning, and which ones concentrate these gaps on expanding learning opportunities.

Some positive shifts can be seen when comparing with 2015, such as in Peru and Mexico, which have managed to improve the quality of learning while also expanding opportunities for grade completion. In Brazil, on the other hand, rising learning outcomes and stable grade completion rates can be observed.

Key education policies between 2000 and 2015

The review of educational policies seeking to improve learning encompasses all the dimensions surveyed in this report. A broad approach to student inclusion is central to the quality of education in profoundly unequal societies (Chapter 2). The social prestige, training and professional careers of teachers is another decisive factor in learning (Chapter 4), as well as the funding and governance of education systems (Chapter 8). These pillars are complemented by our more detailed analyses on: curricular and pedagogical policies, assessment systems and recent changes in school organization.

During the 1990s, most countries in the region underwent curricular reforms (Ferrer, 2004; Dussel, 2006), together with new processes of educational decentralization and the creation of the first standardized learning assessment systems. These efforts led to new tensions, such as the distance between the prescribed and implemented curriculum or the risks of fragmentation in decentralized and unequal systems. Against this backdrop, new educational policy trends

(Guatemala, Honduras, Panama and Paraguay) show that, at least in these contexts, the hypothesis is validated: on average, less than 2% of the out-of-school population assessed achieved PISA level 2 (OECD, 2020b).

Figure 3.11. Proportion of children and young people achieving at least a minimum proficiency level (SDG indicator 4.1.1) in PISA reading, and the completion rate for lower secondary education (SDG indicator 4.1.2). Latin American countries. 2015-2018.
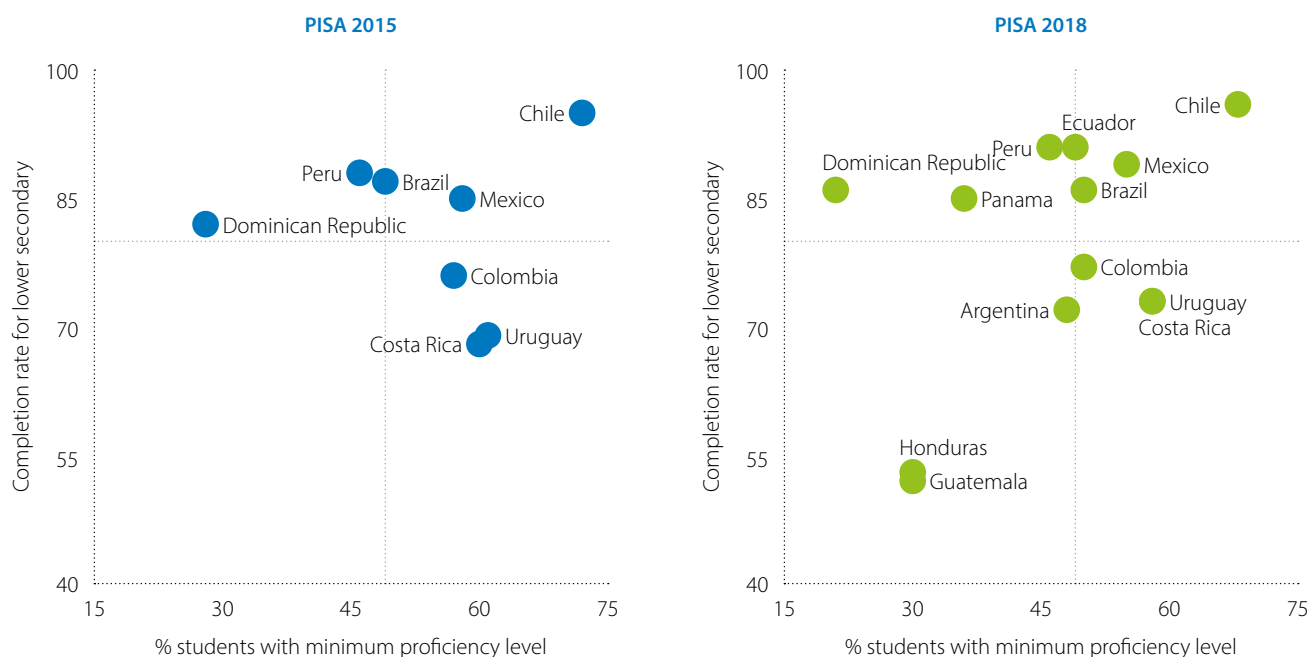
Note: Data for Ecuador, Guatemala and Honduras correspond to 2017. The gray lines show the simple mean value for each indicator, for both years, so as to compare differences between implementations.

Data sources: OECD (2018), PISA 2018 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/ (accessed 1 December 2021), OECD (2015), PISA 2015 Database, https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015database/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

began to emerge in the early 21st century as an attempt to improve learning on a systemic scale.

The first trend shared by several countries in the region was the shift toward greater curricular regulation based on different policy instruments: standards, teachers' guides, textbooks, and standardized assessments. This shift is part of a global policy trend of increased curriculum regulation (Verger *et al.*, 2018). Some countries with a very feeble tradition of national curriculum regulation began to create basic frameworks, such as the Basic Competency Standards (*Estándares Básicos de Competencias*) in Colombia (2003-2006), the General Curriculum Guidelines (*Estándares Básicos de Competencias*) in Brazil (2009-2012) or the National Curriculum Design (*Diseño Curricular Nacional*) of Peru (2009). In other cases, the aim was to synthesize the curricular axes with Priority Learning Nuclei, such as in Argentina (2004).

During the first decade of the new century, policies that attempted to put more focus on learning and on bringing the curriculum to the classroom grew. For example, textbook distribution policies were expanded. This was produced by a confluence favored by the

increase in educational budgets and the view that greater regulation of classroom learning was needed (Rivas, 2015). Mexico expanded its historic textbook policy in the hands of the National Commission of Free Textbooks (*Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos*, CONALITEG), producing some 180 million books per year to distribute to all students (Public Education Secretary's Office, 2009). Chile also revamped its mass distribution of textbooks and combined it with the Shared Support Plan (*Plan de Apoyo Compartido*), a package of prescriptive materials for the lowest performing schools. Brazil universalized its Brazilian National Textbook Program (*Programa Nacional do Livro Didático*) (Bagolin and Adolfo, 2013). Ecuador and Peru launched very extensive textbook distribution plans.

The curricular frameworks were complemented by an increased focus on defining more visible and measurable learning objectives, as was the case in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Mexico. This was combined with the new role of standardized learning assessments. In the new century, several countries moved towards models in which standardized assessments began to have a strong impact on educational systems. Chile published the results of its Education Quality Measurement System

(*Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación*, SIMCE) to help families when choosing a school. Something similar happened when results were published in Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico, and in some of these countries differentiated payment mechanisms were created for teachers based on student learning outcomes (Ferrer and Fiszbein, 2015; Ravela, 2015).

These policies of greater curricular regulation through standards, textbooks or assessments were unevenly distributed among the countries of the region. To point out two very different cases: Mexico's tradition of greater curricular prescription contrasts with Colombia's history of teacher independence. However, most countries attempted to address classroom teaching practices more directly with renewed curricular policy instruments (Rivas and Sánchez, 2020).

This shift was complemented by a second trend towards the creation of the school-unit as the backbone of educational policies. Principals were a more important factor as a node for receiving policies, and teacher training began to focus increasingly on in-service programs for teams by schools, as discussed in Chapter 4 (Vaillant, 2011; UNESCO, 2013). Secondary education reform policies sought to concentrate teachers' working hours in the same school in order to create greater institutional ownership and a shared vision of the institution as a whole. Many countries expanded the management and resource autonomy of public schools alongside the expansion of the supply of private schools (see Chapter 8), which already enjoy a tradition of greater institutional distinction among themselves.

Ultimately, these policies of greater managerial independence were combined with the new role of standardized assessments, which returned or published scores by school, leading to greater local accountability for their results (Ehren and Baxter, 2021). Thus, a two-fold complementary shift was achieved: greater centralized curricular regulation with greater autonomy for results-based management in each school.

These policies were combined with other relevant initiatives, such as policies regarding new digital technologies or the extension of the school day, which are analyzed in more detail in the following chapter.

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

The period from 2015 to 2021 exhibits a plethora of educational policy initiatives that show little consistency among countries. This is a period of shifting priorities,

especially since 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the experts consulted for this report, these scattered policies and priorities are the first thing to stand out from the survey results (**Box 3.2**).

Between 2015 and 2021, curricular policies continued to entrench a course that was already clearly established in the region, in terms of the renewal of teaching approaches. A recent LLECE study of the primary level curriculum suggested that language teaching is no longer conceived as the transmission of linguistic knowledge, but also encompasses the sociocultural constraints that speakers must consider in real communicative interaction situations. Similarly, in mathematics, the predominant problem-solving approach favors the construction of knowledge through a process that involves analyzing, reflecting and discovering creative strategies to solve concrete problems. In turn, the approach to science education has shifted more towards scientific inquiry and research skills away from the collection of data and isolated facts (UNESCO OREALC, 2019).

When comparing the curricular standards in force in Latin America, it is evident that the prevailing approach is one based on proficiency. The concept of proficiency is defined as "the integration of content, skills and attitudes (or dispositions) that students must acquire in order to address concrete situations in different spheres of life" (UNESCO OREALC, 2019: 82). Very few countries escape these new curricular approaches, which could be related to prevailing approaches in new teaching paradigms on a global and regional stage (UNESCO OREALC, 2019).

The new curricular approaches are part of the commitment contained in the Buenos Aires Declaration, which stemmed from the first Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017, indicating the need to formulate

> curricular policies through an interdisciplinary and holistic focus, centered on active, contextualized, transferable, autonomous learning with inclusive and transformational pedagogies that draw links with the different dimensions of everyday life, maximize the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and take into account themes relevant for our global, interconnected, digital and dynamic society (UNESCO OREALC, 2017a: 11).

New curricular content related to global citizenship education (GCED) and education for sustainable

Box 3.2

Expert survey results

In the opinion of the experts consulted for this report (see Methodological Annex, p. 211),one of the most important topics was curricular reforms (**Figure 3.12**). In the survey, 60% of the experts in each country mentioned curricular reforms as being important or very important between 2015 and 2021. Textbook and educational materials policies were slightly less important, with 57%.

School innovation policies and new pedagogical models were paid less attention: 66% of the experts said that these topics were not important or that no significant actions had taken place in this regard. School day extension policies were also

less important in the period under study: 62% of respondents considered that no such actions had taken place; and only 8% said that this had been an important topic in their countries, featuring intense actions.

The most prominent topic in the countries' agendas was the use of standardized learning assessments: almost 69% of respondents considered that there had been important or very important actions regarding this topic (36% considered it very important). By contrast, only 21% said that it had not been an important topic.

Another very important topic in the 2015-2021 period was the development of educational policies involving digital technologies: almost two-thirds of respondents considered that there had been

Figure 3.12. Importance of the policy themes by topic according to experts in the countries of the region.

Topic	Very important (blue)	Important partial (green)	Agenda item (orange)	Not important (red)
Curricular reforms	27	33	13	27
Textbook and educational materials	24	33	18	25
School innovation policies and new pedagogical models	12	22	35	31
School day extension policies	8	30	20	42
Standardized learning assessments	36	33	10	21
Educational policies involving digital technologies	23	43	23	11
Secondary education reforms	17	23	34	26
Adaptation policies to address COVID-19	35	38	15	12

- This has been a very important policy focus area with intense actions
- This has been an important policy focus area with partial actions
- It is an important agenda item but has not led to concrete actions
- This has not been an important policy focus area

Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Expert survey for the SDG4-Education 2030 Regional Monitoring Report, 2021.

important actions in this regard, while only 11% deemed that this topic was unimportant.

On the other hand, secondary education reforms seem to have carried more weight compared to these last two topics, although most of the experts pointed out that no significant actions had been implemented. Only 17% reported that it had been a very important topic in their country.

Finally, organizational-pedagogical, curricular or technological adaptation policies in the face of COVID-19 were naturally a key topic from 2020 onwards. Seventy percent of the experts indicated that this topic involved significant or partial actions, and only 12% said that it had not been an important topic.

development (ESD), which are part of SDG target 4.7, have gained momentum in recent years. Global citizenship education aims to instill in "learners the values, attitudes and behaviors that form the basis of responsible global citizenship: creativity, innovation and commitment to peace, human rights and sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2015b). In the document "Education for global citizenship: An Emerging Approach", UNESCO encourages countries to mainstream in their curricula the development of competencies for peace and respect for human rights, intercultural education, and education for international understanding (UNESCO, 2015a).

In the countries of the region, concepts related to global citizenship education are becoming increasingly important in curricular frameworks, as shown in **Figure 3.13**, prepared by LLECE.

Digital skills have also begun to penetrate the region's curricula. In 2018, the Priority Learning Nuclei (*Núcleos de Aprendizaje Prioritario*, NAP) of Digital Education, Robotics and Programming were approved in Argentina. Uruguay also made significant progress in computer science education, leveraging the Plan Ceibal program (Fowler and Vegas, 2021). Another outstanding case

is that of Costa Rica's National Educational Informatics Program (*Programa Nacional de Informática Educativa*) in partnership with Fundación Omar Dengo.

Socioemotional skills are yet another focus that have begun to emerge in new programs and curricular frameworks. For example, El Salvador included a "Life Orientation" workshop, in which students discuss and reflect on a group of socioemotional skills selected by the tutor. The ERCE 2019 assessment included a module on socioemotional skills, underscoring the curricular importance of this issue, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic (UNESCO, 2021d).

The new curriculum reform movements coexisted in some countries alongside a centralization process of curriculum governance. For example, Brazil deployed its National Common Core Curriculum (*Base Nacional Común Curricular*) in 2019, after a long process that spanned different governments (**Box 3.3**); Colombia drafted its Basic Learning Rights (*Derechos Básicos de Aprendizaje*); meanwhile, Peru designed a new competency-based national curriculum in 2017. Meanwhile, Ecuador carried out a reform in 2016 that outlines an exit profile for compulsory education.

Box 3.3

National Common Core Curriculum (Brazil)

The National Common Core Curriculum (*Base Nacional Común Curricular*) is a normative document that sets out an organic and progressive set of essential learning for all students. It lays out the knowledge, proficiency and skills that all students are expected to develop. It also emphasizes attitudes and values to solve complex demands. The document was prepared by a group of 116 professional experts

from different areas divided into 29 commissions, all of them selected by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

This document solves a long-standing problem in Brazil, which until then lacked a country-wide curricular instrument. This involved conversations, tensions and controversies that lasted for about five years, and that involved particularly controversial topics, such as the teaching of history (Cerri and Costa, 2019). For more information, please visit the website: http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br.

Figure 3.13. Percentage of countries in which global citizenship concepts can be found in the region's curricula at both declarative and syllabus levels. Circa 2020
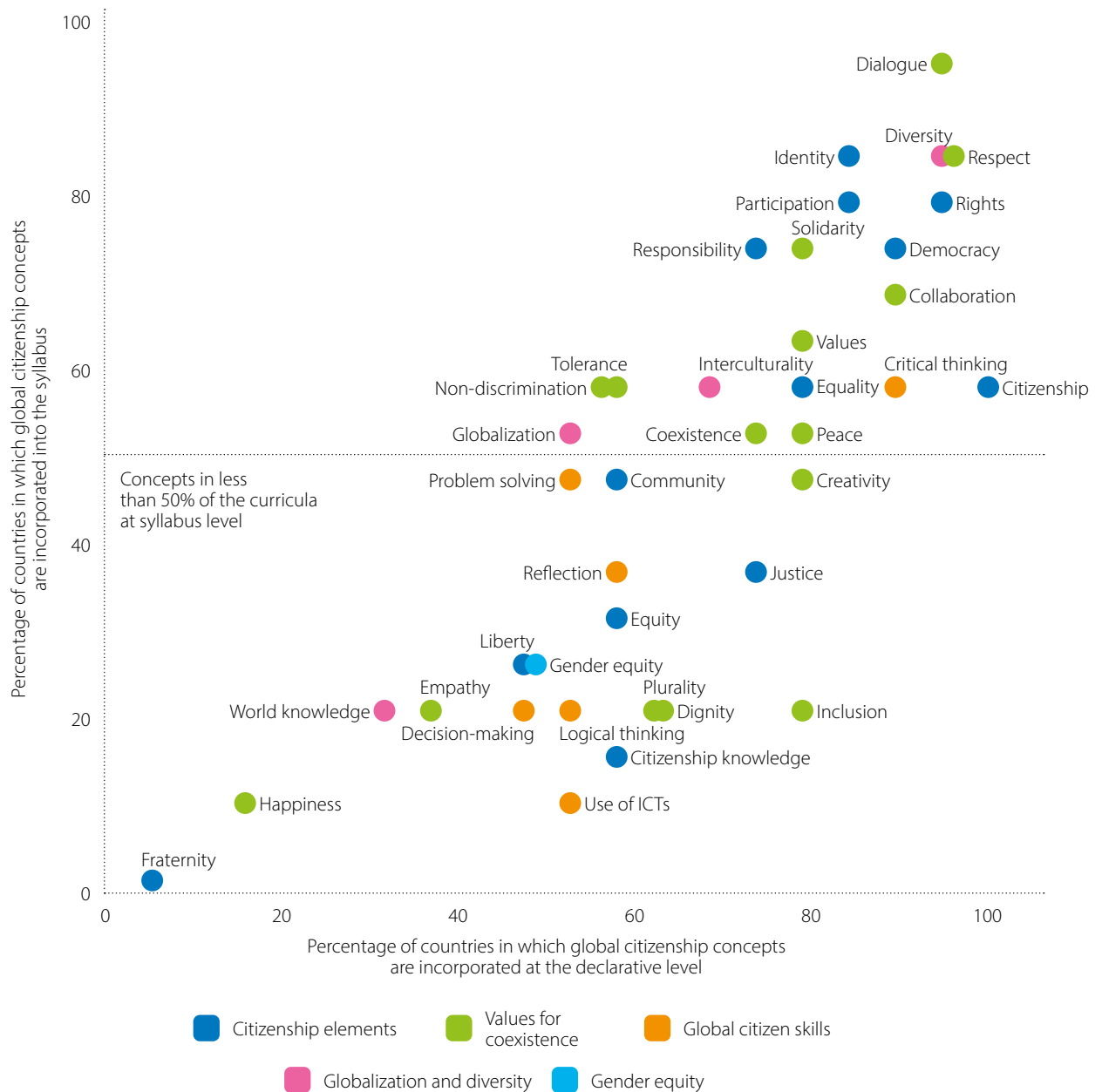
Source: UNESCO (2020c), p. 13.

The sphere of curricular policies experienced yet another episode following the pandemic: most of the countries in the region were forced to limit their curricular regulations due to shorter class time. For example, the Bahamas developed the National Pacing Guides to synthesize the curriculum. In Chile, the Curriculum and Assessment Unit launched a distance learning plan through a digital platform, which involved prioritizing the curriculum, redefining roles, generating formative assessment tools, digital assessments, and types of assessment conducive to self-learning (DEG-

MINEDUC, 2020). In Mexico, the Aprende en Casa (learn at home) II national strategy involves defining criteria for curricular prioritization, based on new forms of teaching.

As for educational materials, textbook policies have been maintained in several countries with a long tradition for them, such as Chile, Mexico and Brazil; however, they have also gained traction in Peru, Ecuador, Honduras, and in Caribbean countries such as Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada, or digital textbooks in the British Virgin Islands. Even in

Colombia, a country with little textbook history, the Let's all Learn (*Todos a Aprender*) Program—which distributes materials to students—has expanded. In Costa Rica, the Teachers' Toolbox (*Caja de Herramientas para docentes*) was created as a collection of resources to support the implementation and execution of the curriculum transformation policy. In Peru, books are distributed to more than six million students, including texts in Spanish and 41 native languages. These educational materials include books, workbooks, worksheets, work cards, assessment kits, classroom materials, and libraries.

The most important trend in this regard has been the expansion of digital materials and the great boom in educational platforms following the COVID-19 pandemic. There had already been several deployments of educational portals in most of the countries in the region and the promotion of per-student computer policies in countries such as Uruguay, Argentina and Peru (Lión, 2019; Lugo and Delgado, 2019). These initiatives gained considerable momentum during the pandemic. The scope of these efforts was linked to the availability of household infrastructure and hardware, and the development of digital competencies (**Box 3.1**).

For example, Argentina developed the Juana Manso platform (**Box 3.4**). Countries such as Paraguay, Peru and Mexico entered into agreements with private sector companies and multilateral organizations to renew their educational portals. Colombia called a public tender to make virtual platforms available for continuing distance learning classes. In Peru, for example, the "I learn at home" (*Aprendo en Casa*) portal features a number of educational resources, some of which have been created in native languages. In Brazil, a website was launched with resources for families and tutors to "support children in the literacy process", through the

Conta para Mim and *Tempo de Aprender* programs. Chile made progress through its "I learn online" (*Aprendo en línea*) platform. Costa Rica launched "I learn at home" (*Aprendo en Casa*). Guatemala made progress with self-learning guides for students and families, among other cases reported in previous studies (Rivoir and Morales, 2021).

Efforts aimed at extending school days were not a top priority between 2015 and 2021, despite the fact that they had been strongly promoted in previous years. The increased budget constraint of these years combined with the pandemic generated other and more immediate priorities. Nevertheless, some countries did make some progress in their school day extension policies. Peru approved the full school day (*Jornada Escolar Completa*, JEC) program. El Salvador launched the whole day (*Tiempo Pleno*) program, which extends the school day with supplementary courses and workshops. Some Brazilian states, such as Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, have implemented comprehensive time policies for secondary education.

New initiatives have been implemented in many of the region's countries regarding learning assessment policies, as pointed out by the experts consulted for this report. Following the precedents of Chile and Colombia, Ecuador created the National Institute for Educational Assessment (*Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa*, INEVAL). In 2016, Uruguay launched the *Aristas* assessment, while Panama began the *Crecer* test and Argentina the *Aprender* test. In contrast, Mexico dissolved its National Institute for Education Assessment in 2019. Between 2014 and 2019, the total number of countries with nationwide assessments for language and mathematics, in primary and lower secondary education rose from 18 to 26. This expansion was most

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Box 3.4

Juana Manso Platform (Argentina)

The *Juana Manso* platform is a federal plan designed by the nation's Education Ministry. The objective of this program is to promote, assist and provide means for using technologies in the educational system, both in contexts of partial or total isolation and in face-to-face situations, in order to optimize teaching, compare innovative practices and teach and learn as part of a knowledge-based society. The program proposes a federal educational platform where each province in charge of managing the educational system can

participate in creating and incorporating modular contents. The program also involves the distribution of hardware, connectivity and teacher training proposals.

Multiple resources have been provided to this end, including virtual classrooms, pedagogical resources and tools to assist students during the health crisis. One of the most significant aspects of this initiative is an agreement with telephone companies that allows for all platform contents—including virtual classrooms for synchronous classes—to be accessed free of charge from students' cell phones. For more information, please visit the website: https://conectarigualdad.edu.ar.

pronounced in the Caribbean, where 10 countries incorporated standardized assessments between 2014 and 2019.[15]

Countries in the region participated steadily and increasingly in international educational quality assessments (Taboada, Gutiérrez and Hamilton, 2020). Sixteen countries from the region participated in the 2019 ERCE tests, the largest number in the four-year history of the event. The number of countries participating in the PISA tests went from 5 to 10 between 2000 and 2018 and 4 other countries from the region joined the first version of the PISA-D tests in 2017.

The emergence of these new curricular approaches, focused on emerging knowledge and 21st century skills, has also begun to generate new assessment policies. For example, Costa Rica, after the 2016 curriculum reform, developed a new formative assessment model with rubrics pertaining to different skills. Colombia stands out as one of the pioneer countries in the teaching of citizenship skills and also in their assessment, with the introduction of questionnaires on Citizen Thinking and Actions and Attitudes in the *Saber* tests. Another example is Chile's SIMCE test, which implemented a new digital skills assessment module. The Education Quality Agency (*Agencia de Calidad de la Educación*, ACE) in Chile has introduced the assessment of Personal and Social Development Indicators (*Indicadores de Desarrollo Personal y Social*, IDPS), which measure school self-esteem and motivation, school climate and coexistence, healthy living habits and citizen participation. In Mexico, socioaffective skills were assessed, relating to knowledge that favors school coexistence (INEE, 2018). Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic also included socioemotional skill measures in some of their educational levels (Taboada, Gutiérrez and Hamilton, 2020).

New assessment models were created in other cases. Following the example of the Basic Education Development Index (*Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*, IDEB) in Brazil, Colombia launched in 2015 the Colombian Synthetic Index of Educational Quality (*Índice Sintético de Calidad Educativa de Colombia*, ISCE), with a score from 1 to 10 that combines students' performance, progress over time, school approval and learning environment. Uruguay introduced an innovative online learning assessment, Adaptive Mathematics Platform (*Plataforma Adaptativa de Matemática*), based on its widespread internet connectivity network at schools (Perera and Aboal, 2017).

The pandemic also paved the way for new assessment devices designed to adapt to the situation by offering diagnostic instruments for assessing learning heterogeneity. In some countries, this has meant a shift towards assessments designed for pedagogical use by teachers and that are more in line with their practices. For example, Belize created the Diagnostic Assessment Test (BDAT) for each grade in primary education. Other innovative cases are Chile's Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis (*Diagnóstico Integral de Aprendizajes*) (**Box 3.5**) and Colombia's Assessing for Progress (*Evaluar para Avanzar*) (**Box 3.6**).

Future challenges

The alarming results obtained on average by students of the region in the ERCE 2019 and PISA 2018 tests illustrate the long road ahead to guarantee the full right to education. The pandemic worsened the situation and exacerbated learning inequalities. The disruption of face-to-face classes led to fewer learning opportunities for sectors with little or no connectivity and lower educational achievements at home (ECLAC, 2020b). Aside from these systemic problems, the challenge is to introduce new curricular content for a constantly changing world and the complexity of making changes in teaching practices to promote valuable and meaningful learning.

Evidence from the 2019 ERCE study into associated factors provides some clues that could allow us to set a course for action (UNESCO OREALC, 2021e). First, it emphasizes the crucial importance of improving the population's living conditions as the first factor influencing learning.[16] Economic growth with distributive policies is a key avenue for future learning. Second, there is ample evidence of the importance of factors within education systems: access to pre-primary education; early childhood education; alternative measures to school repetition; the creation of inclusive learning environments with teachers who place high expectations on all students and support them in their

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15 Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

16 Some studies suggest that the difference of about 50 points in the PISA test results between students in Latin America and those in Scandinavian countries has two equally compelling explanations: about 25 points depend on the socioeconomic context and the other 25 points are linked to the poor effectiveness of the region's education systems to develop meaningful learning (Breton and Canavire-Bacarreza, 2018).

Box 3.5

Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis (Chile)

The Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis (*Diagnóstico Integral de Aprendizajes*) program is implemented through the Education Quality Agency and seeks to provide direct support to teachers against the background of the pandemic, through a flexible, voluntary, self-assessment instrument, with individual results, for instructional use and focused on the learning of the curriculum prioritized over the previous years. The results of this assessment may be visualized immediately, in order to define relevant support initiatives for each student and for the different groups in each establishment.

The comprehensive learning diagnosis is an extension of incremental assessment implemented since 2015, and its implementation in the initial educational levels involved participation by many education centers. This constitutes an expansion of the assessment purposes and instruments, which used to be considered mainly as accountability tools. There is an internal monitoring system, which can be managed by each school, which monitors the socioemotional and academic learning of students through three assessments over the course of the year.

For more information, please visit the website: https://diagnosticointegral.agenciaeducacion.cl.

Box 3.6

Assessing for Progress (Colombia)

Evaluar para Avanzar is a Colombian national government strategy that provides the educational community with a set of assessments to support evaluation and teaching processes for children and young people across the entire country. This is a voluntary and open-access strategy led by the Colombian Institute for Educational Assessment (*Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación*, ICFES), which provides tools to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

In order to reduce distance issues, differences and access problems during the pandemic, this test can be taken online, offline or on paper according to each establishment's circumstances. The manager must validate enrollment on a platform and the teacher must enroll his/her students. Thus, three million children and young people in primary and secondary education and 100,000 teachers have been provided access to this assessment and toolkit.

For more information, please visit https://colombiaaprende.edu.co/contenidos/coleccion/evaluar-para-avanzar.

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learning; the improvement of expectations and the involvement of parents in their children's learning, among others. **Table 3.1** provides a summary of the correlation between certain associated factors (those that were part of the supplementary test questionnaires) and learning attainments on the ERCE 2019 test.

It should be noted that data from learning tests are fundamental, but they do not provide a complete picture of what students are learning. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 2010 Moscow Declaration and the 2014 Lima Declaration on Education for All underscore the importance of ensuring quality through holistic pedagogies that respond to children's needs and value their creativity, cooperation, self-confidence, autonomy, active learning and wellbeing. These aspects highlight the need to broaden the scope of the assessment and to conceive dimensions that are

not easily captured in standardized tests, to avoid a narrow approach to learning (UNICEF, 2020b: 13).

Rethinking the curriculum frameworks discussed in this section also poses new challenges for education systems (UNESCO OREALC, 2020a). Earlier studies have analyzed the difficulty of translating new, more complex conceptions of teaching based on constructivism and competency-based education into pedagogical practices (García and Malagón, 2010). Modifying curricula is not enough; to rethink the systemic dynamics of translation and feedback with teaching practices and the importance of rethinking pedagogies is also necessary.

As shown by a recent UNICEF study, education systems in Latin America and the Caribbean tend to improve marginally and slowly. This highlights the importance of moving towards a greater acknowledgment of cultural

Table 3.1. Number of countries where the factor significantly correlates with educational outcomes on each test, for each factor

		3rd grade		6th grade		
		Reading	Mathematics	Reading	Mathematics	Science
Factors associated with the students and their families	Socioeconomic level of the family	16 (+)	14 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)
	Student pre-primary attendance	11 (+)	12 (+)	16 (+)	12 (+)	12 (+)
	Student belonging to an ethnic group or indigenous people			13 (+)	12 (+)	13 (−)
	Grade repetition	16 (−)	16 (+)	16 (−)	16 (−)	16 (−)
	Out-of-school	3 (+) 2 (−)	15 (+)	1 (+) 8 (−)	10 (−)	10 (−)
	Days of study per week	16 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)
	Parental involvement in learning	16 (+)	14 (+)	14 (+)	13 (+)	15 (+)
	Parents' educational expectations	16 (+)	15 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)	16 (+)
School process and teaching practices	Teachers' educational expectations	6 (+)	5 (+)	5 (+)	4 (+)	4 (+)
	Teachers' interest in students' wellbeing	12 (+)	13 (+)	9 (+)	6 (+)	10 (+)
	Support for student learning	14 (+)	14 (+)	6 (+)	10 (+)	10 (+)
	Organization of teaching by the teacher	11 (+)	9 (+)	7 (+)	8 (+)	11 (+)
	Classroom disruption	3 (−)	0 (+) 3 (−)	8 (−)	4 (−)	10 (−)
School factors	School socioeconomic level	12 (+)	11 (+) 1(−)	14 (+)	12 (+)	13 (+)
	Private school administration	9 (+)	5 (+)	6 (+) 1 (−)	6 (+)	8 (+)
	School in an urban area (10,000 or more inhabitants)	1 (+) 1 (−)	1 (+) 1 (−)	2 (+)	2 (+) 1 (−)	2 (+)

Note: The plus sign indicates that in that number of countries the association is positive, while the minus sign indicates that the association is negative.

Source: UNESCO OREALC (2021e), p. 28.

differences with more flexible dynamics of teaching organization, in collaborative work environments networked at varying complexity levels (Aguerrondo and Vaillant, 2015).

Central coordination and planning of educational systems are complementary to this vision. The capacity of state agencies to lead processes that reach into teaching practices is a core issue in order to achieve systemic improvements (Rivas and Scasso, 2020). Systemic coordination requires greater technical-professional capabilities, leadership, agreements, resources and continuity over time (see chapter 8).

Different studies show that a source of systemic learning improvement is curricular coherence, understood as the prolonged articulation over time of a sequence of topics and assessment criteria consistent with the logic of the disciplinary knowledge underlying each subject (Schmidt, Wang and McKnight, 2005). Comparative studies of multiple education systems suggest that curricular materials in the top performing countries have fewer topics, but communicate them in a deeper, more coherent and clearer way (Schmidt *et al*., 2001: 303).

In Latin America, some research shows that there is still considerable room for improvement in curriculum alignment (Valverde and Näslund-Handley, 2010). Well-aligned educational systems provide common expectations to teachers through a coherent and consistent curricular environment (Valverde, 2009).

Systemic coordination does not imply assuming a top-down model of centralized governance, but rather generates balances with the knowledge that comes from teaching practice, horizontal dialogue and constant capacity building (Deng, 2010: 388). Coordinating curricular policy interventions so that they are coherent, systemic, aligned, continuous and with constant feedback from teachers is a decisive challenge to improve learning.

Meanwhile, having rigorous and up-to-date information on learning allows us to be evidence-based and to reach out more directly to the students and schools with the greatest needs. Some new assessment mechanisms are promising—for example, Chile's Comprehensive Learning Diagnosis (*Diagnóstico Integral de Aprendizajes*)—as they are more focused on helping teachers in their pedagogical endeavors (UNESCO OREALC, 2020b, 2021a).

COVID-19 has represented a historic milestone, with no end in sight and whose impacts and challenges remain unresolved. Its negative effects on learning are undeniable and have only just begun to be gaged. Still, the disruption caused by the pandemic has also facilitated the development of curricular prioritization processes, new formative assessment models (UNESCO, 2021b), teaching practices involving digital technologies, and public educational platforms with renewed learning resources, among other promising activities for the future. Systemic improvement within a context of profound changes requires new balances that draw from the lessons learned from scientific research and newly emerging practices, both inside the classroom and in terms of public policy.

Teachers and principals

Teachers and principals in SDG4, Education 2030

Teachers are fundamental to achieving education quality targets. Governments must therefore guarantee the best conditions for the exercise of this profession. As different comparative studies indicate, teachers' training, careers, salaries, and working conditions are essential conditions for achieving high quality teaching (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017).

SDG4 includes a specific target linked to the need to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers (target 4.c), defined as one of three means to implement the goal. One of the region's main challenges relates to the scarcity of qualified teachers. By the year the SDGs were adopted, 69 million teachers were estimated to be needed worldwide to ensure universal primary and secondary education (UIS, 2016b). A recent IDB study stated that more than 10 million teaching jobs would need to be filled in Latin America in the next fifteen years (IDB, 2019).

The Education 2030 Framework for Action establishes clear guidelines in terms of the requirements for guaranteeing adequate teaching conditions demanded by SDG4. Policies are needed to ensure that teachers have the necessary skills, that are adequately recruited and compensated, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated, distributed equitably and effectively throughout the education system, and supported in well-resourced, efficient, and effectively governed systems (UNESCO, 2015a: 33).

As such, it is not simply a question of expanding the supply of teachers. We must also guarantee that they have quality initial and in-service training, adequate working conditions, an attractive teaching career that generates expectations of high personal and professional realization, and fair compensation and policies for teacher allocation based on educational justice criteria.

In monitoring Education 2030 SDG4, a key aspect relates to initial and in-service teacher training. This dimension enables to diagnose the extent to which teaching staff have the appropriate disciplinary and didactic tools

to be able to promote quality learning. It contributes to assessing pending policy generation challenges for the professional improvement of teaching staff. The indicators for the highest education level attained and in-service teacher training opportunities contribute to monitoring this dimension. Although these data allow us to recognize trends associated with greater training opportunities, their actual impact on teaching is also linked to the existence of quality and relevant initial and in-service training.

On the other hand, a look at the labor situation also helps to identify the extent to which national governments have made progress in guaranteeing suitable frameworks for the teaching profession, so that education practices can be developed under fair and dignified conditions. This is an end unto itself, insofar as it refers to the rights of teachers as workers, but it is also a means to fulfill other education goals, since it favors better learning experiences. Although some monitoring indicators are available, the lack of comparative data on teacher salaries limits the analysis of this core dimension.

Substantive improvements in education occur both in the classroom and in the school. For this reason, school principals are also key players in educational institutions and their activities. As the highest authorities of educational institutions, they are responsible for the educational, pedagogical, and administrative management processes. The fact that little information is available on these profiles also warns about the need to focus on such a fundamental role for the education system.

This section will address some of these dimensions to characterize teachers and principals in Latin American and Caribbean countries, based on available information: teacher availability, demographic characterization, initial and in-service training, and working conditions.

It should be noted that, given the scarcity of information on teachers in the region, data for some dimensions of the analysis are available only for Latin American countries, and exclusively for the primary education level, obtained from the supplementary ERCE

questionnaires applied to teachers and principals. When interpreting these data, the fact that they are not strictly representative of the teaching population should be kept in mind: they are obtained from third- and sixth-grade reading, mathematics, and science teachers from the schools that participated in the ERCE sample. Nor can the findings be extrapolated to other education levels.

Teacher availability in Latin America and the Caribbean

As shown in **Figure 4.1**, between 2000 and 2019, 2.4 million teachers joined the region's education system, which represents a 30% increase. A marked deceleration can be seen if we focus on the 2015 to 2019 period: a total increase of 260,000 teachers was recorded, a mere 2.7% increase compared to 2015.

In relative terms, in the last twenty years, the education levels with the greatest increase in the total number of teachers are tertiary education (126%), upper secondary education (37%) and pre-primary education (33%). Two strong expansion cycles can be observed: 2000 to 2004 and 2007 to 2013. Growth has continued in recent years, but at a slower pace.

This increase in the total number of teachers should be analyzed in terms of enrollment, in order to identify whether it has improved the student-teacher ratio, or whether it follows the expansion of education levels. It is worth noting that the levels that have most improved teacher availability are not necessarily those that have incorporated the most people.

Primary education is the level that has achieved the greatest reduction in the student-teacher ratio, despite having the smallest increase in teachers percentage- wise (9%) and in absolute terms (255,000) between 2000 and 2019. This is mainly due to the drop in enrollment at this level, caused by regional demographic dynamics and pathway improvement.

On the other hand, upper secondary and tertiary education have not substantially improved relative teacher availability: in the former case, the student- teacher ratio decreased slightly, while in the latter case it increased. This shows that this expansion of teaching staff has primarily been associated with the growth of education systems, as a way of meeting the expanded demand while maintaining more or less stable teacher availability in relation to enrollment.

Not all of these teachers necessarily have the minimum

training required to teach at a given education level, as established in SDG4. Specific information is therefore required in order to monitor target 4.c.

Since these minimum requirements may vary between countries, the SDG4 global monitoring framework has adopted an operational definition to establish a common criterion for monitoring the availability of trained teachers. A *teacher with the minimum required qualifications* is considered to be a teacher who

has met at least the minimum requirements of organized teacher training (pre-service or in-service) to teach a specific education level under relevant national policy or law. These requirements usually include pedagogical knowledge (general classroom management and organization principles and strategies that transcend the subject matter being taught, typically teaching approaches, methods, and techniques), and professional knowledge (knowledge of the statutory instruments and other legal frameworks governing the teaching profession). Some programs may also cover content knowledge (knowledge of the curriculum and subject matter to be taught and the use of relevant materials) (UIS, 2021a).

In line with this definition, SDG indicator 4.c.1 refers to the proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, as depicted in **Figure 4.2**.

The proportion of teachers with the minimum training required for teaching is around 80% in Latin America and the Caribbean, with some variations between education levels. In other words, approximately 1 out of every 5 teachers lacks the required training for teaching. The years between 2015 and 2019 stand as a period in which the proportion of teachers trained in pre-primary education improved, while exhibiting stable behavior in primary and secondary education.

Figure 4.3 reveals that some countries have made sustained progress in ensuring that all teachers have acquired the minimum levels of training at all education levels. This scenario, however, is the least common. On the contrary, most countries are still in the process of achieving this, with different degrees of progress, and even with marked differences between education levels, as in the cases of Barbados, Belize, Dominica, and Montserrat.

Likewise, the 2015 status report also allows us to focus on those countries which have advanced in increasing the percentage of teachers with the minimum training required for teaching in the last five years: Belize,

Figure 4.1. Total number of teachers (in thousands) and student-teacher ratio by education level. Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
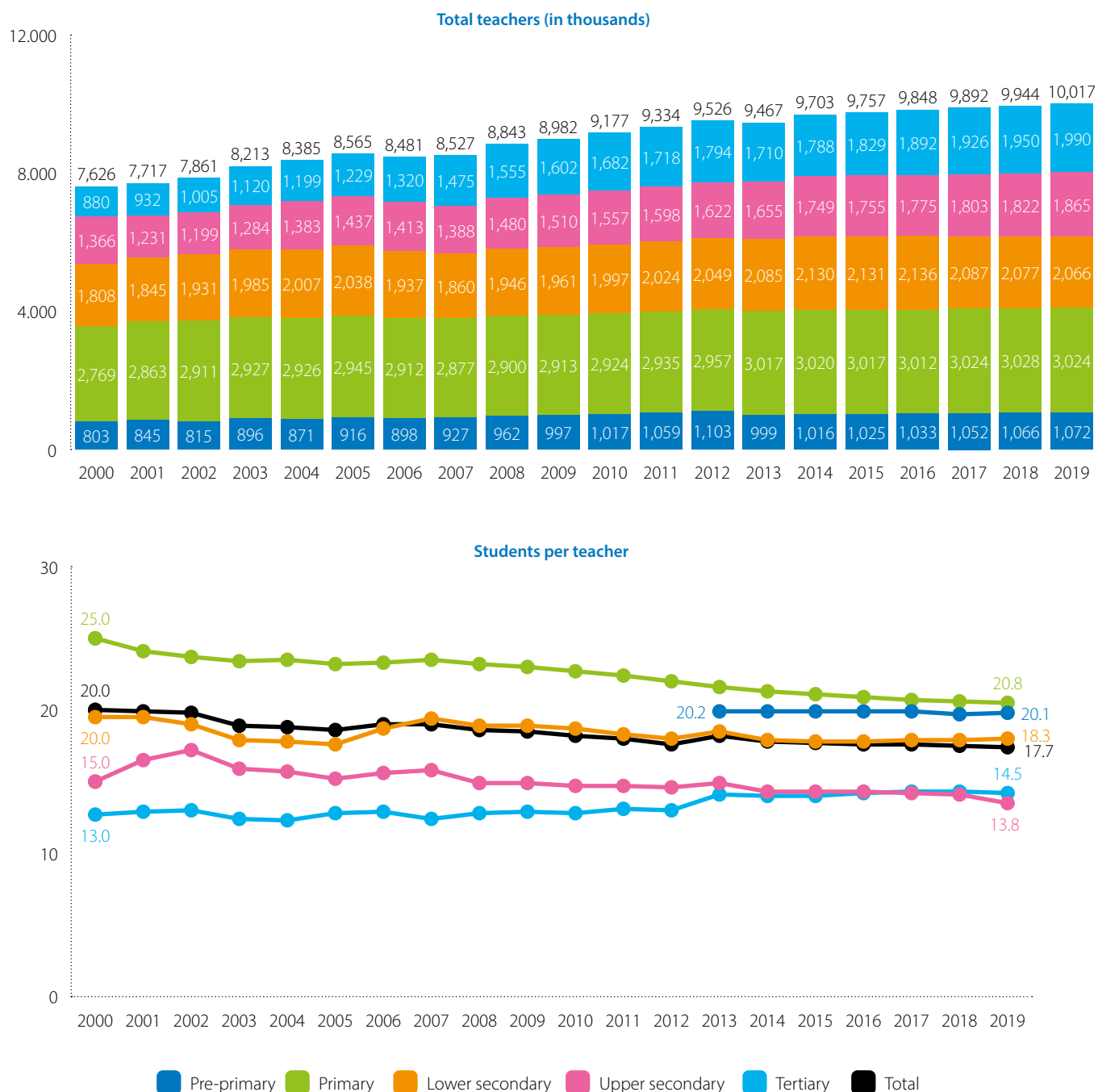
Total teachers (in thousands)

Students per teacher

Pre-primary ● Primary ● Lower secondary ● Upper secondary ● Tertiary ● Total

Note: The total number of teachers includes only classroom teachers, i.e., those who teach in front of students (they may or may not have other functions).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic can be identified as the three countries with the greatest increase in the period.

Teacher demographics

A first aspect to consider is the eminently female nature of teaching in the region, which is probably a consequence of the persistence of traditional gender roles associated with care, particularly at the pre-primary and primary education levels, and also tends to explain the persistent disparity in the different leadership roles in education, which is expressed in the fewer opportunities for women to access leadership and management positions (UNESCO OREALC, 2002; UNESCO, 2019a).

Figure 4.2. Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications (SDG indicator 4.c.1) by education level. Latin America and the Caribbean. 2006-2020
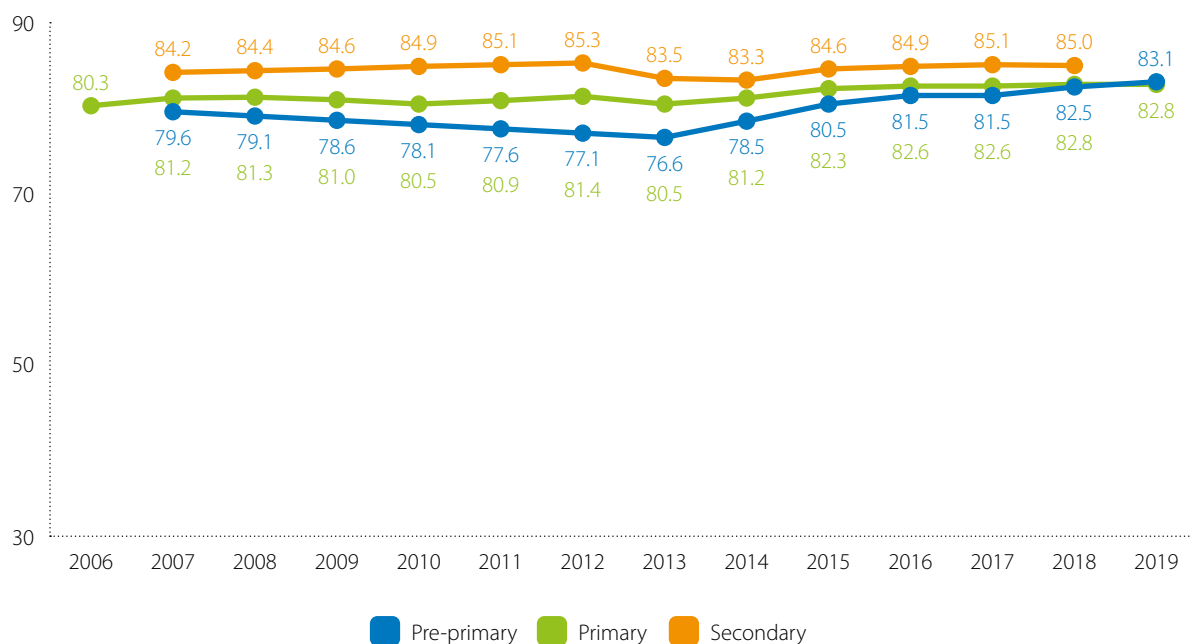
Note: The total number of teachers includes only classroom teachers, i.e., those who teach in front of students (they may or may not have other functions).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

The proportion of women in teaching staff is widespread at the education levels aimed at the lower age population, and decreases progressively as one moves to the next education levels (**Figure 4.4**). While 95.1% of teachers at the pre-primary education level are women, this proportion drops to less than half (41.8%) in tertiary education. This difference is alarming, even considering that tertiary education enrollment consists largely of women: as of 2019, for every 100 men 120 women were attending tertiary education in the region.[1]

Likewise, this teacher profile has exhibited a structural behavior over time: in the last twenty years, the structure of participation by sex has hardly changed.

The almost exclusively female population in pre-primary education is prevalent in most countries in the region. On the other hand, some countries have a ratio of female teachers of around two-thirds in primary education: Guatemala, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, Panama, and Mexico are some examples where nearly one third of teachers are men.

The most diverse scenario can be found in secondary education, where female participation varies from 40% to 70%. Some patterns can be identified: the countries with the most female teachers are the Caribbean islands (where the percentage ranges between 60% and 70%), while Latin American countries with the highest proportion of indigenous populations tend to have a more masculinized composition (Guatemala, Peru, Mexico, and the Plurinational State of Bolivia). Finally, in tertiary education, the proportion of female teachers ranges between 40% and 60%.

As for the profile of principals, there is a marked difference in women's participation in this position according to data from the ERCE 2019 supplementary questionnaires:[2] in the country average, 74% of primary

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1 Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

2 Some methodological caveats should be noted regarding the use of the responses to the ERCE questionnaires to characterize teaching and management staff. The data obtained are not strictly representative of all teachers. Estimates are affected by a bias tied to the subject matter taught, as well as by the sample design. Concerning the first point, the questionnaires were implemented to systematize information that would allow relating it to the ERCE results; therefore, they were answered by third- and sixth-grade reading, mathematics, and science teachers. Regarding the second point, the sample design of the evaluation was not intended to make estimates about teachers, but about students and schools. The data

Figure 4.3. Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications (SDG indicator 4.c.1) by education level. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2015-2020

	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary
Antigua and Barbuda	65 / 78	53 / 65	47 / 48
Bahamas	82 / 83	90 / 90	83 / 85
Barbados	58 / 71	66 / 75	52 / 52
Belize	40 / 58	68 / 86	47 / 70
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	78 / 83	87 / 90	84 / 89
Colombia	97 / 97	94 / 97	98 / 99
Costa Rica	87 / 90	94 / 94	96 / 97
Cuba		100 / 100	100 / 100
Dominica	20 / 28	58 / 64	29 / 45
Ecuador	91	88	75
El Salvador	94 / 95	95 / 96	92 / 92
Grenada	35 / 38	63 / 64	42 / 46
Cayman Islands	89 / 100	93 / 100	100 / 100
Turks and Caicos Islands		43 / 78	97 / 98
British Virgin Islands	49	76 / 92	69 / 89
Jamaica	75 / 89	93 / 100	85 / 100
Mexico	84 / 85	94 / 95	95 / 96
Montserrat	69 / 81	75 / 76	46 / 52
Panama	100	99 / 99	
Dominican Republic	82 / 90	87 / 95	
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines		61 / 84	58 / 63
Suriname	99 / 100	98 / 99	
Trinidad and Tobago	76		
Uruguay		100 / 100	

● Circa 2015 ● Circa 2020

Note: Circa 2020 values correspond to 2020, except for secondary education in Colombia, Montserrat, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2019); primary and secondary education in Antigua and Barbuda, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, El Salvador, Grenada, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Mexico, Surinamee, and the Bahamas, as well as primary education in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2018); and pre-primary education in Panama and the Bahamas (2017). Circa 2015 values correspond to 2015, values for pre-primary education in Colombia, primary education in the Cayman Islands, primary education in the Turks and Caicos Islands and Montserrat were estimated from linear projections of data in adjacent years. The total number of teachers includes only classroom teachers, i.e., those who teach in front of students (they may or may not have other functions).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

presented are expanded by school, so that, strictly speaking, they represent people who teach in the areas of language, mathematics, and science in the third and sixth grades of primary education schools in the participating countries. In the case of principals, the bias is smaller, given the close correspondence between management positions and schools. It is therefore possible to state that the data represent the total number of people who fill the role of school principal in primary education schools.

education teachers are women, while this proportion decreases to 64% among principals. In some countries, such as Colombia and Nicaragua, the presence of women in both positions is so dissimilar that it can exceed 20 percentage points.[3]

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3 Data obtained from the ERCE 2019 microdatabase (LLECE, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago).

Figure 4.4. Percentage of female teachers by education level. Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020.
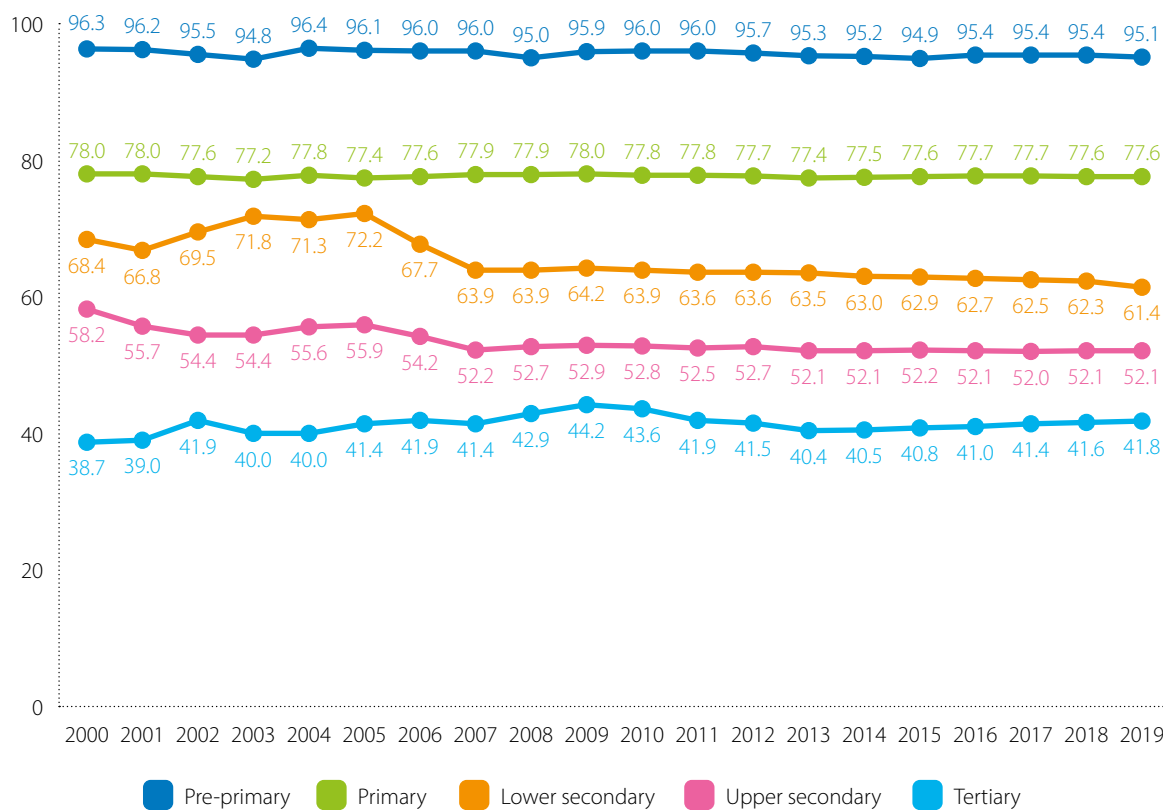
Note: The total number of teachers includes only classroom teachers, i.e., those who teach in front of students (they may or may not have other functions).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS Database. https://apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds (accessed 1 December 2021).

The teacher age characterization and its changes over time reveals population characteristics, as well as aspects associated with tenure. Data from the ERCE 2019 supplementary questionnaires are used for this characterization, along with information on lower and upper secondary education collected by the OECD, available for a limited set of countries.

Figure 4.5 shows that the average age of principals is generally six years older than that of classroom teachers for the countries in the region for which data are available. Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Argentina are the countries with the largest age gap between classroom teachers and principals. Countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua have younger teachers than the other countries, with an average age below 40. Peru, El Salvador, Cuba, and Panama are the countries with the oldest teacher populations.

An analysis of changes during the period reveals countries with an aging teaching and principal population, such as Paraguay, Peru, Panama, Guatemala,

and Argentina. A movement of this nature may be reflecting changes in teaching staff entry or turnover dynamics: longer time required for entry into teaching, lower turnover rate of classroom teachers, or access to the teaching profession at older ages may be some examples. Conversely, in Nicaragua and Uruguay there is a rejuvenation of the managerial population.

Regarding teacher seniority (**Figure 4.6**), an increase in seniority for classroom teachers and a reduction in seniority for principals can be seen in all of the countries analyzed, at least at the primary education level. This suggests a change in the profession's access and permanence dynamics, as well as in the dynamics of the career ladder.

We can establish some central coordinates on entry and permanence dynamics in the managerial function based on the relationship between service length and the average age of principals. Low average seniority indicates shorter tenure in the position, either due to entering the position at an older age, or due to a more dynamic transition to other positions. Where seniority

and average age are high, there is relatively early entry into management, low turnover, and long tenure. In contrast, where the average age is high but seniority is not, entry into management occurs at higher ages, and turnover is more dynamic.

In the case of school seniority, it can be seen that both classroom teachers and principals remain in the same school for an average of seven years, and there are no substantive changes in the period that could indicate policies that encourage permanence in a school.

Between 2013 and 2019, some signs of increased classroom teacher turnover can be seen among primary

education institutions in some countries, such as Ecuador and Nicaragua, although in most countries it is fairly stable. Cuba, El Salvador, and Paraguay stand out as countries with high classroom teacher permanence in the same institution.

Teacher training

Two indicators that suggest policy impact on training pathways are the characterization of the highest education level attained by the teaching population and accessing training opportunities during the exercise of teaching functions (**Figure 4.7**).

Figure 4.5. Average age of classroom teachers and principals (in average years) and percentage under 20 years old by education level. Latin American countries. 2015-2020

Note: Circa 2020 values correspond to 2019. Circa 2015 values correspond to 2013 for primary education, and 2015 for lower and upper secondary education. The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OCDE. OECD.Stat. https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=EDU_PERS_AGE (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 4.5. Average age of classroom teachers and principals (in average years) and percentage under 20 years old by education level. Latin American countries. 2015-2020 (continuation)
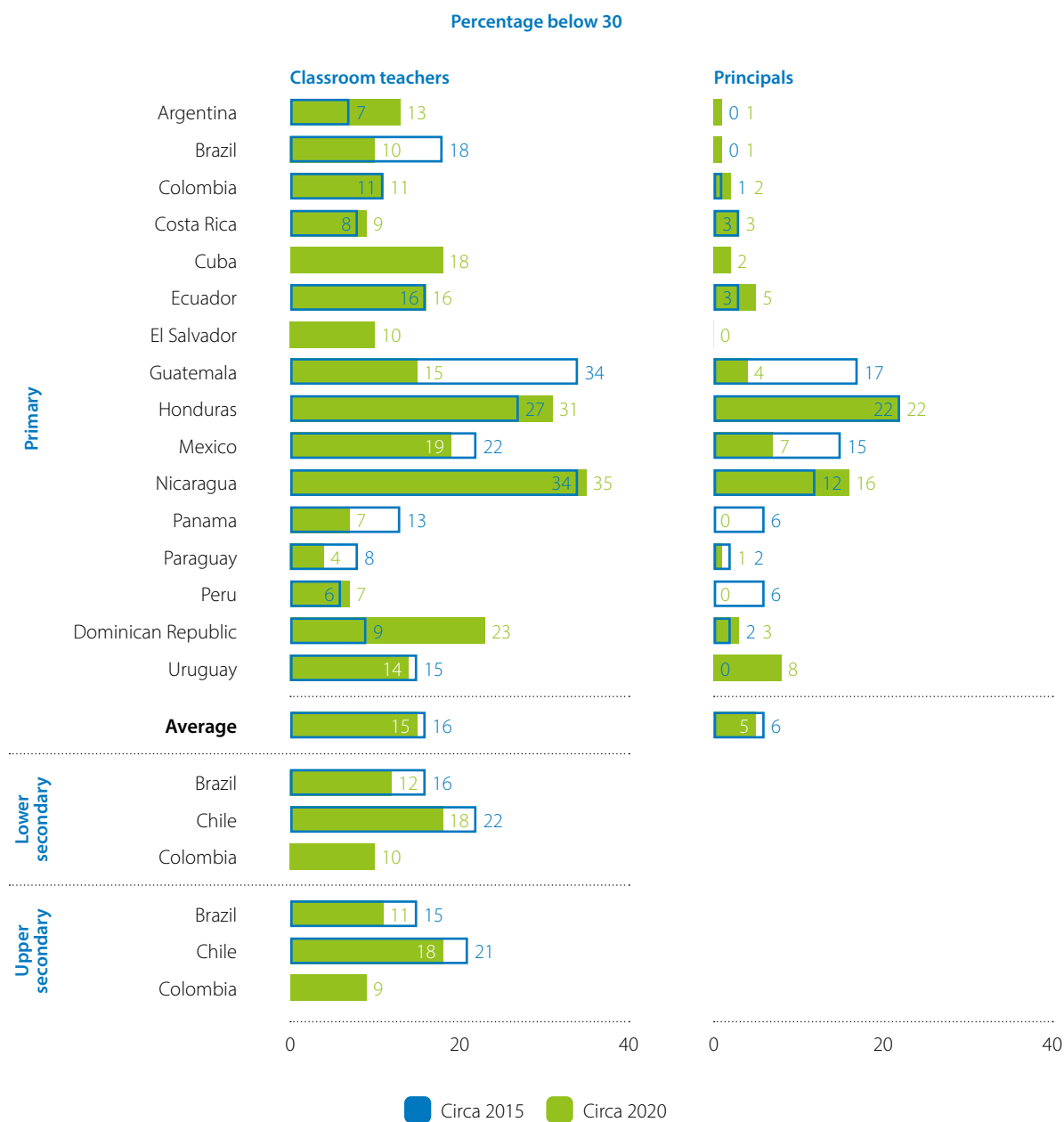
Percentage below 30

Note: Circa 2020 values correspond to 2019. Circa 2015 values correspond to 2013 for primary education, and 2015 for lower and upper secondary education. The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021) and OCDE. OECD.Stat. https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=EDU_PERS_AGE (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 4.6. Average length of service and school seniority of classroom teachers and principals (in average years). Primary education level. Latin American countries. 2013-2019

Years of service

Country	Principals	Classroom teachers
Argentina	9.1 / 6.4	12.9 / 13.8
Brazil	8.0 / 6.9	13.4 / 15.9
Colombia	14.0 / 14.0	15.4 / 15.7
Costa Rica	12.5 / 11.1	15.3 / 15.1
Cuba	8.1	23.2
Ecuador	9.0 / 5.2	13.6 / 14.0
El Salvador	9.7	18.1
Guatemala	8.2 / 8.4	10.8 / 13.7
Honduras	10.6 / 9.7	13.5 / 12.7
Mexico	8.6 / 8.1	13.2 / 14.0
Nicaragua	7.9 / 4.6	11.0 / 10.3
Panama	6.4 / 7.1	15.2 / 17.7
Paraguay	9.9 / 9.1	13.7 / 15.0
Peru	10.3 / 10.9	12.8 / 17.8
Dominican Republic	11.5 / 10.2	11.1 / 9.3
Uruguay	10.9 / 11.1	15.2 / 15.9
Average	9.8 / 8.8	13.4 / 14.3

School seniority

Country	Principals	Classroom teachers
Argentina	6.0 / 5.1	6.8 / 7.3
Brazil	6.7 / 6.1	6.6 / 7.6
Colombia	9.6 / 8.8	7.9 / 7.6
Costa Rica	6.9 / 6.5	7.4 / 7.1
Cuba	7.9	10.8
Ecuador	6.5 / 5.1	8.2 / 6.8
El Salvador	10.0	12.2
Guatemala	7.2 / 7.5	6.9 / 8.3
Honduras	9.6 / 8.1	8.0 / 8.3
Mexico	5.4 / 5.9	6.1 / 6.2
Nicaragua	4.7 / 4.5	6.5 / 5.6
Panama	6.3 / 7.4	7.2 / 9.2
Paraguay	8.6 / 8.4	10.2 / 10.1
Peru	7.0 / 6.4	7.6 / 7.5
Dominican Republic	8.5 / 11.2	6.8 / 6.1
Uruguay	6.2 / 5.5	6.5 / 5.7
Average	7.1 / 6.9	7.3 / 7.4

Legend:
- Principals 2013 (blue)
- Classroom teachers 2013 (purple)
- Principals 2019 (green)
- Classroom teachers 2019 (orange)

Note: The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 4.7. Percentage of classroom teachers and principals whose highest education level is post-secondary or higher. Primary education level. Latin American countries. 2013-2019

Principals

	Circa 2015	Circa 2020
Argentina	90.4	99.6
Brazil	96.3	97.9
Colombia	99.6	99.7
Costa Rica	99.1	100.0
Cuba		93.7
Ecuador	93.2	95.4
El Salvador		98.2
Guatemala	56.2	75.8
Honduras	70.2	92.5
Mexico	89.1	97.4
Panama	87.5	89.5
Paraguay	76.2	98.2
Peru	92.6	100.0
Dominican Republic	99.1	100.0
Uruguay	97.9	99.3
Average	90.1	93.9

Classroom teachers

	Circa 2015	Circa 2020
Argentina	97.0	99.6
Brazil	89.6	94.4
Colombia	97.6	99.3
Costa Rica	95.7	99.1
Cuba		79.8
Ecuador	83.9	97.0
El Salvador		95.0
Guatemala	34.2	54.7
Honduras	66.1	94.1
Mexico	86.1	96.1
Nicaragua	46.2	68.5
Panama	82.2	88.3
Paraguay	62.4	89.9
Peru	96.8	98.2
Dominican Republic	87.5	90.6
Uruguay	93.0	99.9
Average	82.5	88.1

■ Circa 2015   ■ Circa 2020

Note: The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

In Latin America, most countries have teaching staff and principals—at least at the primary education level—almost all of whom have post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4, according to the International Standard Classification of Education) or tertiary education (ISCED 5 or higher). Five countries have yet to ensure that at least 90% of classroom teachers have upper secondary education: Guatemala, Paraguay, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Panama. From these, Guatemala and Nicaragua also still have a very high proportion of classroom teachers and principals who have attained no more than a secondary education level (ISCED 3).

Changes in training during the period analyzed show a positive trend towards a reduction in the percentage of classroom teachers and principals who only have secondary education level training. Honduras, Mexico, Ecuador, Argentina, and Peru are examples of countries that have almost universalized post-secondary education training for the entire teaching staff during the period.

Monitoring in-service teacher training is also an important aspect of SDG4 with regard to the target of increasing the availability of sufficiently trained professionals. To review this aspect, the study explored the percentage of primary education level teachers who have participated in teacher training activities in the last two years (**Figure 4.8**). Although these data provide information on the extent to which teachers have access to in-service teacher training opportunities, both the interpretation of the data and the comparison between countries should be undertaken with caution, given the variety of formats and contents of these programs.

In all the countries analyzed, an average of about two-thirds of primary education level teachers had participated—by 2019—in a teacher training activity in the last two years. Of these, 29% had completed tertiary education studies (master's degree, diploma, or postgraduate degree), and 33% had completed advanced training courses lasting more than 60 hours. There has been a slight increase in in-service teacher

Figure 4.8. Percentage of classroom teachers who have participated in some form of teacher training in the last two years by type of activity. Primary education level. Latin American countries. 2013-2019
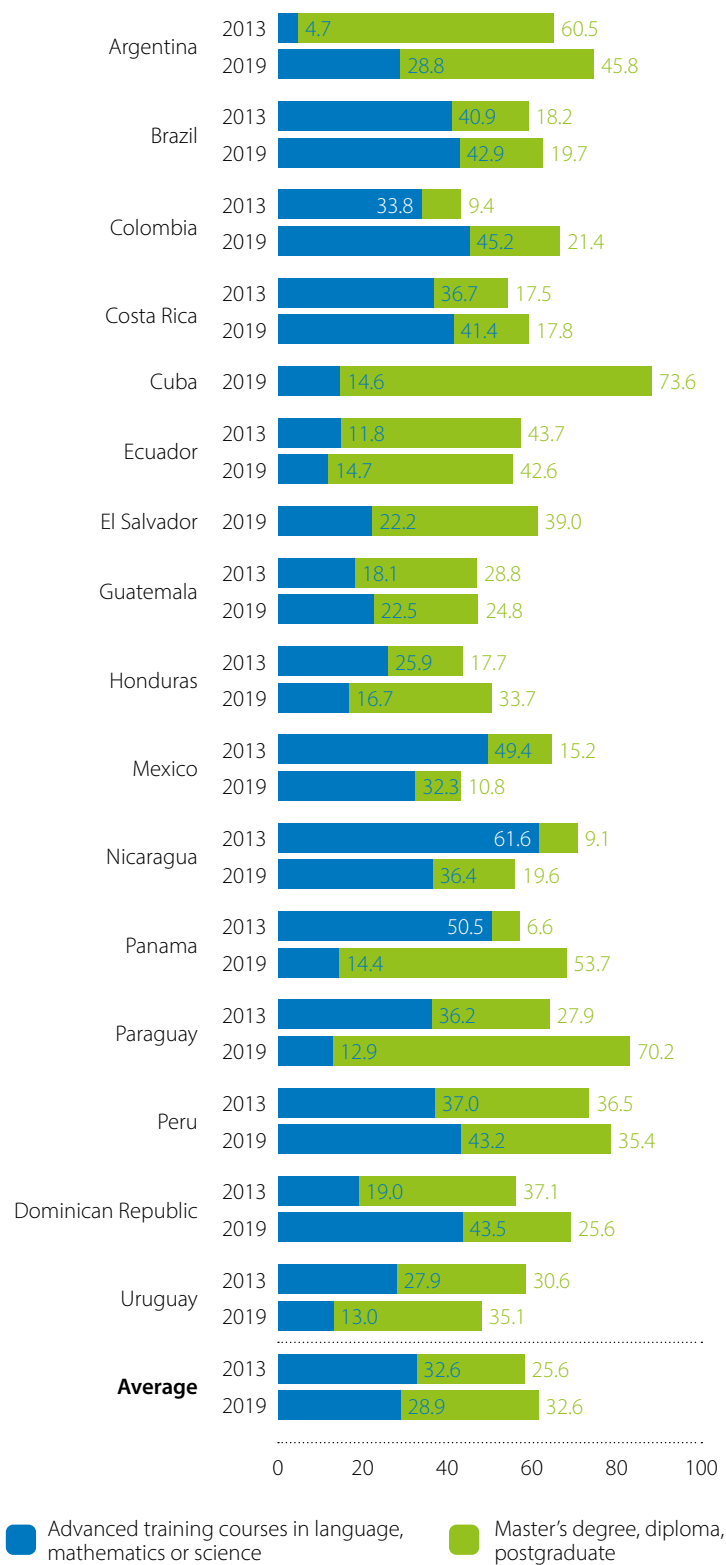
Note: The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years. Teachers who reported both types of training are computed in the category "master's degree, diploma, postgraduate", in order to construct a classification with mutually exclusive categories.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

training opportunities in recent years (by 2013, this percentage was 58%); and also, that the type of activities has changed, with a lower participation in tertiary education (from 33% to 29%) and more frequent courses (from 26% to 33%).

Some countries have greatly increased training opportunities, such as Colombia and Paraguay, and to a lesser extent the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Argentina. In some cases the growth is mostly explained by greater access to postgraduate studies, which entail more advanced training: Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia are the most prominent cases.

Conversely, other countries show a drop in total percentages, an aspect that should be taken as being associated with a decline in training opportunities. In a scenario in which the total percentage remains unchanged, another aspect to consider for monitoring are the cases where access to tertiary education has regressed in relation to courses, since it represents a change in the nature of in-service teacher training for teachers. This is the case, for example, in Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

Complementarily, exploring the specific training received by principals for the exercise of their institutional and pedagogical leadership role in the school is also relevant. Considering the functions and challenges faced by principals, the existence of specific training opportunities is essential to strengthening their role, which results in better teaching organization.

From the available data (**Figure 4.9**), it is possible to observe a decline in the proportion of the region's principals who have received specific in-service training on education administration or management, at least at the primary education level: by 2019, 52% of principals—on average—had received training of this nature in the last two years. This proportion was 59% in 2013.

This drop is observed in most countries. In some cases, these percentages have been maintained or slightly increased, such as in Argentina—where the relative importance of shorter courses has grown—and Peru. Paraguay and the Dominican Republic show a more marked increase, and Nicaragua stands out in terms of the expansion of access to in-service training in management.

The scenario up to 2019 shows that access to this training in education administration or management reaches three out of four primary school principals in

only four countries, and that these opportunities have been accessible to less than half of the principals in seven countries.

This information highlights the need to reinforce specific training for school principals, who play a key role in planning and coordinating teaching proposals, managing educational institutions, and monitoring learning, and require adequate training to meet the specific challenges of their role.

Working conditions

Most of the countries analyzed in **Figure 4.10** show a high degree of job stability, at least at the primary education level. On average, between 70% and 75% of classroom teachers and principals have an indefinite contract. Most other teachers have one-year or longer-term contracts with the possibility of continuing (interim or contract type). In some countries, these conditions of stability are more guaranteed for management teams than for teachers, as in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Guatemala.

While the situation is stable on average, this scenario is heterogeneous among countries: it combines cases where access to stable positions has improved in general (such as Argentina, Guatemala, Nicaragua, or Panama) or concentrated in managerial positions (such as Brazil or Ecuador), with some cases of countries where a decline is observed, such as Costa Rica, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, or Uruguay. In the latter, the proportion of classroom teachers and principals hired on a temporary basis has increased, indicating less stability in their positions.

Another relevant aspect to monitor is the concentration of working hours in a school. The possibility for teachers to work exclusively in one school not only contributes to improving working conditions and avoiding the effort of moving from one school to another, but also has a multiple impact on improving learning: it favors the formation of teaching teams and the construction of pedagogical proposals between grades and subject areas. Although this aspect tends to be more crucial in secondary education, a look at primary education allows for an approximation of the changes that have occurred over time and the differences between countries.

On average, 15% of primary education teachers in the region work in more than one institution, and nearly half of them dedicate more than 30 hours per week to a

Figure 4.9. Percentage of school principals who have participated in some form of education administration or management training in the last two years by number of hours of the course. Primary education level. Latin American countries. 2013-2019
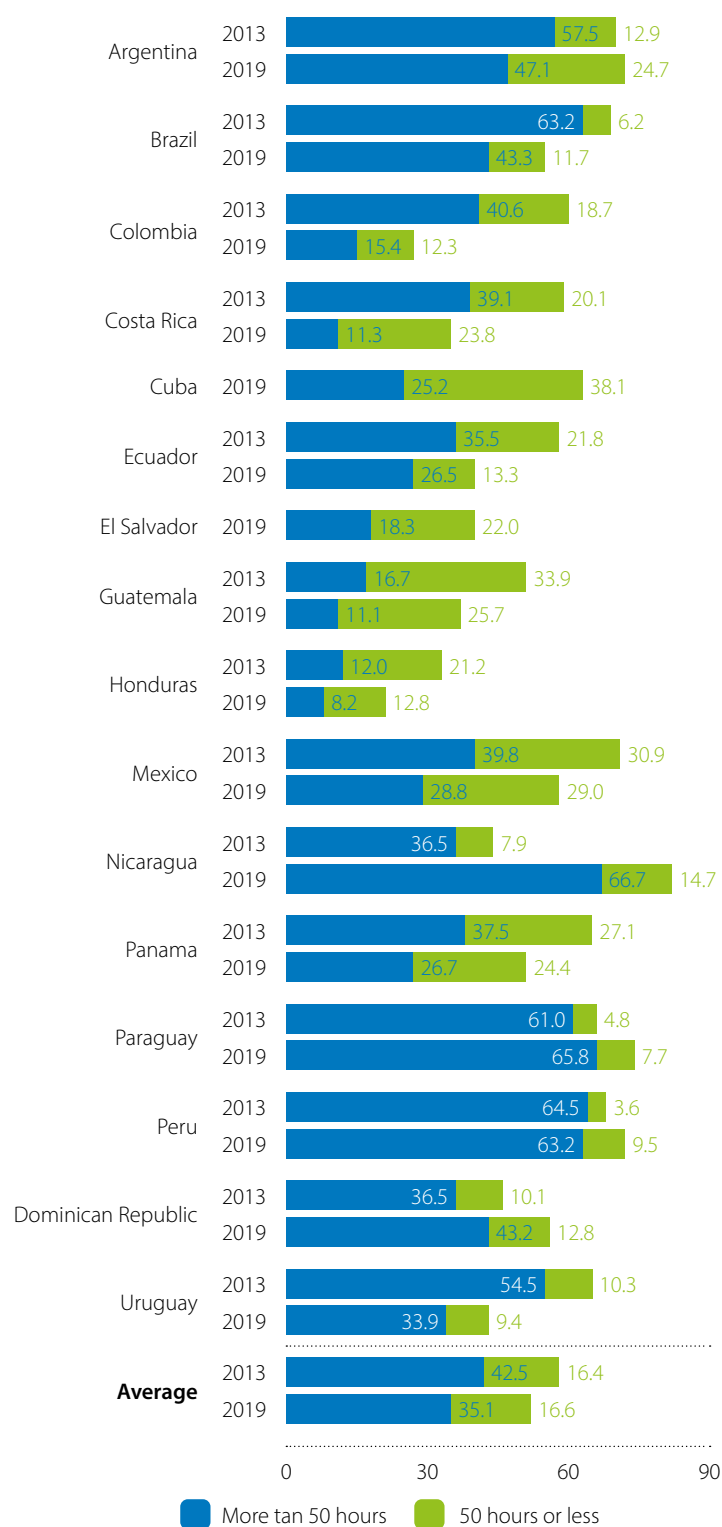
		More than 50 hours	50 hours or less
Argentina	2013	57.5	12.9
	2019	47.1	24.7
Brazil	2013	63.2	6.2
	2019	43.3	11.7
Colombia	2013	40.6	18.7
	2019	15.4	12.3
Costa Rica	2013	39.1	20.1
	2019	11.3	23.8
Cuba	2019	25.2	38.1
Ecuador	2013	35.5	21.8
	2019	26.5	13.3
El Salvador	2019	18.3	22.0
Guatemala	2013	16.7	33.9
	2019	11.1	25.7
Honduras	2013	12.0	21.2
	2019	8.2	12.8
Mexico	2013	39.8	30.9
	2019	28.8	29.0
Nicaragua	2013	36.5	7.9
	2019	66.7	14.7
Panama	2013	37.5	27.1
	2019	26.7	24.4
Paraguay	2013	61.0	4.8
	2019	65.8	7.7
Peru	2013	64.5	3.6
	2019	63.2	9.5
Dominican Republic	2013	36.5	10.1
	2019	43.2	12.8
Uruguay	2013	54.5	10.3
	2019	33.9	9.4
Average	2013	42.5	16.4
	2019	35.1	16.6

Note: The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 4.10. Percentage of classroom teachers and principals with indefinite contracts (tenured or tenure-track). Primary education level. Latin American countries. 2013-2019
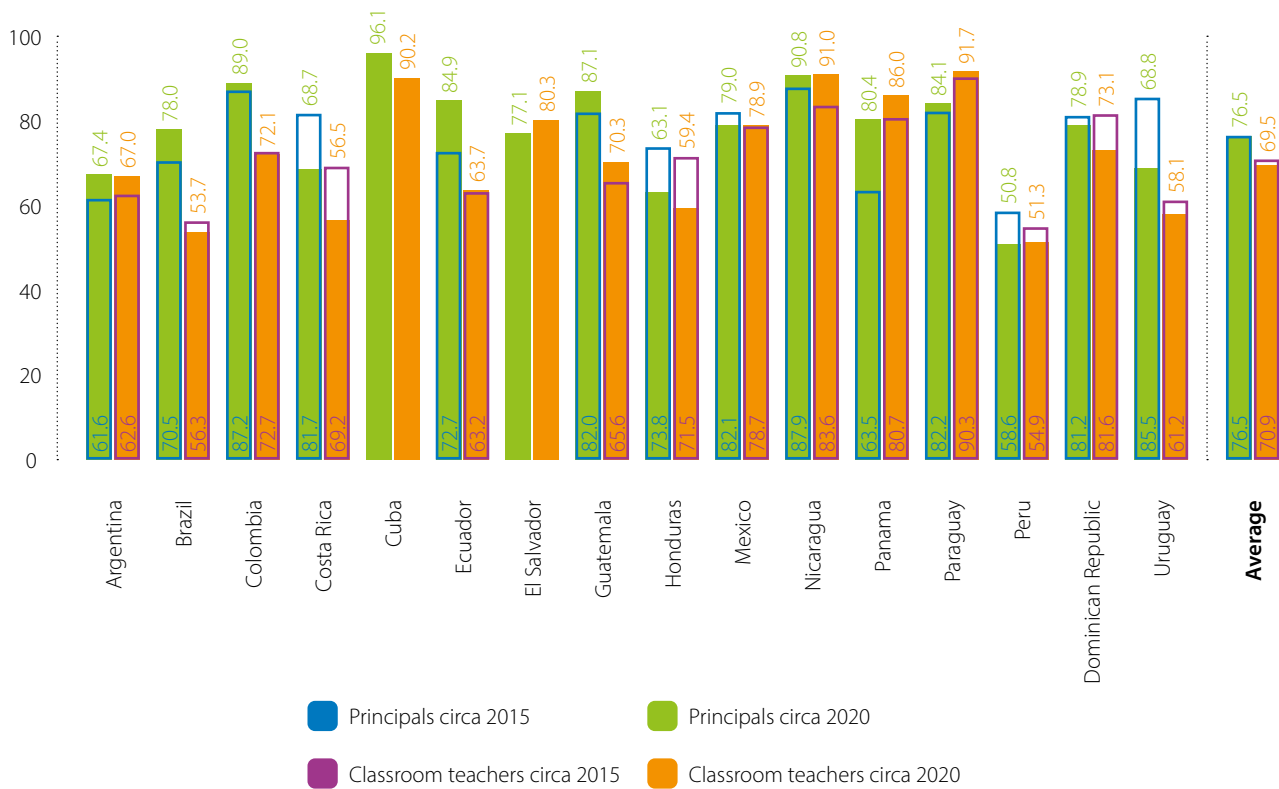
Legend:
- Principals circa 2015
- Principals circa 2020
- Classroom teachers circa 2015
- Classroom teachers circa 2020

Note: The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

school (**Figure 4.11**).[4] This percentage has increased in recent years.

Argentina and Brazil have the highest percentage of classroom teachers working in more than one school, a proportion that was already high in 2015, and has remained at similar levels in recent years. In both cases, the hourly time commitment of each teacher is lower than average. There are some exceptions to this ratio, however, if we compare these cases with Guatemala or Mexico, where the average time commitment is low and the percentage of teachers working in more than one school is lower.

In Guatemala, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay, the proportion of classroom teachers working in more than one school increased in the last five years. In the two latter cases, this movement was

accompanied by a marked reduction in the average time spent in a school. These two simultaneous changes may be associated with a change in the appointment criteria for teachers in these institutions.

In the other countries, the proportion of teachers working in more than one school is very low, and the average number of hours dedicated to the institution is high, which indicates a greater concentration of teachers working in a single school.

Key education policies between 2000 and 2015

Policies aimed at the professional improvement of teachers have been a central issue on the region's educational agenda in recent years. This has been reflected in the efforts of the OREALC/UNESCO Santiago Regional Strategy on Teacher Policies (2011-2018), which favored expert discussion from different countries to formulate diagnoses and intervention proposals (UNESCO, 2013; Cox *et al.*, 2021). In line with various international studies, OREALC/UNESCO Santiago's strategic actions on teacher issues have promoted a

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4 These data were taken from teachers' responses to the ERCE evaluation supplementary questionnaires. Teachers answer about their time commitment in the school participating in the sample, so these data should not be considered as an average time commitment in all the schools in which each teacher works, but as an approximation.

Figure 4.11. Percentage of classroom teachers working in more than one school. Primary education level. Latin American countries. 2013-2019
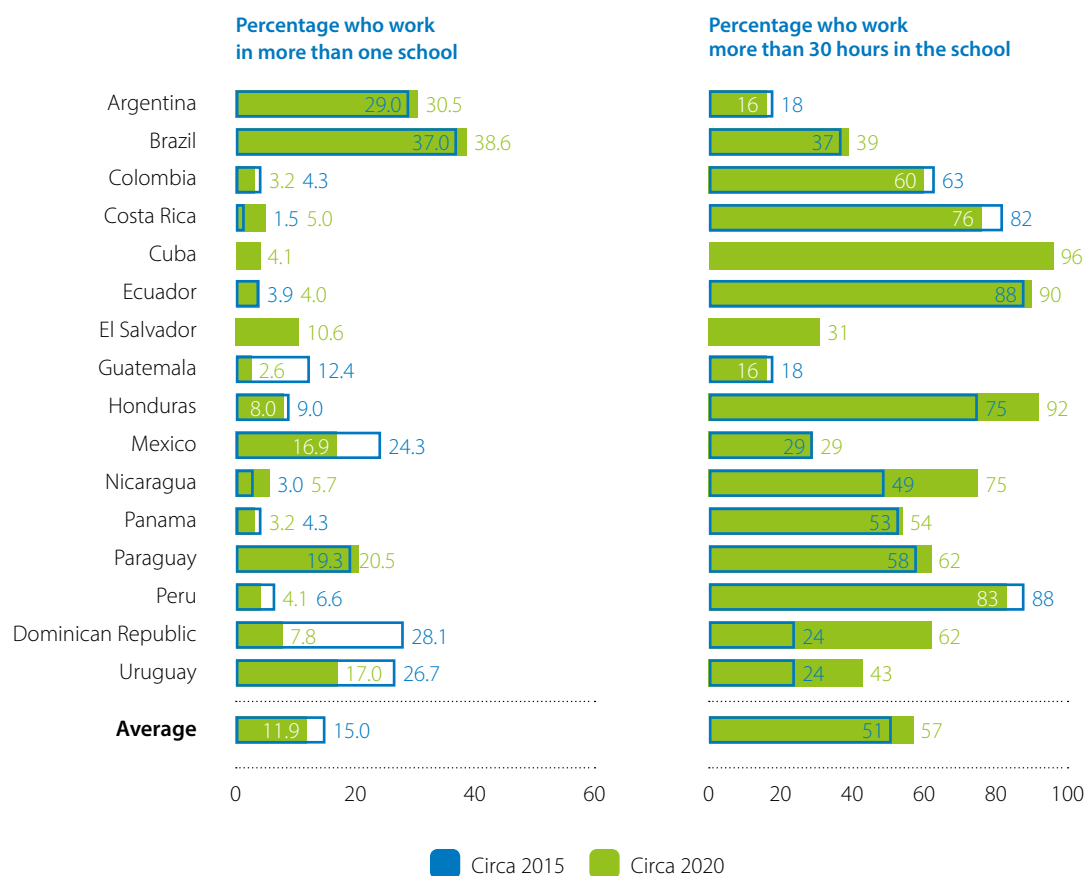
	Percentage who work in more than one school	Percentage who work more than 30 hours in the school
Argentina	29.0 / 30.5	16 / 18
Brazil	37.0 / 38.6	37 / 39
Colombia	3.2 / 4.3	60 / 63
Costa Rica	1.5 / 5.0	76 / 82
Cuba	4.1	96
Ecuador	3.9 / 4.0	88 / 90
El Salvador	10.6	31
Guatemala	2.6 / 12.4	16 / 18
Honduras	8.0 / 9.0	75 / 92
Mexico	16.9 / 24.3	29 / 29
Nicaragua	3.0 / 5.7	49 / 75
Panama	3.2 / 4.3	53 / 54
Paraguay	19.3 / 20.5	58 / 62
Peru	4.1 / 6.6	83 / 88
Dominican Republic	7.8 / 28.1	24 / 62
Uruguay	17.0 / 26.7	24 / 43
Average	11.9 / 15.0	51 / 57

Circa 2015 Circa 2020

Note: The simple average considers only those countries that have data for both years.

Data sources: UNESCO OREALC. Third and Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE 2013 and ERCE 2019). https://lleceunesco.org/ (accessed 1 December 2021).

comprehensive view of teachers, including their initial and in-service teacher training, the possibilities for their insertion in the labor market, their working conditions, salaries, and professional careers.

These dimensions are intertwined and require a combined approach: the possibilities of improving teachers' professional competencies cannot be understood without the general context of their preparation, social status, and working conditions. Only a holistic view will enable to enhance social status as a key axis for improving the teaching profession in Latin America (Elacqua *et al.*, 2018).

The long history of the region's education systems growth has been a factor—among others—that has enabled the loss of the profession's social status in many of these countries. The expansion of schooling has coincided in several cases with limited resources that prevented sustaining the necessary investment in teachers' salaries and working conditions, with a direct

impact on their recruitment and social status (Tenti and Steinberg, 2011).

However, the teacher issue did not remain on the back burner over the last two decades. Many countries began complex education reform processes involving their training and careers in the 2000s. Some studies indicate that, after structural reforms in different aspects of the education systems during the 1990s, the teaching profession began to be a central policy focus in the following period (Rivas, 2015; Cox, Beca, & Cerri, 2017).

New interventions were launched using different policy instruments for initial teacher training. Some countries continued or increased the transition from training in specific tertiary institutions to university-based training, such as in Chile, Brazil, and Ecuador. In other cases, the training number of years in tertiary institutions increased, such as occurred in Argentina, which went from 3 to 4 years of training in 2006.

Box 4.1

Teachers and the COVID-19 pandemic

The massive school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted the teaching profession. Schools were forced to close their doors, but teachers were faced with the task of ensuring educational continuity through remote formats.

This implied a profound change in teaching, which was often implemented without sufficient guidance, training, support or resources, and in many cases was even made impossible by a lack of technological devices or connectivity (UNESCO, 2020a). Many teachers therefore increased the time they devoted to teaching preparation, in contexts in which they also had to take on care and support tasks at home, which also increased stress levels and affected their emotional health.

Trainee teachers were also affected in their learning experience, as teacher training courses underwent the same challenges. This is expected to have a negative impact on the future supply of trained teachers, which should be taken into account when planning the needs of the coming years and moving towards measures to close the gaps identified in this chapter.

On World Teachers' Day 2020, UNESCO issued a joint statement with UNICEF, the ILO, and Education International to urge countries to strengthen the digital and pedagogical skills needed for distance teaching, ensure digital infrastructure and connectivity throughout their territory, and protect the safety, health, and wellbeing of teachers, as well as their employment (UNESCO *et al.*, 2020).

Countries have implemented various measures to support teachers. A survey conducted during the 2021 first months reports that more than 90% of countries had supported teachers with training activities for distance teaching, 85% had provided professional, psychosocial, and emotional support, and only 40% had provided guidelines to reduce the amount of overtime needed to prepare a virtual classroom (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that a number of teachers have been unable to return to work during the return to on-site classes because they are at risk due to their age or pre-existing illnesses, which has had an impact on student attendance during school reopening periods. On a positive note, 71% of countries in the region prioritized their teachers for vaccination during 2021 (John Hopkins University, World Bank, and UNICEF, 2021).

To fill these vacancies and the need for new teachers to support remote or hybrid teaching, almost half of the countries decided to hire new teachers at all levels of the system to meet the needs created by the pandemic, and almost all the countries made no changes to their pay (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

Some of these changes forced by the pandemic may also present an opportunity to introduce relevant changes to the way we teach in the future. Indeed, some studies report on the development of teaching and learning processes under the conditions imposed by this new context, and what aspects can be recovered and enhanced in the future (Aguilar, 2020; Failache, Katzkowicz and Machado, 2020; Porlán,2020).

The quality of the training institutions was tested on the basis of external evaluation instruments. Several countries have implemented teacher training qualification policies. For example, Ecuador introduced the mandatory accreditation of all institutions and degree programs in 2008, with the possibility of closing those not passing the external evaluation. A process to accredit teacher training schools to integrate them with the programs of some education facilities was started in Colombia. In other cases, such as Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and several states and municipalities in Brazil,

standardized assessment systems for trainee teachers were implemented (Calvo, 2019).

There are common strategic plans at the regional level that include targets such as having qualified teachers for at least 80% of primary education schools and 65% of secondary education schools; at least one-third of tertiary educational institutions offering pedagogy; and requiring an academic qualification such as a teaching degree. This holds true for some countries in the Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, the

Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Surinamee, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Teacher training underwent different curricular renewal processes that in some countries, such as Mexico and Peru, involved mandatory curricula for training in non-university institutions (Calvo, 2019). Argentina sought greater centralized coordination in a system with hundreds of provincial training institutions: one of the tasks of the National Teacher Training Institute, created in 2006, was to organize the multiple curricular plans being implemented.

This trend was reinforced in several countries with the advent of a new policy instrument: the Good Teaching Frameworks (Vásquez, Cordero and Leyva, 2014). Chile created the Good Teaching Framework (*Marco para la Buena Enseñanza*, MBE) in 2011. Mexico promoted its Teaching Performance Standards (*Estándares de Desempeño Docente*) in 2010. Peru developed the Good Teaching Performance Framework (*Marco de Buen Desempeño Docente*) after a broad dialog led by the National Education Council (CNE, 2012; Meckes, 2014). Ecuador launched the Yes Teacher (*Sí, Profe*) initiative, which defined common regulations and parameters for all teacher training programs.

As part of the move toward greater teacher training regulations, some countries have created assessments for screening aspiring teachers. Chile created the diagnostic assessment in pre-service teacher training (*Evaluación Nacional Diagnóstica de la Formación Inicial*, INICIA) in 2008, an optional teacher training completion exam, which was later renamed the Initial Pedagogical Excellence Examination (*Examen Inicial de Excelencia Pedagógica*). Brazil followed similar steps with the National Student Performance Examination (*Examen Nacional de Desempeño de Estudiantes*, ENADE). These models, however, failed to evolve into mandatory systems, nor did they succeed in confirming themselves as a trend in other countries. Several also installed teacher training performance standards (Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Dominican Republic), as did some subnational governments, such as Santa Catarina in Brazil (Cruz-Aguayo, Hincapié, and Rodríguez, 2020).

Policies aimed at in-service education for teachers also went through a transition period, from more theoretical and individual external coursework models to more practice-based, collaborative approaches between teams within schools (Calvo, 2014; Vezub, 2019). Some countries developed specific bodies to promote in-service teacher training, such as the Uladislao Gámez Professional Development Institute (*Instituto de Desarrollo Profesional Uladislao Gámez*) in Costa Rica or the National Institute of Education and Training of Teachers (*Instituto Nacional de Formación y Capacitación del Magisterio*, INAFOCAM) in the Dominican Republic. Other cases stand out for having decentralized in-service teacher training to local educational units, such as the Local Education Management Units (*Unidades de Gestión Educativa Local*, UGEL) in Peru, regions in Panama, the Microcenters in Colombia or the Regional Teachers' Centers in Uruguay.

The teaching career was also a central area of educational reforms in the 2000s, with emblematic cases such as Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru (Fumagalli, 2018). Chile underwent a process with several change stages in its teaching career, from 1996 onwards. This process was implemented in the context of an increased education budget and in consensus with the College of Teachers (*Colegio de Profesores*), in a moderated model of repeated negotiations and agreements (Mizala and Ross Schneider, 2014).

Mexico also underwent different stages of teacher career reform, but more fraught with disputes and controversy (Ornelas, 2018). In 2005, a differential salary payment system was created based on students' test results in ENLACE. Then, in 2013, the General Law on Professional Teaching Services (*Ley General del Servicio Profesional Docente*) was enacted, with a performance assessment that sparked a fierce dispute with the sector's unions.

In Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru, new professional careers for teachers were created that established the possibility of dismissal based on performance evaluations and a new salary incentive regime (Rivas, 2015; Chiriboga, 2018b).

These trends are not equally applicable in all countries. Cuba is a unique case in its teacher professional development: those with the best qualifications in their performance assessments gain access to advanced master's and doctoral training programs, allowing them to take on coordinating roles in in-service teacher training or pedagogical research (Vezub, 2019). The professional career consolidates a scheme in which teacher training is intrinsically linked to the education system's curriculum and practices (Carnoy, 2005).

In summary, the trends of the first fifteen years of the new century reveal a boom in teaching policies. This

was a key aspect in education reforms, in a context of growing resources and continuity of different governments to undertake processes of profound change in teachers' professional careers.

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

The risky and often controversial reforms to various aspects of the teaching profession were a central theme of education policy in the first fifteen years of the 21st century. In the period 2015 to 2021, the issue was more moderate and fluctuating due to greater budgetary restrictions, political instability, and the systemic disruption resulting from the pandemic.

Some countries have continued to implement policies to improve initial teacher training. In Colombia, new Quality Guidelines for Bachelor's Degrees in Education were established, which proposed a novel system for educator training as of 2016 (Ow *et al.*, 2018). Argentina also defined the new National Curricular Guidelines for Teacher Training (*Lineamientos Curriculares Nacionales para la Formación Docente*) in 2016. In Brazil, the Curricular Guidelines for Initial and In-service teacher training for Primary Education Teachers (*Directrices Curriculares para la Formación Inicial y Continua del Magisterio de Educación Básica*) were established in 2015.

Progress was also made in consolidating more hours of internships or teaching residencies in initial training. A very critical diagnosis of this aspect had noted that most of the region's teacher training programs had few practice hours, with the exception of Cuba (Bruns and Luque, 2015). The increase in practice hours was a clear trend in recent years. For example, the Dominican Republic introduced different innovative strategies in its *Inductio* program as of 2016 (Marcelo *et al.*, 2016). Some experts, however, suggest that this shift towards practice also carries the risk of reproducing traditional teaching without transforming it (Vaillant and Marcelo, 2012).

One ambivalent trend in some countries in the region was the criteria and qualifications required for entry into teacher training. In Ecuador and Peru, the minimum requirements for admission to teacher training programs were reversed, since both countries faced a recruitment crisis for future teachers. In Peru, the definition of a minimum score in entrance exams as a requirement to enter teacher training generated a drastic drop in the number of applicants, especially

critical in bilingual tertiary educational institutions (UNESCO and CNE, 2017). In 2016, a new Law on Tertiary Educational Institutions and Schools was enacted, which gives each institution autonomy in the selection process, with guidelines on the definition of vacancies as required by institutional conditions and the Ministry of Education's analysis of teacher supply and demand (Elacqua *et al.*, 2018). The lack of teachers has also been an important factor in explaining the emergence of various scholarship programs to attract future teachers. The scholarships *Beca Vocación de Profesor* in Chile, *Beca Vocación de Maestro* in Peru, and *Becas Compromiso Docente* in Argentina are examples of this trend.

Progress was also made in several models for strengthening induction to professional teaching. In Mexico, a new mentoring process with tutors for novice teachers was created in 2015 (INEE, 2017). Colombia created the *Pioneros* induction program, which has three stages: i) welcome to the teaching profession by the Ministry of Education, ii) identification of teachers' needs led by the territorial entities, and iii) pedagogical mentoring. The mentoring process involves classroom observations, systematization of the teacher's practices in a portfolio, and workshops focused on tools that contribute to good teaching (Cruz-Aguayo, Hincapié & Rodríguez, 2020).

Several Brazilian states and municipalities have created courses and activities for new teachers. For example, the municipality of Sobral in Ceará offers an induction program during the three-year trial period prior to teachers' permanent appointment. They must attend classes once a week, at night, at the Escola de Formação de Professores and participate in the *Olhares* program, which seeks to broaden their cultural knowledge. Program participants receive a monetary incentive representing 25% of the four-hour base salary, and must attend at least 80% of the classes to obtain a satisfactory assessment (André, 2015).

One trend that raises concerns is an increase in the distance teacher training courses on offer. Some countries, such as Colombia, Brazil, and Chile, already had a tradition of using these teacher training models, although the latter stands out because it has backed away from distance education in order to guarantee common criteria for face-to-face training (UNESCO, 2013). Brazil, on the other hand, had a marked increase in its distance initial teacher training courses, which went from accounting for 6% of teachers in training in 2005, to 40% in 2016 (Elacqua *et al.*, 2018). Some

Box 4.2

Expert survey results

The analysis of the regional expert survey (see Methodological Annex, p. 211) shows that, in the period 2015 to 2021, policies aimed at the teaching profession have achieved varying degrees of importance. Four specific dimensions were consulted for this regional report: i) initial teacher training, ii) in-service teacher training, iii) teaching careers and salaries, and iv) policies for school principals (**Figure 4.12**).

Initial teacher training policies have been important and the object of intense actions, according to 28% of the experts consulted, while 26% indicated that partial actions had been implemented. Forty-six percent indicated that it had not been an important topic on the education agenda or had received minimal attention.

In contrast, in-service teacher training seems to be a more present issue, as 38% of the experts reported partial actions in the period 2015 to 2021. This seems to be more typical of a type of policy that is constantly deployed in education systems and often depends on education policy interventions that are closer to government decision-making, while initial training is generally more independent and is based in tertiary educational institutions or universities.

Policies related to the professional teaching career and salaries have received intense attention, according to 25% of experts, or been partially important, according to 23%. In contrast, 52% of respondents indicated that it had not been an important issue or had involved minor actions in the years analyzed.

Policies for the training and recruitment of school principals, on the other hand, have been much less important in the region's education agendas, according to the experts consulted. Only 8% reported that there had been intense actions, while 64% stated that it had not been an important issue or had not involved concrete actions.

Figure 4.12. Importance of the policy focus areas by topic according to the experts in the region's countries (in percentage of responses by importance category)

Legend:
- This has been a very important policy focus area with intense actions
- This has been an important policy focus area with partial actions
- It is an important agenda item but has not led to concrete actions
- This has not been an important policy focus area
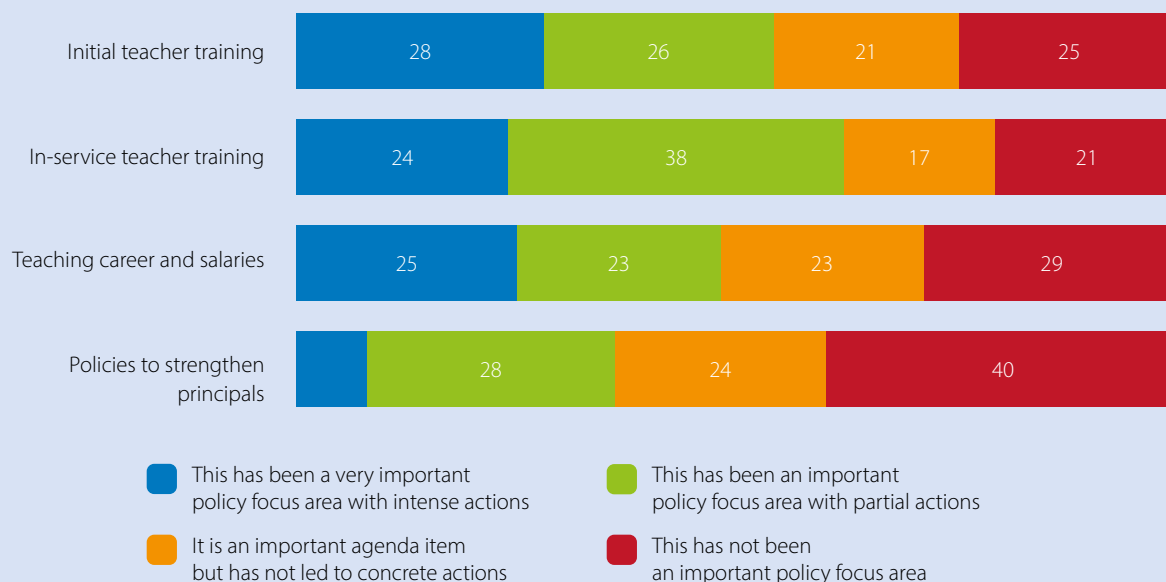
Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Expert survey for the SDG4-Education 2030 Regional Monitoring Report, 2021.

studies suggest this trend is worrisome, given that greater improvisation in the pedagogical content and weaknesses in student support were detected in the distance training courses (Gatti *et al.*, 2019).

School principals and supervisors have not been the central focus of teaching policies, but some recent initiatives stand out. The National Common Base Competencies for School Principals (*Base Nacional Comum de Competências do Director Escolar*) was established in Brazil in 2021. In Jamaica, the government created a principal training program focused on their pedagogical leadership to provide feedback to classroom teachers and use student learning data (Nannyonjo, 2017).[5]

Ecuador completely reformed the role and profile of school supervisors, a key intermediate link between the education system and government management. The model introduced training based on innovative methodologies to support schools, far removed from

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[5] Some valuable background information on principal training processes was collected in previous studies: in Argentina, the Training Program for Education Leaders (*Programa de Formación para Líderes Educativos*) was created in 2012; in Brazil, the Management for Learning Program (*Programa Gestión para el Aprendizaje*) in 2013; in Chile, the Master in Education Leadership and Management (*Magíster en Liderazgo y Gestión Educativa*) in 2011; in Colombia, the Transformational Leaders Principals Program (*Programa Rectores Líderes Transformadores*) in 2010; in Mexico, the Competency-based Principal Training Program (*Programa de Formación de Directivos por Competencias*) in 2007; and in the Dominican Republic, the School of Principals for Education Quality: Education Management Training Program (*Escuela de Directores para la Calidad Educativa: Programa de Capacitación en Gestión Educativa*) in 2012 (Weinstein *et al.*, 2015).

the control and monitoring role of the past (Chiriboga, 2018b, 2018a).

In-service teacher training was a diverse field of interventions, as reported in the expert survey. Building on the experience of other countries, El Salvador created the National Teacher Training Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente*) in 2018 (**Box 4.3**). Paraguay launched the teacher training program to improve learning among children, youth and adults (*Programa de Capacitación de los Educadores para el Mejoramiento de los Aprendizajes de Niños, Niñas, Jóvenes y Adultos*, PROCEMA), a comprehensive teacher training program, in 2016. Peru defined Training Action or Program Design Standards (*Estándares de Diseño de Acciones o Programas Formativos*) in 2018 to assess its in-service teacher training programs (UNESCO, 2019b). This process was reinforced with the In-Service Teacher Training Policy Guidelines (*Lineamientos de Política para la Formación Docente en Servicio*), which generated greater systemic coordination (Vezub, 2019).

Costa Rica developed its national in-service teacher training Plan 2016-2018, called *Actualizándonos*. This establishes five priority thematic areas for the in-service training of public service teachers: i) curricular transformation, ii) digital equity and social inclusion, iii) planetary citizenship and national identity, iv) sustainable development, and v) institutional management.

Argentina launched the large-scale National Lifelong Learning Program (*Programa Nacional de Formación Permanente*, PNFD), called *Nuestra Escuela*, in 2013, which was then continued— although reformulated—

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in the period 2016 to 2019. This program is universal, free of charge, in-service and has two main modalities: on-site teacher training, which takes place in schools through institutional workshops, didactic athenaeums, and circles of principals; and specialized teacher training, which takes place through mostly virtual courses outside the institutions.

Colombia's Let's all learn (*Todos a Aprender*) program began in 2013 and had different stages of work with primary schools. The program innovated by training teachers in the education system to be peer tutors in other schools, generating a horizontal network of in-service teacher training (Rodriguez and Pantoja, 2019).

Chile implemented local professional development training plans (*Planes Locales de Formación para el Desarrollo Profesional*) (**Box 4.4**).

Some innovative vocational training models were implemented in subnational governments. For example, in 2015, the Legislative Power of Bogotá, Colombia, approved a sabbatical year for those teachers or principals who certify a minimum of ten years of service to the Ministry of Education and propose a research project, the preparation of books and teaching materials, internships, or other academic activities.

In the area of professional teaching careers, the policy pathway has stalled to a certain extent. A study by Cuenca (2015) built a classification of three types of teaching careers. The first type is the more traditional generation that rewards teacher seniority, stability, and the vertical pathway toward management positions. Many countries have taken steps towards a transition, retaining these traditional mechanisms and adding some new components such as performance assessment or attempts at horizontal promotion. A third group consists of countries that have succeeded in introducing a new generation of teaching careers, which entails a comprehensive renovation of professional improvement criteria, rewarding merit and in-service teacher training.

Countries that had succeeded in introducing new regulations found it very difficult to implement them and, in many cases, had to modify aspects that generated great resistance among teachers. In the period under study, Chile's case stands out, as it managed to advance more firmly into a new stage of consolidation of second-generation reforms with the enactment of a law in 2016 that created the Professional Teacher Development System (**Box 4.4**).

A recurring problem refers to how teaching careers address socio-educational inequalities. Different studies suggest that teachers with higher education levels and experience tend to be concentrated in schools with more favorable social contexts, leading to an expansion of social inequalities by way of education supply (Luschei, Chudgar and Rew, 2013; La Rosa, 2017; Bertoni *et al.*, 2018). In Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and some Brazilian states and municipalities such as Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco, economic incentives were introduced for teachers working in vulnerable schools, but these are still limited or incipient (Elacqua *et al.*, 2018).

In summary, the period 2015 to 2021 was extremely complex, with changes of governments, fiscal crises, and the emergence of the pandemic. This did nothing to favor possible agreements and negotiations with teachers' unions and other political stakeholders

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Box 4.4

Chile's Professional Teacher Development System

The Professional Teacher Development System aims to consolidate the teaching profession and improve conditions for teachers, supporting their performance and increasing the way in which they are valued. The Teaching System addresses students' entire pathway, from the beginning of their pedagogical studies through their entire professional career, which generates a new salary scale that for most teachers translates into an average increase of 30%. It promotes peer-to-peer and collaborative work through teacher networks (Carrasco and González, 2017).

All publicly funded schools participate in this system. Classroom hours were decreased to 70% starting in 2017 and to 65% by 2019. At least 40% of non-teaching time is allocated to class preparation, learning assessment, and other activities relevant to the schools.

Principals play a key role in the Education Improvement Plans. They can count on collaboration with the school's mentor teachers, consult with technical-pedagogical coordinators, and seek the advice of the Teachers' Council to accomplish this task.

to solidify the process of transforming teachers' professional careers.

Future challenges

Teaching's overarching challenge lies in combining legislative and policy measures to make teaching an attractive profession for current and potential staff by ensuring that working conditions, social security provisions, pension schemes, and salaries are attractive, equitable, and equivalent to those of other professions requiring similar levels of qualification (UIS, 2016b: 23).

The Buenos Aires Declaration of the Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean, in January 2017, highlights the commitment to strengthening teacher training and careers to transform teaching into a "profession of excellence, ensuring the participation of teachers and other education professionals in its design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation."

The conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have made this challenge more difficult to overcome. The teacher burnout crisis and early abandonment of the profession had already been the subject of education research (González-Escobar, Oliveira and De Almeida, 2020; Tabares-Díaz, Martínez-Daza and Matabanchoy-Tulcán, 2020). With the return to face-to-face classes, teachers had to implement numerous adjustments to their work and reinforce their attention to students in contexts of a notable increase in the violation of rights and social inequalities. Supporting teachers in this increasingly difficult task is a central focus of current education policies in the region (UNESCO, 2020a).

In addition to this challenging context for teaching, there are also the demands posed by the renewal of pedagogical and curricular practices. The SDGs set an agenda of major social, economic, and cultural transformations that require adjustments to the region's curricular frameworks.

Recent studies on the introduction of new 21st Century competencies signal their weak presence in initial teacher training curricula (Ow et al., 2018). In this regard, a key issue is the incorporation of certain 21st century competencies to teacher training, such as global citizenship, training in digital technologies, creativity and resilience in adverse and changing contexts, as well as new pedagogical practices that address inclusion from a social diversity perspective.

One of the central challenges posed by the pandemic is distance teacher training, which has become an unavoidable path during the pandemic. This process could be exacerbated by the distance learning availability after the pandemic.

Moreover, there is a significant teacher deficit in native languages to serve rural populations in countries with substantial indigenous populations, such as Peru (Ombudsman's Office of Peru, 2016). Teachers serving the indigenous population often have little experience and precarious contracts (Bertoni et al., 2018; Cavalcanti and Elacqua, 2018). Recent studies also highlight the dual challenge of the lack of teachers with the required training and the difficulty of finding suitable candidates (Schmelkes and Ballesteros, 2020).

On the other hand, specialized training and the appointment of principals is an issue that has been on the regional agenda, but with no significant momentum. Even the data collected through the ERCE test show a decrease in principal training in 2019 compared to 2013. This points to the importance of strengthening renewed principal training processes and public competition guidelines for their appointment to ensure the arrival of suitable profiles for this role (UNESCO OREALC, 2014).

In short, the consolidation of comprehensive strategies for the improvement of the teaching profession requires a holistic, long-term vision. Political fragmentation, discontinuity, and the serious economic crisis afflicting many countries jeopardize the development of cross-cutting measures underpinned by strong agreements that guarantee continuity based on legitimacy and consensus. The gradual improvement of teacher training, professional careers, and salaries is a combined essential goal to strengthening systemic teaching capacities and the quality of learning. Enhancing the social status of the teaching profession is a core outcome of these policies, so as to achieve a favorable future cycle of aspiring teachers who decide to commit themselves to improving education.

Higher education

Higher education in SDG4, Education 2030

Higher education includes the entire range of education provided after secondary education and encompasses academic programs and professional training, including research, that is offered by institutions such as universities that are recognized by national authorities as being part of the higher education sector (UNESCO, 1998). The rapid growth in demand for higher education across the globe, and in the Latin American and Caribbean region specifically, is indicative of the sector's tremendous economic and social value to individuals and to governments, which have been investing in universal access to education at levels preceding higher education. The increased social and economic wellbeing that higher education offers is apparent in the salary differences between those possessing post-secondary qualifications and those who managed only to complete secondary education (Busso *et al.*, 2017).

In fact, the average differences are much higher in the LAC region than in more developed countries, surpassing 200% in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico, compared to the average of 150% among OECD countries (OECD, 2021). However, beyond the personal return from the perspective of public intervention, the sector offers strategic benefits to the nation for its capacity to develop highly qualified human capital in the service of society, private enterprise, and the State. It also generates new knowledge and encourages innovation and social and economic stimulation in social justice contexts, as proposed in the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

Unlike the global education agendas that preceded them, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA), SDG4 takes as one of its core targets expanding access to higher education to the entire population (UNESCO, 2016a). The concept of lifelong learning includes concern for ensuring greater and equitable access to this educational stage and more opportunities for quality learning. To this end, SDG4 generates a specific monitoring framework, expressed in target 4.3, and includes it as a high priority in its policy recommendations (UNESCO, 2016a).

With its evident reported benefits, the sector acts as a catalyst for public and private actions aimed at achieving equal educational opportunities from a social justice perspective. International law had already included higher education as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); later, the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1966) affirmed that "Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity." While this provision makes it an absolute obligation for States not to discriminate, it does not demand that access to higher education be universalized, leaving the door open to systems with high rates of private provision, the high economic costs of which make it accessible only to a limited, privileged portion of the population (Schendel and McCowan, 2016).

The most common rationale for this is that access should be merit-based, and so many people, due to their lack of dedication or natural talent, are not able to take advantage of the opportunities inherent to higher education. However, this rationale ignores the fact that determinants to access and success in higher education develop long before students reach this level, originating in the disparate quality of primary and secondary education systems, as well as in pre-existing social and economic inequalities. In fact, on average in the region, young people from high-income families are seven times more likely to access higher education than those from families in the lowest-income quintile, and in some Central American countries the former can be 18 times more likely (Busso *et al.*, 2017). It is vitally important to note, however, that those inequalities seem to have worsened in recent years owing to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, the rationale also maintains an approach to public expenditure on higher education that is focused, if not on restricting access, then at least on not expanding it.

UNESCO has encouraged international consensus on the matter, as reflected in the Regional Conferences on Higher Education (UNESCO IESALC, 2018), imparting guidelines to ensure that, first of all, higher education is seen as a public social good; second, that the right to higher education be an integral part of the universal right to education; third, that States play a central role in

guaranteeing the exercise of that right in a framework of equal opportunities; and last, specifically in the case of universities—given their role as institutions that are essentially oriented toward research and the production and transmission of scientific knowledge—that their institutional autonomy should be guaranteed in a framework of academic freedom.

The tension between the robust tradition of institutional autonomy in the region—now enshrined in the so-called "Scream of Córdoba" (1918)—and State intervention, has made higher education one of the most complex areas to manage politically, and until recently the result has been a sector with weak governance and high levels of social injustice (Mendoza, 2020). However, what characterizes higher education in the region above all is the heterogeneity of policies related to it, which has created a certain degree of polarization among countries (Fernández and Pérez, 2016). In fact, even within the same country one can sometimes find both a constitutionally framed political orientation (defense of university autonomy) and its opposite enacted in legislation (State representation predominates in university governance authorities). This brings into relief the recurring, and perhaps inevitable, tension between governments and higher education institutions, as well as between political and regulatory control and academic and institutional autonomy.

In this context, based on comparative information available, the monitoring of higher education proposed in this chapter focuses on analyzing regional and national trends in access to higher education based on gross enrollment rates. The chapter also introduces some complementary indicators to characterize this educational level, and delves deeper into some measurements that reflect the unequal access to it.

Entry, completion and equity in higher education

This educational stage encompasses programs that usually focus on students who have completed secondary education and are seeking to acquire some kind of higher education certification. It includes diverse types of education, approaches and modalities (academic or professional; technical, artistic, or pedagogical; in-person or remote learning, etc.), and although this learning occurs most commonly in universities, higher education may also be provided by technology institutes, professional training institutes, and others (UNESCO, 1998).

SDG indicator 4.3.2, "Gross enrolment ratio," is the most widely used around the world to monitor access to higher education. This rate is an approximate measure of access that establishes the ratio of the total number of enrolled students as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group;[1] as such, it does not strictly represent the percentage of the population that accesses higher education. The information available shows that in the past 20 years, access has risen significantly. The gross ratio increased from 19% to 38% at the global level, with the Latin American and Caribbean region showing the second highest growth, after East and Southeast Asia.[2]

This growth, however, has occurred unequally among countries, and the gaps are tending to increase. A recent study by UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (*Instituto Internacional de la UNESCO para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe*, IESALC) shows that in recent decades, middle- to high-income countries increased their participation rates more, while higher education rates in lower-income countries have risen more slowly. Poverty, crises and emergencies, high enrollment fees, entrance exams, limited geographic mobility and discrimination are the central barriers that limit marginalized communities' access to higher education (UNESCO IESALC, 2020b).

Figure 5.1 shows a constant rise in the rate of access to higher education of about two percentage points per year. Close to 17 million students entered higher education during this period. This growth began to slow down in the 2015-2020 period, and over the past two years the indicator has remained static. This is a warning bell that will need to be monitored, to determine to what extent it is signaling a change in the trend.

In the final year of the period, 28.9 million young people and adults attended higher education. Of them, 10% attended ISCED 5 (short-cycle tertiary education), 84% attended ISCED 6 (Bachelor's degree or equivalent tertiary education level), 5% were in ISCED 7 (Master's degree or equivalent tertiary education level), and 1% attended ISCED 8 (doctoral or equivalent education level).

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1 While higher education has no strictly defined age range, as there is no upper limit for entry, for the purpose of constructing a comparable indicator the theoretical population of youth in the age group corresponding to the five years immediately following completion of upper secondary education is used (UIS, 2018b).

2 Estimates from the UIS database.

Figure 5.1. Gross enrolment ratio (SDG indicator 4.3.2) and total enrolment for tertiary education (millions of people). Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
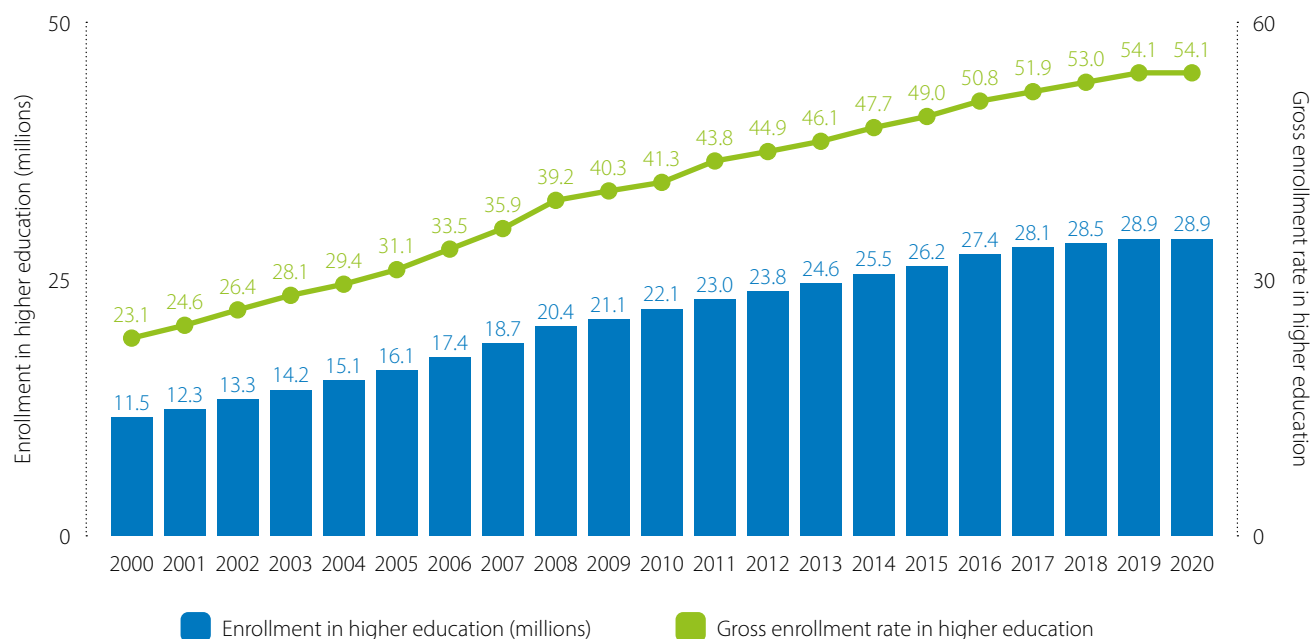
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

When broken down by country (**Figure 5.2**) the data show that Southern Cone countries tend to have higher levels of access to higher education than other countries in the region, while Central American and Caribbean countries tend to have the lowest rate of access.

Over the past five years, the overall trend shows some improvement, with negative or no change reported in only a few cases. What is concerning behavior is the fact that countries with higher levels of access are also those where access is increasing faster: the five countries with the highest higher education enrollment rate—excluding Uruguay, which shows exceptionally high growth—increased by 8% on average from 2015 to 2020, while in the five lowest scoring countries, the indicator grew by only one percentage point—except for the British Virgin Islands, where the indicator dropped dramatically. If this trend is not reversed, the inequalities among countries will become increasingly marked. For countries that have information for 2010, this trend has been sustained over time: opportunities for access increase more in countries where higher education is already well developed.

No direct relationship was observed between the population's level of access to higher education and the existence of public education provision: in some countries, including Argentina and Uruguay, the majority of students are enrolled in public institutions

and access is high, while in other countries like Peru and Chile, rates are also high, but higher education provision is intensely privatized.

Moreover, the higher participation in public higher education in some countries does not necessarily mean that access to it is free. Some public universities charge enrollment or tuition fees, or have other direct costs, and these constitute one of the main barriers to guaranteeing equitable access (UNESCO IESALC, 2020b). According to recent data, in the region more than 50% of higher education enrollment is financed by students' families themselves (Bustamante Chán, Passailaigue Baquerizo and Silva Gómez, 2021).

In analyzing the trends in participation in private higher education for the 17 countries that have consistent, comprehensive information for the 2010-2020 period, it can be observed that in the first half of the decade, enrollment in private institutions increased (from 52.2% to 54.3%% between 2010 and 2015), then in the second half the indicator flattened out somewhat (decreasing slightly to 54.1%).[3] It should be noted that recent studies in the region reveal the existence of different quality circuits in higher education, which is manifested in both public and private institutions. In both realms,

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3 Estimates from the UIS database.

Figure 5.2. Gross enrolment rate for tertiary education (SDG indicator 4.3.2) for 2015-2020 and percentage of enrolment in public institutions as of 2020. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean

Legend: ■ Circa 2015 ■ Circa 2020 ■ Percentage of enrollment in public institutions

Country	Circa 2020	Circa 2015	Public %
Grenada	104.6	95.6	0%
Uruguay	102.6	59.7	90%
Argentina	95.4	84.0	76%
Chile	93.1	85.3	16%
Costa Rica	57.7	53.1	52%
Brazil	55.1	51.3	26%
Colombia	55.0	53.3	51%
Ecuador	47.9	44.9	58%
Cuba	46.7	36.1	100%
Mexico	42.8	31.8	65%
El Salvador	29.4	28.0	31%
Belize	25.6	23.3	58%
Honduras	25.5	20.4	53%
British Virgin Islands	42.3	24.8	100%
Guatemala	22.1	21.8	51%
Bermuda	25.1	19.0	99%
Saint Lucia	16.4	16.3	55%

Note: For the gross enrollment indicator, data from 2020 was used for the years circa 2020, except for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, the British Virgin Islands, Mexico and Uruguay (2019), and Bermuda, El Salvador and Grenada (2018). For the years circa 2015, values from that year were used. In the indicator showing the percentage enrollment in public institutions, information from 2019 was used, except for Belize and Saint Lucia (2020), Grenada and El Salvador (2018), Cuba, the British Virgin Islands and Bermuda (2015).

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

these circuits tend to lead to pathways for the "elite" and those for "the masses" (Ezcurra, 2020).

To complement access data, it is also important to analyze the graduation rates of those who enroll in higher education. The relationship between access, retention, and progression towards a qualification is crucial for characterizing the progress countries make towards making the right to higher education universal.

Graduation rates enable a representation of the final outcome of the educational process that occurs within higher education institutions. It represents the ratio of the total number of graduates from degree programs (ISCED 6 and 7) as a percentage of the population in the theoretical graduation age, considering the length of the most common degree program.

Although only a small group of countries has information about this aspect, analyzing that information does yield some observations. There is no clear relationship between access to and graduation from higher education (**Figure 5.3**): there are countries

with intermediate levels of access, but high graduation rates, and also others with high levels of access that do not lead to higher graduation rates. The latter group includes countries with very high dropout levels. As countries advance towards widespread access to higher education, inequities are manifested more frequently within levels, expressed in higher dropout rates and difficulties associated with pathways, and monitoring retention and completion becomes increasingly important.

A key message of the report "Towards universal access to higher education: International trends," published by IESALC, is that higher education institutions must develop strategies to reduce the gap between enrollment and graduation, especially among disadvantaged groups, and strengthen data collection on completion rates to provide a clearer picture of retention (UNESCO IESALC, 2020b).

Another aspect relevant for the analysis is the distribution of enrollment among educational fields.

Figure 5.3. Gross enrolment rate for tertiary education (SDG indicator 4.3.2), gross rate of graduation from higher education and percentage of enrolment in public institutions. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2020

Bubble size = Percentage of enrollment in public institutions
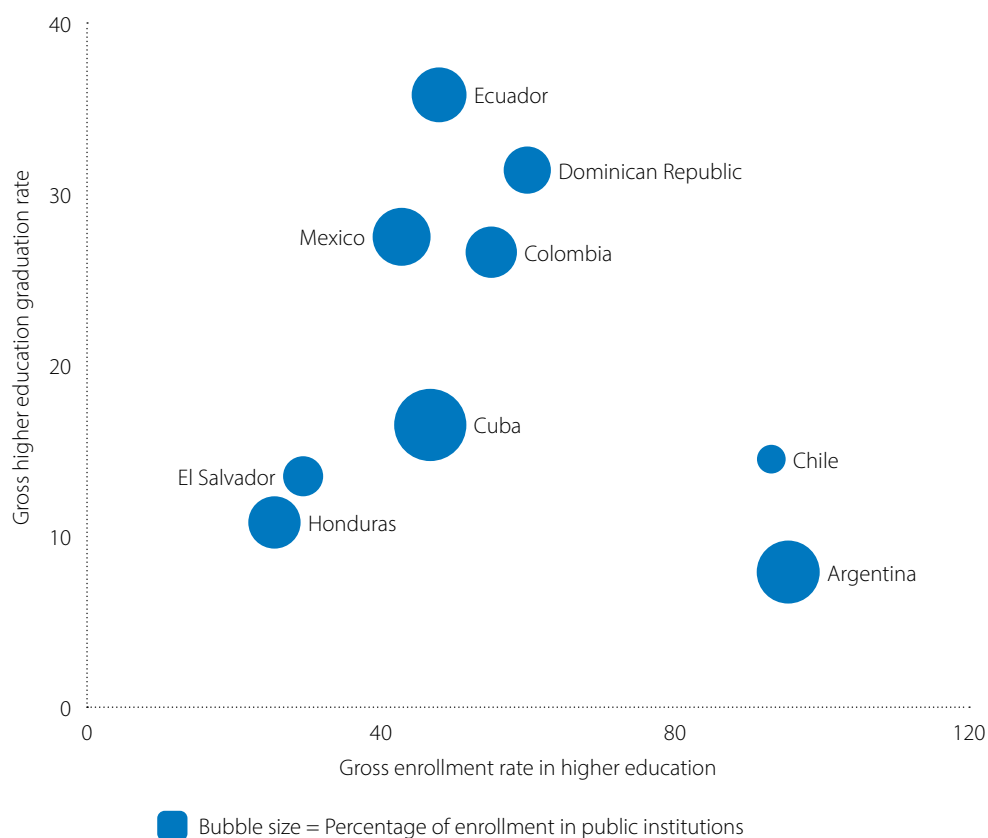
Note: For years circa 2020, 2019 data were used, except for Cuba, Ecuador and El Salvador (2018), and for Mexico and the Dominican Republic (2017).
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 5.4 shows these data, along with information about the relative presence of women in each field. Approximately one-quarter of students who attend higher education register in business and law programs, and 14%-16% in health and welfare, engineering, industry and construction, and education programs, in most countries. Between 2015 and 2018, participation increased slightly in some groups of programs with relatively lower weighting in enrollment, including service programs (1.3 points), and social sciences, journalism and information (0.9 points).

Data on the relative participation of women enables the identification of orientations with more unequal access in regard to gender: those related to information and communication technologies, engineering, industry and construction, have lower female enrollment. In contrast, the programs associated most with care giving roles (health, welfare and education) and social sciences, display a higher presence of women.

From 2015 to 2019 there was an observable overall increase in women's participation in the different

orientations. This indicator increased less in programs where women participated less, which indicates that unequal access for women is not only persistent, but has also deepened. The close to 20-point increase in women's participation in social science programs is striking. By 2020, 81% of students enrolling in these programs were women.

In this regard, it is important to analyze the overall trends in women's enrollment. **Figure 5.1** shows a sustained increase in the enrollment rate, while the disaggregated rates for women and men presented in **Figure 5.5** show that this rise has been dissimilar in the two groups. Throughout the past 20 years there has been an evident increase in women's participation in higher education.

While in 2000 the indicator displayed a high level of parity between the two genders, with a difference of just 3.8 percentage points, this difference has widened gradually over the period. Between 2000 and 2020, women's enrollment rate has grown by 36.6%, and men's by 25.6%.

Figure 5.4. Percentage of enrollment in higher education by educational field and percentage of women enrolled in each field. Latin American countries. Circa 2015-2020
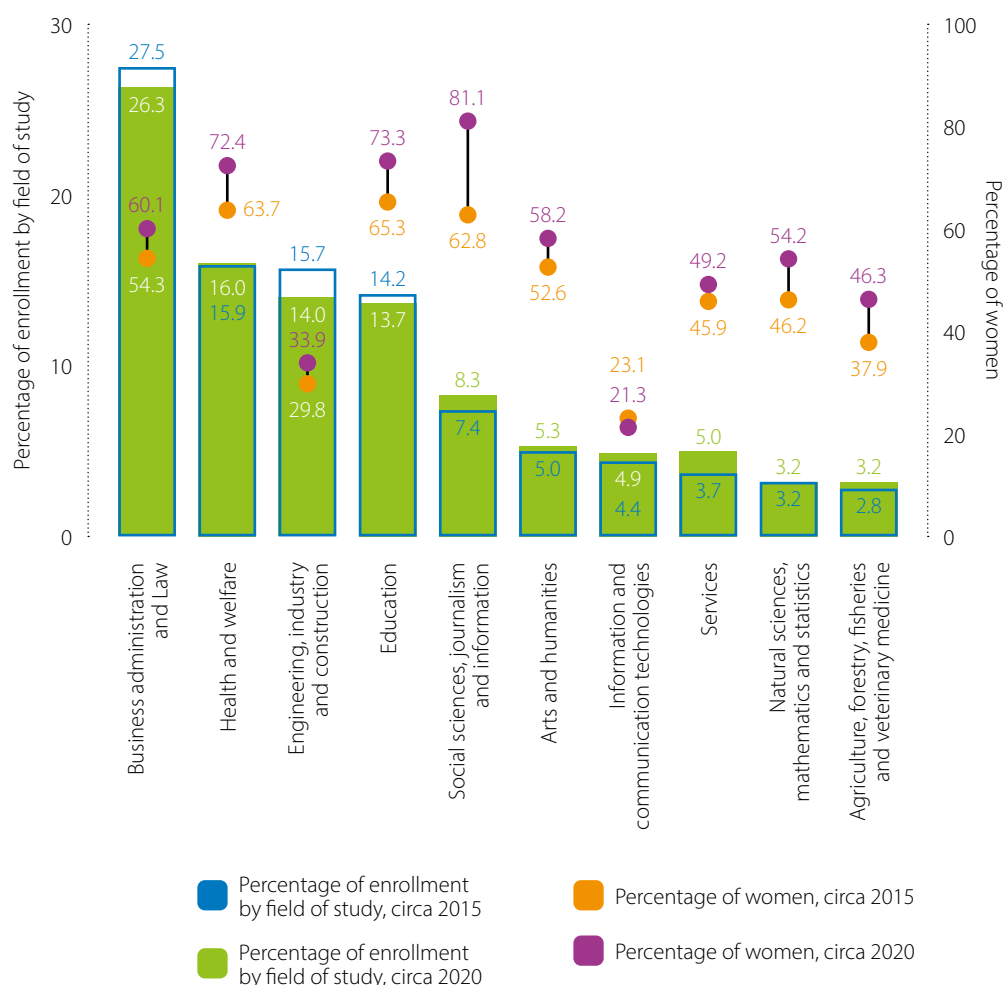
Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available for the period. Information from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Uruguay was used. The circa 2015 data correspond to 2015, except for Cuba and Uruguay (2016). The circa 2020 data correspond to 2019, except for Argentina (2018). The category "unknown or unspecified fields of education," which some countries present and which represents less than 0.5%, is excluded.

Data source: Ibero-American Network of Higher Education Indicators (Red Iberoamericana de Indicadores de Educación Superior, Red INDICES), available at http://www.redindices.org/indicadores-comparativos/indicadores-comparativos-estudiantes (accessed 1 December 2021).

It is estimated that 128 women attend tertiary education in the region for every 100 men. The data do not show any signs that this trend will slow down in the coming years. On the contrary, the gap is increasing steadily.

One of the factors most closely linked with opportunities for access to tertiary education is socioeconomic level. Data from countries in the region (**Figure 5.6**) show that access to this educational level benefits primarily middle- and high-income segments of the population, while the lower-income segment has less access.

The gross enrollment rate for 2019 was 23.2% for the low-income population, considering the simple

average among countries with information available, and 136.5% for the highest-income quintile. Given the nature of the indicator—which compares enrollment in tertiary education with the population in the age bracket spanning the five years following the theoretical secondary education graduation age—, these percentages indicate that the higher income population has much greater access to higher education, while only one in four young people in the lowest income bracket will access this stage. This gap has widened dramatically in recent years, from an 80-point spread in 2000 to 113 points in 2019.

Uruguay and the Dominican Republic, and to a lesser extent Chile and Argentina, display the smallest gaps

Figure 5.5. Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education by sex. Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020.
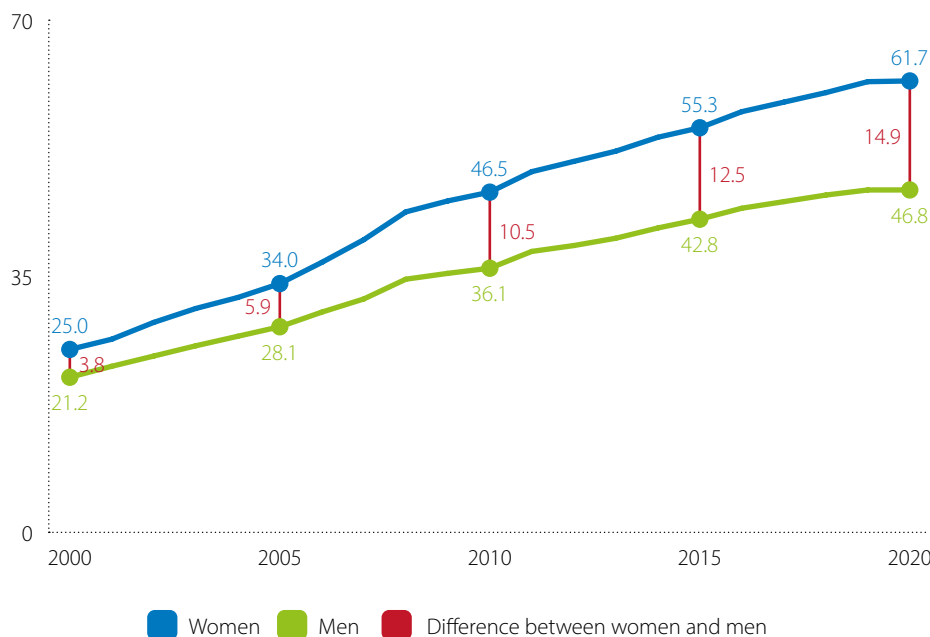
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

in access. Even so, the gaps are very marked in all cases: even where the difference is very low, the gross enrollment rate in the lowest-income quintile is less than half that of the highest-income quintile.

This exclusion is partly associated with low levels of secondary education completion, which limits young people from accessing higher studies. Unless education systems manage to reverse the profound inequalities in access to upper secondary certification, higher education will remain inaccessible to broad segments of the population.

However, this alone does not entirely explain the gaps observed. Many young people from low-middle and low-income segments who complete secondary education do not continue on to tertiary education, or in some cases they do, but soon they drop out. This reinforces the segregation among levels and reflects the cumulative inequalities that affect them throughout their educational pathways.

The data show that these unequal opportunities in accessing higher education also negatively affect rural, indigenous and Afrodescendant students. **Figure 5.7** shows a situation of marked inequity: the fewer opportunities for access available to the rural population are expressed in the fact that the gross

enrollment ratio is notably different between urban and rural areas, up to 44 percentage points among countries with information available. For their part, the gross enrollment ratio is 40% for the indigenous population, 45.5% for the Afrodescendant population, and 71.9% for the rest of the population, among the countries that have this information available.

One worrying aspect of these trends is that the gaps have been increasing over the past five years: although the indicator has improved among the most marginalized population segments, it is increasing at a slower rate than among the rest of the population, which means that inequality of access is worsening. For example, the gap in access between the indigenous and non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendant population was close to 25 points in 2015 and had risen to 32 points by 2019. The trend was similar between urban and rural populations.

It can thus be observed that between 2015 and 2020, access to higher education has expanded in the region, at the cost of a steady increase in inequality both among and within countries, widening existing gaps even more. This is a continuation of the trend observed in the previous five-year periods.

Figure 5.6. Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education, by socioeconomic level. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020

	2015		2020	
Argentina	177.4 / 42.7		41.0	208.0
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	106.3 / 36.8		30.9	139.2
Brazil	133.0 / 15.6		14.2	189.1
Chile	146.0 / 53.9		53.8	140.3
Colombia	92.4 / 9.4		18.2	159.9
Costa Rica	81.4 / 5.0		7.8	81.4
Ecuador	102.1 / 15.7		18.4	111.6
El Salvador	92.1 / 7.8		9.4	99.8
Guyana	27.0 / 2.2		2.2	31.4
Haiti	23.7 / 0.3		0.4	27.0
Honduras	91.7 / 8.0		7.2	102.1
Mexico	81.9 / 10.9		16.7	97.7
Panama	131.6 / 13.5		23.4	130.9
Paraguay	140.6 / 36.0		29.3	186.0
Peru	121.6 / 24.8		34.0	145.0
Dominican Republic	116.5 / 64.7		65.3	148.4
Surinam	30.9		30.6	
Uruguay	174.5 / 68.7		68.9	173.0

Scale: 250 200 150 100 50 0 (left) | 0 50 100 150 200 250 (right)

- ● Wealthiest quintile
- ● Lowest-income quintile
- ● Difference between quintiles

Line chart (2000–2019):

Wealthiest quintile (blue): 90.4 (2000), 101.5 (2005), 108.3 (2010), 112.7 (2015), 136.5 (2019)

Lowest-income quintile (green): 10.3 (2000), 13.0 (2005), 17.4 (2010), 21.1 (2015), 23.2 (2019)

Difference between quintiles (red): 80.1 (2000), 88.4 (2005), 90.9 (2010), 91.6 (2015), 113.3 (2019)

Note: For years circa 2020, 2019 data were used, except for Costa Rica, Haiti and Uruguay (2018). For years circa 2015, 2015 data were used; for Mexico, the rate was estimated from the linear projection of adjacent years. Simple averages were calculated on the basis of countries with information available for the period: the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. Estimates for 2019 were obtained from ECLAC processing for this project. In some countries, the estimates present slight differences in regard to the UIS data, which may have a slight impact on the comparison. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021), and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Figure 5.7. Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education (SDG indicator 4.3.2) by area and ethnicity. Latin American countries. Circa 2010, 2015 and 2019.

By area / By ethnicity

Rural · Urban · Indigenous · Afrodescendant · Non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendant
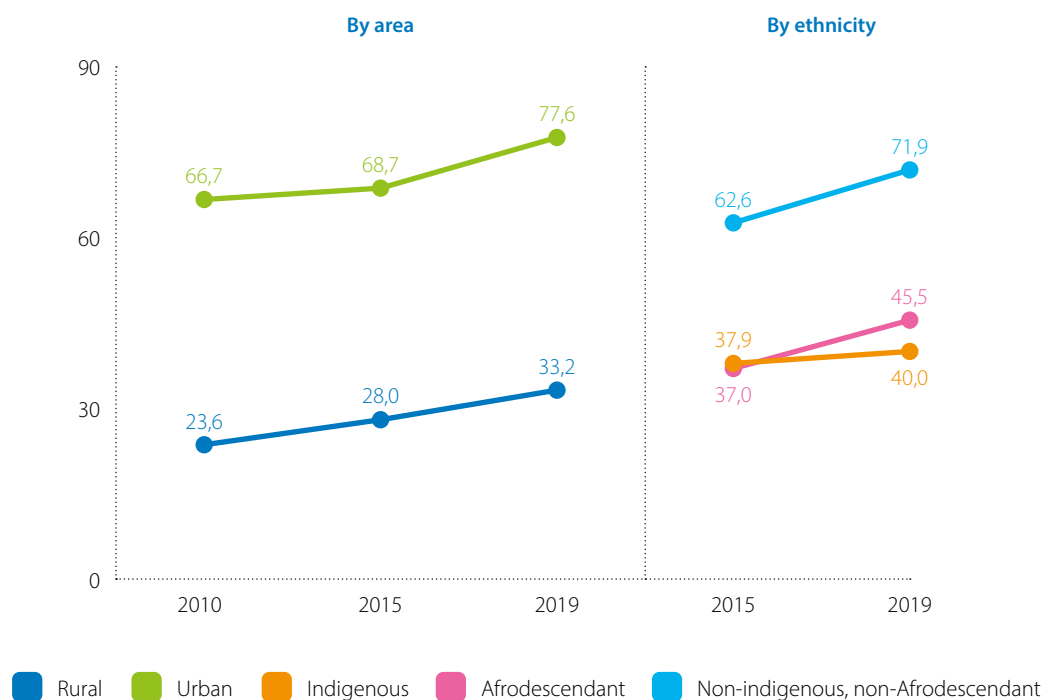
Note: The circa 2019 data correspond to 2019, except for Mexico (2018) and Chile (2017). The circa 2015 data correspond to 2015, except for Argentina and Mexico (2016). The circa 2010 data correspond to 2010, except for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Panama (2011). The simple averages were based on countries with information available for the period: for data by zone, this included the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay; data on the indigenous population came from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay; and data on the Afrodescendant population was from Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Box 5.1

Higher education and the COVID-19 pandemic

The closure of higher education institutions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic affected approximately 23.4 million higher education students (ISCED 5, 6, 7 and 8) and 1.4 million teachers in Latin America and the Caribbean (Pedró, 2021b).

While higher education had a significant history of distance education provision before the pandemic, this mode of learning was concentrated in a few universities, particularly at the graduate level (UNESCO IESALC, 2018). As such, the majority of institutions were not prepared for the mass shift to remote learning.

There are indications that this situation may have negatively affected the population's participation in higher education, which may have led to a drop in the indicators analyzed.

Several factors justify this view: first, not all teachers and students have access to the technology necessary to engage in this mode of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the negative economic impact of the pandemic could have forced some students to abandon their higher studies. Then there is the chilling effect of *corona teaching*, a term that refers to teachers' efforts to use the few technological resources available to move in-person classes online, without changing the curriculum or methodology; in other words, to proceed as though they were in the classroom (Pedró, 2021b).

Key education policies between 2000 and 2015

The policies developed in the 21st century can be seen, in part, as an inevitable consequence of the evolution of higher education in the previous decades, the availability of resources and political orientations to meet the growing demand for access to an educational service that responds to a nation's social needs and value chains. On the one hand, economic conditions—although volatile—made more resources available for public expenditure which, in relative terms, grew in virtually all countries, offering greater opportunities for public intervention. However, that same impetus in economic development revealed the need to improve the quality and relevance of higher education, to meet the incessant demands of ever-more demanding labor markets avid for qualified professionals and technicians.

Second, the uncontrolled growth in educational provision in response to the also incessant demand, lacked regulation to guarantee the minimum quality standards that should accompany relevant educational provision. This led, in the early years of this century, to a call for policies to organize and regulate the sector, policies that would establish national priorities and help refine the supply-side. This could only be achieved by strengthening the role of the State as the overseer and sole regulator of the sector, on occasions in contravention of academic freedom.

Third, social demands—particularly those of young people—for the democratization and universalization of access to higher education, found a somewhat positive response from some governments. In summary, on the one hand a good number of countries coincided in strengthening the role of the State as overseer of the system through political-administrative structures, and as mediator, by providing incentives to develop certain professional programs and by creating agencies specializing in quality assurance, in what has been called *collegiate neostatism* (Moreno and Aguirre, 2020). On the other, some governments opted to develop policies to democratize access through an equal opportunity approach, as well as creating agencies to strengthen financing methods such as student loans and scholarships. Lastly, initiatives were also developed to diversify higher education, in an attempt to introduce professional training programs that were more relevant and in line with market needs, in parallel to strictly university-based provision.

Several countries have followed a two-pronged strategy to reinforce the State's role as overseer of higher education. On the one hand, they have gradually increased public investment in higher education, while on the other they have created political-administrative structures to manage the sector. From a financial perspective, the rise in public investment over the past 20 years has been slight (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019), and in some cases irregular as well, following the behavior of national economies. Where a clear increase in public investment in higher education can be identified, that trend has generally been accompanied by reforms focused on creating political-administrative structures to entrench the State's oversight role. This increase in expenditure levels is due, in large measure, to the fact that the specialization of technical-political entities fosters more autonomy and participation in the definition of political agendas, through closer work with the corresponding minister. All of this is crucial for the allocation of resources on strategic governance issues for the sector.

States' investment in their oversight entities has become more important to the functioning of national higher education systems. Recent estimates indicate that, on average, 61% of the resources of public universities in the region have come from governments, which means that institutional budgets depend heavily on these contributions (Arias Ortiz *et al.*, 2021). While this could present a risk, given the volatility of Latin American economies, public expenditure on higher education as a percentage of GDP has grown steadily in some countries of the region. This is true in Chile, where investment tripled from 0.44% of GDP in 2006 to 1.37% in 2017, with the approval of the first university reforms marking major milestones. Likewise, Brazil increased its expenditure as a portion of GDP by 0.77% from 2004 to 2017, while in Argentina this figure grew from 0.62% in 2005 to 1.2% in 2017; in both cases the proportion of public expenditure was doubled, following the approval of major structural reforms.[4]

To date, nine countries of the region have entities specializing to a greater or lesser degree in higher education within the corresponding ministries, including Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Mexico and Uruguay. Peru has taken the first steps to joining this list by approving the creation of a Higher Education Vice-Ministry, although it has not yet become

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[4] See also Chapter 8, on Funding Education.

operational. It is also important to note that Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have ministries exclusively dedicated to higher education. In all cases, the primary reason given for this specialization has been to strengthen the sector, as shown in the text of regulatory instruments in Brazil (2003), Mexico (2002), Argentina (2005), Colombia (2003), Chile (2006 and 2010) and, more recently, Peru (2021). In all of the countries mentioned, the structural reform processes in ministries of the region have coincided with periods during which expenditure on the education and higher education sectors has increased. It is also worth noting how relations have evolved between governments in the region and international funding organizations, shifting from the well-known bailout loan model in exchange for structural adjustments, to a shared planning model (Ledesma, 2014).

Last but not least, many countries have decided to introduce information systems specifically for the sector to strengthen decision making, monitoring and coordination processes (Moreno and Aguirre, 2020). Chile, Ecuador and Peru pioneered the push to centrally organize such information systems, and this helped to solidify the governments' position in relation to these institutions, as well as their ability to strategically orient policies for the sector. These systems represent, in turn, a notable advance in terms of transparency and public reporting.

If there is one area in which higher education has changed radically over the past two decades, not only in the region but probably around the globe, it is without a doubt that of quality assurance and accreditation (Pedró, 2021a). The nonstop increase in the demand for higher education since the late 20th century—characterized in the previous chapter through an analysis of the data—which few countries were able to resolve by increasing provision or providing suitable regulation, has in many cases resolved itself through uncontrolled expansion and over-commercialization, with no mechanisms to ensure quality. This explosion in the demand is reflected, for example, in Peru where the volume of higher education students tripled between 1995 and 2014 (Wells *et al.*, 2018); and it is even more evident in Brazil, where the number of students rose from 3.8 to 8 million between 2003 and 2016 (Douglass, 2021).

In a marked tendency to strengthen the oversight role of the State, an effort was made to refine the supply of higher education and accredit programs and

institutions, to encourage continuous institutional improvement processes and safeguard the interests of students, their families, and the respective local and national societies in which graduates would provide their services. Nevertheless, the size, diversity, and complexity of higher education systems in the region today have made necessary the introduction of sophisticated, standardized mechanisms for managing educational quality. This concern is present in the new legal higher education frameworks in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. In these countries, the most recent legislative acts specifically address the issues of licensing, evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions, making the refinement of quality assurance systems a highly important aspect.

Still, most countries in the region have followed the international trend and opted for a collegiate intervention formula to endow the State with greater capacity to act, at least in regard to ensuring quality. By turning to agencies, which are governed by representatives of both the State and the institutions themselves, and which have become progressively more technified and professionalized, governments have been able to make progress while respecting institutional autonomy at the same time. In almost all countries, specialized quality assurance agencies have been created, the sole exception being the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Caribbean countries, which are following accreditation and quality assurance processes based on Anglosaxon models. Excluding agencies that have just become operational, such as those of Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, and the cases of Honduras and Uruguay, where laws approving the creation of these agencies have been passed but the entities have not yet been created, in the vast majority of countries in the region, these entities have been up and running for more than a decade, in some cases even two.

Some, such as those of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba and Peru, have very solid experience under their belts. As they gain even more traction, the need to adjust their operation to the changing higher education scenario becomes more evident: Chile, for example, recently (in 2018) amended its Higher Education Law, introducing major changes to the system; Ecuador changed its internal regulations; Mexico introduced a new General Higher Education Law in 2021; and Peru's higher education system is still undergoing a period of serious upheaval. In Costa Rica, legislative changes are

being debated that could have major implications for quality assurance (Strah, 2020).

Solid proof of the vigorousness of this trend at the regional scale is the creation of a network of quality assurance agencies (RIACES) and, more recently in 2019, the Ibero-American Quality Assurance System (*Sistema Iberoamericano de Aseguramiento de la Calidad*, SIACES), following agreements made at the xxvi Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government. The goals of this entity include promoting peer learning and proposing regionwide criteria for evaluation and accreditation, which were enshrined in the UNESCO-sponsored Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education (2019). Certainly, the work of these agencies—usually funded by the State but managed independently by autonomous expert boards selected on the basis of merit—have resulted in a much more refined array of educational courses on offer, and in many cases has led to a certain purging of low-quality institutions and programs, most of them targeting students in lower socioeconomic levels.

The appreciation of higher education as a strategic sector for economic and social development has led many states to make major efforts to favor more democratic access to it, particularly by increasing coverage by public institutions and strengthening financing mechanisms for students wishing to study in private institutions. In the international scenario, the Latin American and Caribbean region and South Asia continue to have the highest participation of private institutions in the provision of higher education (UNESCO IESALC, 2020c). This regional feature can be explained, to some degree, by late 20th century policies that eased regulatory frameworks and the fact that private institutions often meet the demand that goes unsatisfied by the limited range of public courses available.

The creation of new institutions, and the consolidation of others into larger institutions that can serve more students, has in many cases been aimed at achieving greater differentiation among programs through the creation or expansion of national university systems or technology institutes into zones that previously lacked educational systems at this level, and it therefore has had a notable impact on coverage. The federal government of Brazil, for example, implemented an active policy to expand public higher education under a national plan to restructure and expand federal universities. To this end, it founded 16 new public universities—in some cases by consolidating preexisting

institutions—and opened some 200 university campuses. At the same time, the federal government supported the creation of hundreds of federal institutes of education, science and technology—meaning tertiary technical institutes—that are intended to entrench the public sector's presence in the national non-university higher education segment in areas that are far from Brazil's large cities.

In contrast to Brazil, in Mexico the subsystems with the highest relative growth, thanks to the creation of new institutions, were polytechnical universities, intercultural universities, technological universities, and decentralized technology institutes, while in absolute terms, the greatest increase in enrollment occurred in private higher education institutions and in State-run public universities (ANUIES, 2018). Currently, technical higher education in Mexico is organized into four broad subsystems, each with its own origin and structure, and encompassing some 400 institutions in total. One of them is directed by the National Polytechnic Institute (Instituto Politécnico Nacional), which offers high-priority undergraduate degree programs, while other federal and State-level subsystems tend to offer shorter programs. Since 2009, those other subsystems have coordinated to introduce shared mechanisms to recognize degrees granted, allow student transfers and facilitate mobility among institutions, and are exploring a shared educational quality assessment system (Ruiz Larraguivel, 2011).

For the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 52 of the country's 71 existing public universities were created during the so-called "Bolivarian Revolution" period (1999-2021). In Uruguay, the expansion of educational provision was enabled by the construction of new campuses of the Universidad de la República (UDELAR) and the emergence of a second public institution, the Universidad Tecnológica (UTEC). Lastly, in Argentina, despite the continued predominance of public federal institutions at the university level and the extremely high rates of enrollment in higher education for the Latin American context, the federal government backed a new wave of expansion in public higher education provision in the first decade of this century. From 2005 to 2010, 11 universities and university institutes were created, all with federal support, along with 145 non-State tertiary institutions. This significantly expanded public higher education provision in different parts of the country through the creation of regional centers, satellite campuses, extension centers, and remote learning channels (Brunner and Ferrada Hurtado, 2011).

In addition to expanding their provision, many countries promoted access through measures such as student financial aid, beginning with free tuition. Ecuador chose to decree higher public education free of charge in 2008, while Mexico approved a gradual transition towards free educational services starting in 2022. It thus joins the other countries of the region where higher education is already free-including Argentina, Uruguay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the federal universities of Brazil. The Ecuadorian case displays some peculiarities, as its free higher education policy was accompanied in 2010 by a strengthened meritocracy in the form of a university entrance exam and a firm policy to eliminate low-quality programs, although both policies came under review as of 2017 (Rivera, 2019).

However, the majority of countries opted to intervene with financing mechanisms without making higher education entirely free. To cover all or part of the instruction they receive, students can pay institutions directly, wholly or in part, from government-backed student loans. These are extended under what are in principle favorable terms, but the magnitude of debt that many students in countries like Chile and Colombia accumulate does not seem to support this. Most countries of the region have developed a variety of student loan programs to help low-income individuals with tuition costs, but—with some exceptions—little is known about their coverage and sustainability (Espinoza, 2013). Critiques abound however, based on very contradictory readings of the more extensive and well-known experiences in the region, such as that of Chile and Colombia, which were a response to demands made by student movements in the context of broader social uprisings (Torres and Sánchez, 2019).

Brazil, for its part, has developed a series of federal assistance programs, although there are contradictory reports about their true scope and impact on tuition financing. One of these, the University for All Program (*Programa Universidad para Todos*, PROUNI) gives government subsidies to private institutions that admit low-income students from public secondary schools, offering a complete or partial reimbursement for tuition—on a sliding scale—for students who score high enough in their final secondary education exams and meet the family income requirements.

In a bid for democratization, in addition to increasing public higher education provision and boosting student financial aid mechanisms, some countries have taken steps to support access to higher education for disadvantaged and at-risk youth, based on their potential for success (merit, effort, or personal ability). These measures all seek to fight social exclusion (Darity, William and Weisskopf, 2011; Balán, 2020) through preferential treatment or the use of quotas for identifiable segments of the population. The design of these policies is always affected by conditioning factors and national contexts, each with its own historic roots.

Chile's Program for Effective Access and Support for Higher Education (*Programa de Acompañamiento y Acceso Efectivo a la Educación Superior*, PACE) offers one notable policy experience. Since 2014, it has offered direct access to higher education for academically outstanding secondary education students who have graduated from schools with the highest educational at-risk rating in each municipality of the country (UNESCO, 2020b). Brazil offers another recent experience worth noting. In just two decades, the country shifted from a system of "universal rights" which practically ignored differences in gender, ethnicity, race and social class in accessing higher education, to a decidedly inclusive set of national policies that included socioeconomic and ethnic-racial quotas. This initiative was ratified by the country's Supreme Court in 2012 when it affirmed the constitutionality of the national social quotas law, which mandated that federal universities reserve 50% of their future spots for students at public secondary schools (Lima, 2011). The efficacy of those measures is evident in the fact that, while in 2003, 36% of undergraduate students enrolled in Brazil's federal universities were children from minority, black or indigenous families, by 2014 this number had risen to 48% (McCowan and Bertolin, 2020).

Affirmative action in higher education also penetrated other countries, such as Colombia. There, the National Higher Education Financing and Loan Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Financiamiento y Crédito para la Educación Superior*, ICETEX) launched a grant program to support the admission of indigenous students, followed by a similar one for Afro-American students. At the same time, several public and private institutions established admission systems to promote the inclusion of students from these two groups, although very few of them offer financial aid or specific services (León and Holguín, 2004). However, as in many countries of the region, in Colombia affirmative action focused more successfully on socioeconomic categories than on race or ethnic origin (Didou Aupetit and Remedi Allione, 2009). Recently, through a public policy entitled *Generación E*, Colombia's Education Ministry provided

investment and operational funding to strengthen the country's 61 public universities, aiming to achieve social transformation by providing new opportunities to more than 336,000 at-risk young people. It is important to note that these policies were put forward in the region during a very favorable economic cycle. When Latin American economies were growing steadily, the percentage of the population living in poverty dropped drastically and the younger generation's access to school and educational attainment also improved continually (Villalobos *et al.*, 2017).

Along the same line, efforts to serve disadvantaged groups like disabled and migrant students from countries such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Haiti and those of northern Central America, should also be highlighted. And there is also the promotion of intercultural universities, the goal of which is to foster indigenous peoples' access to ways of learning and knowledge proper to higher education. The complexity and diversity of this subsector is worth noting here, as some of these institutions have been created by States, and others by indigenous or Afrodescendant organizations themselves, and that difference can determine the weight given to indigenous and Afro knowledge, the use of indigenous languages, the hiring of teachers from indigenous communities, and the risk that these institutions will not be recognized by formal education systems (Mato, 2018). For example, between 2003 and 2008, seven public institutions and two private ones were established in Mexico under this model. The goal was to increase the participation of indigenous people in higher education—which in the early 21st century hovered around 1% of all students—to around 10%, matching the percentage of indigenous people in the country's total population (Schmelkes, 2008). According to the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (*Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior*, ANUIES), in 2020 Mexico already had ten intercultural universities and another 70 publicly-funded institutions, as well as 30 privately-funded ones, with indigenous enrollment ranging from 10% to 100%.

Another priority policy area is the diversification of higher education as a lever for boosting young people's practical skills before they join the workforce. The two-pronged goal is to make higher education more relevant, while attracting more students at a lower cost. Essentially, this involves promoting the non-university higher education sector by offering shorter-duration programs focused on meeting the labor market's need

for specialized technicians, whether in the technology, manufacturing, service or agrifood industries. These policies began timidly in the late 20th century, and have only become regionally significant in the past decade. In addition to costing less, non-university higher education programs are more flexible in terms of admission standards (admission is usually open, with no entrance exam) and in the hiring of teachers. While many countries limit private sector participation in the university realm, especially for-profit stakeholders, in non-university higher education it is precisely these kinds of institutions that predominate (Ferreyra *et al.*, 2021). Brazil is a notable case in point in the region: according to the 2018 *Censo de Educação Superior* survey (INEP, 2019), from the 13,529,101 spots available in undergraduate programs, 12,693,532 were in private institutions.

The expansion in non-university institutions occurred mostly in the private sector, or entirely in the case of Chile. This can be explained to a large degree by the decoupling of tertiary education systems that are primarily focused on producing university graduates from productive sectors characterized by high rates of informal employment and a growing demand for technical labor. This disconnection between the demand for more technical skills and a tertiary system that produces mainly university graduates is a huge problem in countries like Peru: just 15% of jobs in the Peruvian market require university studies, yet universities account for 65% of tertiary enrollment. This mismatch between education and production is a problem for 24% of employers around the globe, and totals 32% in Latin America and the Caribbean (Ferreyra *et al*., 2021). Recent studies also confirm that non-university higher education programs attract more students from lower socioeconomic brackets, as their practical, flexible nature enables these students to study while working, graduate earlier in most cases and successfully obtain employment afterwards (Gaentzsch and Zapata-Román, 2020). For their part, standardized university entrance exams become in many cases another barrier to entry for students, particularly those from secondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs and others who, faced with the difficulty of preparing adequately for these tests, opt for a non-university program even though they had the potential for success in a university program. Despite this, TVET provision does not seem to have taken off yet, partly because its advantages are not well known among the public, or simply because there remains some prejudice against it, and a bias for the more highly-valued university programs (Ferreyra *et al*., 2021).

Long before the pandemic erupted, distance higher education was indicative of the supply-side adapting to the diversification of delivery channels (UNESCO IESALC, 2017). Coverage by this modality has grown by 73% since 2010, while in-person learning grew by just 27%. In 2010, almost 2.5 million of the 21 million first degree students in universities in the region were studying remotely, representing 12% of the total. By 2017, this learning modality represented 15% of the total, or 4.3 million students. However, its penetration is still incipient and varies extremely among countries of the region. Brazil has the largest participation in distance learning in first degree higher education, with more than a million students. This way of teaching has also gained ground in Colombia and Mexico, where in 2017 it accounted for 14%-18% of the student body.

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

The sweeping policy approaches that began in the early years of this century continued to solidify until the pandemic erupted. The inclusion of higher education among the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda had a notable effect on institutions in this sector, but more in the sense of reaffirming their public commitment to sustainability in general and to the sustainable development goals in particular, than as a direct response to the specific target regarding access to higher education. In contrast, this inclusion did not seem to make a direct impression on public policies in the region, as references to it in national policy documents and in legislation are virtually non-existent, at least to date.

Whether due to the influence of the international agenda or not, strategies have been deployed to expand access in a few countries during recent years, democratizing it even more. First, these strategies have acted directly on the economic conditions limiting access, focusing on tuition and fees and expanding the volume and coverage of financial aid, although without yet attaining free higher education for all. Second, attempts have been made to expand public educational coverage as a way of quickly improving access to higher education.

Colombia exemplifies the first strategy, specifically in its Zero Tuition Program (*Programa Matrícula Cero*), although it needs more political will and substantial budgetary support to implement and ensure its continuity. This is because the program was introduced in response to a lengthy national strike in 2021 led by university students, who demanded universal free access to higher education. Chile, despite its high

gross rates of access to higher education, has faced intense criticism from organized social movements, which have repeatedly denounced the inequalities present and the burden that financial debt incurred under the student loan system places upon the most economically disadvantaged. Although universal free higher education was expected to be in place by 2020, the measures implemented to date have effectively reached students from the six lowest deciles of the population, by income distribution (Brunner and Labraña, 2018). In any case, the group of countries in the region with truly free and universal higher education is limited to Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. At the same time, specific affirmative action programs to encourage inclusion were also introduced in many countries of the region, including Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and the Dominican Republic (Bernasconi and Celis, 2017).

Meanwhile, Mexico and Peru have opted for expanding public higher education provision under a vision that attempts to combine the promotion of equity with a bid for territorial rebalancing. Mexico began its project before the pandemic, and it has not been free from criticism due to the fact that the proposed new institutions are not intrinsically academic. However, the country's new higher education legislation calls for the creation of a program by 2022 to expand the range of educational programs on offer. In contrast, a similar initiative was designed in Peru, partly in response to the pandemic, when it became clear that students in territories with little institutional coverage had difficulty accessing higher education. This hindered equality of opportunities; but above all, it came about as a requirement of the higher education public policy launched in 2020 under the National Educational Project to 2036 (Proyecto Educativo Nacional al 2036), which seeks to raise the rate of access from the current level of 30% to 48%. It also should be noted that, at the end of the licensing period, more than a third of Peruvian universities were denied a license. This means that the expansion of public provision must also include a measure to ensure that students who were enrolled in those establishments that were forced to close because they did not meet the minimum quality standards can transfer to a licensed one.

The fundamental question is whether advances in democratizing access do not in fact contain a hidden segregation mechanism that, when combined with institutional differentiation, results in access that is also

Box 5.2

The university reform in Peru

In July 2014, University Law 30.220 was passed in Peru to launch the reorganization of the country's university system, in a bid to strengthen the social role of universities and guarantee the right of students to access a quality education service. That restructuring dissolved the National Assembly of Rectors (*Asamblea Nacional de Rectores*, ANR), which was composed of university rectors, and transferred to the Education Ministry (MINEDU) the responsibility for coordinating the sector's stakeholders and formulating its budget and public investments. The University Law is a milestone in the Peruvian context, as it establishes the regulatory framework for the licensing process to follow and strengthens the State's role by making MINEDU responsible for governing the university higher education quality assurance policy.

As well as strengthening the State's role, this reform envisions the creation of the Superintendency of

Higher University Education (*Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior Universitaria*, SUNEDU) as an autonomous regulatory authority charged with determining and verifying compliance with basic aspects of quality that are part of the licensing process authorizing public and private universities to operate. SUNEDU thus has taken on the duties of regulation, oversight and enforcement, including verifying compliance with the eight basic conditions of quality and the appropriate use of the public resources allocated. It should be noted that there are currently no middle to high-middle income countries that do not have quality assurance procedures, which is reflected in the effect of the licensing processes. A recent study found that graduates of universities licensed by SUNEDU had a greater return on investment in regard to income, employability and hourly wages, while those attending institutions denied a license experienced the opposite effect (Flor Toro, Magnaricotte and Alba, 2020).

For more information, please visit: https://on.unesco. org/3LFTA4T.

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differentiated on the basis of socioeconomic strata. In other words, participation grows, but the new students end up concentrated in less prestigious institutions, and those students from disadvantaged sectors are the ones with the highest dropout rates, which leads to what has been called "inclusion that excludes" (Ezcurra, 2019). The data analyzed in the previous chapter warn of the widening of some gaps in inclusion.

Some evidence indicates that in several countries, the most prestigious institutions have remained on the margins of the democratization of access process (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019). In Chile, the number of students enrolled in the institutions that form part of the celebrated Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (*Consejo de Rectores de la Universidades Chilenas*, CRUCH) has not grown significantly, despite the fact that overall enrollment has increased; the new free-of-charge policy may change this situation in the future. In Argentina, enrollment expanded more vigorously in new universities located in areas where lower-income populations reside. In contrast, in Uruguay over the 2015-2020 period, enrollment in the Universidad de la República (UDELAR) rose by close to 4.5% annually, while in parallel budgetary increases, the quantity of teaching hours, square meters of building space and support staff hours all grew.

As with all areas of life, the pandemic brought everyday activity to a virtual standstill in higher education institutions and pushed them to find solutions to ensure the continuity of learning by meeting the needs emerging from the situation. Despite having few resources, institutions have made notable efforts in a multitude of areas in this regard, including on the strictly health-related front, adjusting academic calendars, helping to mitigate the pandemic through research and development, guaranteeing the continuity of educational activities through remote learning, and providing support not only in the form of materials such as books and technologies, but also socially and emotionally to the university community.

Not all governments responded so promptly to the situation, although the array of responses deployed was similar on three simultaneous fronts (UNESCO IESALC, 2020a): economic, technological, and pedagogical.

First, on the economic front, some governments transferred extraordinary amounts of resources and students benefited from flexible loan repayment plans and extensions to deadlines for grant and loan applications to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Through United for Colombia (*Unidos por Colombia*)

Box 5.3

Promoting high quality in Colombia

With a view to establishing guidelines for the accreditation of high quality between now and 2034, the Colombian Education Ministry undertook a broad-based participatory process with all stakeholders in the quality Assurance System to generate the public consensus and legitimacy needed for the design of the new regulations. This lengthy process of reflection, analysis and debate held in 2018 and 2019 through a public consultation entitled "Quality IS for everyone" (*Calidad ES de Todos*) ultimately led to Agreement 2 of the National Education Council of 2020, part of the 2016-2026 Ten-Year Education Plan. The plan affirms that Colombia must advance in meeting the agreements pledged under different international pacts and at UNESCO global conferences and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in relation to guaranteeing inclusive, quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In addition to blazing a trail towards academic excellence and having the unique quality of being a policy based on broad-based participation, Colombia's high-quality accreditation integrates learning outcomes across the board as indicators of the level of quality of service. While measuring learning can be technically complex to implement, this approach departs from traditional models that assess quality standards based on institutional and programmatic capacities and processes, and instead makes the student the focal point of quality assurance. This idea of recognizing learning outcomes as a cornerstone of university quality defines an intuitive yet innovative path towards excellence in higher education systems.

and FOGAPE-COVID[5] in Chile, the governments of those countries provided State-guaranteed loans to offset the impact on the sector. Likewise, Peru's National Scholarship and Educational Loan Program (*Programa Nacional de Becas y Crédito Educativo*, PRONABEC) launched the Continuation of Studies (*Continuidad de Estudios*) grant to mitigate the number of dropouts resulting from the pandemic and modified its planning for 2020 by increasing the number of grants offered from 18,000 to a total of 42,000. In Mexico, the Support Fund for Financial Restructuring & Addressing Structural Problems in Public State-run Universities (*Fondo de Apoyo para el Saneamiento Financiero y la Atención a Problemas Estructurales de las Universidades Públicas Estatales*) increased its budget and the number and amount of higher education grants, from a total fund of around US$378 million in 2018 to US$620 million in 2021. Although the stakeholders responsible for higher education funding implemented various student assistance strategies to stimulate students' entry and continuity in these institutions, the structural conditions of higher education systems coupled with an unfavorable economic context, limit these actions and threaten the continuity and sustainability of many of the initiatives and strategies undertaken (Arias Ortiz *et al.*, 2021).

Second, measures were introduced to provide technological resources to both institutions and students, with the aim of reducing the existing digital gap and ensuring educational continuity. To this end, Argentina's Education Ministry organized a program with the country's leading cellphone service providers to provide unlimited data access to the websites of Argentina's 57 national universities. Government initiatives—such as this one—were joined by some organized universities themselves. These included the laptop grant offered by *Universidad de La República de Uruguay*, and the "Your PC" (*Tu PC*) fund for students at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata in Argentina to provide technology resources to the student community.

Third, on the pedagogical front, given the lack of experience with the virtual learning environment, Chile, Panama and Peru, for example, developed pedagogical training mechanisms to help teachers adapt. Colombia addressed the pedagogical component with a regulatory framework focused on academic activities and technology use. Lastly, many quality assurance agencies, including the Peruvian national superintendency of higher university education (*Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior Universitaria*, SUNEDU), have facilitated the transition towards remote education by formulating guidelines and instructions for institutions.

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[5] Small Business Guarantee Fund (Fondo de Garantía para el Pequeño Empresario, FOGAPE).

It is still too early to assess the impact that the pandemic will have on higher education in the region. By all indications, there have been major losses in learning, the loss of students who will never return and a loss of equity, as the impacts have been much more severe for more vulnerable students, and probably for women more than men as well. However, the health emergency has opened a window of opportunity for digital transformation in higher education systems, for the adoption of new pedagogies and for greater collaboration at the international level.

Future challenges

First of all, it should be noted that the effects and opportunities that could ultimately be generated by the pandemic will continue to impact the higher education sector over the coming years. In Latin America and the Caribbean, it is clear that higher education institutions, with the support of governments, have made major efforts to guarantee the continuity of learning during the pandemic. These efforts have enabled institutions to boost their technological and pedagogical capacities, and by doing so have generated the expectation of further innovation. But to ensure these expectations are realized, it is necessary for university leaders to propose strategies for moving beyond the crisis, that can be sustained over time and that contain a transformative vision of university teaching. The most determinant factor will be for institutions to know what public support they will have, to enable them to commit to reforms that optimize technology use and develop teachers' pedagogical skills, both conditions that are indispensable for successful hybridization. Although many governments have done what they can to support the higher education system during the pandemic, the way they design exit strategies will depend on the availability of public resources, on policy options and on their confidence in the role that higher education can play in the context of social and economic recovery.

Even before the pandemic struck, a change in orientation could be perceived in the emphasis of public higher education policies. The broadening and diversification of channels of access to higher education remained high-priority goals of education policy for a long time, but in countries that have achieved high levels of coverage, and—as Trow described (1973)— have gone from massification to universal access, the expansion of the system is already no longer the top policy priority. In its place, other concerns have come powerfully to the forefront: increasing educational

quality, if not the quest for excellence, and in particular the promotion of graduate studies; the bid for greater equity, reflected in better financial aid mechanisms for students; and the strengthening of research and its role in encouraging innovation, to foster integration within international academic networks. These aspects, which have been little studied to date, are coupled with a push to qualify professionals in science and technology fields, develop researchers and promote research as a substantial element of national development, and construct the infrastructure necessary to meaningfully engage in a range of academic activities on an international scale (Sarmiento and Díaz, 2018). Certainly, linking higher education, research, innovation and development will continue to be a challenge in the region, and governments will have to determine the strategic value of the sector for their nations' future development.

Looking ahead to 2030, there are also major challenges associated with the stratification of education systems, as their diversification is undoubtedly an essential pathway to universal access. In the face of the continent's well known structural inequalities, States have the task of establishing public policies that lead to the legitimization of alternative higher education mechanisms. This means thinking about higher education as more than just universities themselves, in order to increase access by strengthening technical and vocational education and training and effective mobility among the different educational programs available. In addition to the challenges outlined, it is important to highlight the affirmation of UNESCO's International Commission on the Futures of Education (UNESCO IESALC, 2021), that establishing a new social contract that can strengthen the transformative effect of education will be a key component on the international agenda in the coming years. To call for the construction of a new social contract, with the participation of civil society and political and economic sectors, in which the concept of higher education as a public good is collaboratively entrenched, is one of the first starting points for ensuring lasting support, particularly at times when public funding for higher education is looking at serious cutbacks.

All of these challenges should not neglect policies aimed at improving equity, as beyond the illusion that improved rates of access may create, the expansion of higher education does not necessarily lead to its democratization or to the elimination of barriers to access (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019). Education

must be understood as a continuum that begins in early childhood and continues throughout life, and it should offer quality. Governments must accompany their educational policies with quality education and structural equity measures that are deployed from multiple ministries, as schools alone cannot resolve the lack of equity. Only then can a more equitable distribution of opportunities for entry into higher education be achieved, where the student's own potential for success and their efforts, rather than their background, will determine their entry. And where this fails, governments must take additional measures to ensure that any student who has the potential for success has a chance to continue, regardless of unrelated factors. Today, inequalities are reflected in how a student's social origin affects their chances of remaining at school and completing their studies, even in a context of educational expansion, while education with the highest quality and prestige is captured by the most affluent social strata (Pla *et al.*, 2021). The challenges here are to better coordinate basic education and strengthen both financial and pedagogical mechanisms that aid access and improve success rates and, later on, employability. This is not only a challenge for governments, but also for institutions and even families, both of which play a crucial role in supporting students' permanence and timely graduation. In that sense, ways must be found to best resolve the tension between need and merit in the right to higher education.

To respond to these new priorities, in many countries, States must encourage social dialogue, improve the governance of the sector and, in particular, enhance their own capacities for operating as its overseer in an environment that is increasingly complex, and in which institutional autonomy will be a permanent fixture. The progressive technification of governance, whether from the maturing of quality assurance agencies or the increasing importance of information systems and indicators, will require internal capacity building and more sophisticated regulatory mechanisms. This is partly because of the complex nature of governance, and to avoid limiting institutions' autonomy and capacity for innovation, flexibility and differentiation are entirely indispensable.

Youth and adult learning and education

Youth and adult learning and education in SDG 4, Education 2030

SDG4 focuses on the goal of expanding educational opportunities for all, establishing the need to promote broad and flexible learning conditions. The concept of *lifelong learning* includes learning activities for individuals of all ages from all walks of life and through various modalities (UNESCO, 2015a).

In this context, UNESCO has encouraged the adoption of this perspective in recent years as an approach to educational policy and as a new paradigm for 21st century education. This means going beyond the vision of the right to education focused on childhood (as this right applies to everyone), on the education system (as learning can take place both inside and outside schools), and on access (as what is important is not just gaining access, but learning) (UNESCO, 2020c).

This broad approach carries with it the need to incorporate new monitoring aspects for the themes that are part of the more traditional framework for monitoring educational attainments. This section of the report describes the progress made and challenges linked to expanding educational opportunities for the youth and adult population (anyone over the age of 15).

In the region, the field of youth and adult learning and education (YALE)[1] presents a dynamism associated with the expansion of its concepts and scope in a context shaped by complex changes and profound inequities. There have been changes in the composition of the various modalities due to the growing participation of the youth population. At the same time, new perspectives incorporate learning rather than just education, recognizing the diversity and potential of the field beyond formal educational spaces. Similarly, discussions in the field address the need to legitimize and make space for different forms of knowledge and ways of building it, recognizing the unique contribution of popular education in the region.

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[1] Due to the characteristics of this field in the region, we have decided to include the 'y' in the acronym to signal the importance of youth participation in educational processes. At the end of this section, we summarize the main challenges related to contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals from the field of YALE.

In the late 1990s, at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (UIL, 1997), the growing participation of persons aged between 15 and 29 was noted. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the incorporation of the youth population has been documented in country reports since the late 1980s. At the comparative level, the only available study shows that in YALE secondary education programs, young people through the age of 24 represent over 60% of enrollment across the various modalities. The report also states that adult education can offer more adequate education to young people who have recently dropped out (UIS, 2013b, 26).

A recent ECLAC study conducted in the context of the extension of compulsory secondary education supports this statement, noting that a key element for young people choosing the modalities offered in the field of YALE "is the flexibility of institutional and teaching arrangements that [...] allow for coordination with work. This is key for groups that are not able to stop earning money full or part time while they study" (Acosta, 2021: 60).

In this context, the various modalities of YALE in the region have increasingly had to address changes in the composition of their participants. This is due to the growing incorporation of the youth population and increase in participation among older adults as a result of increased life expectancy (World Bank, 2022). YALE makes visible other diversities related to the specific characteristics of the population. These can include cultural identity, as in the case of ethnicities and migrant populations; gender and sexual diversities; temporary location, as is the case of military personnel, detained persons or isolated rural populations; the diversity of learning processes; diversity of spheres of action; or the diversity of the participants' training goals and itineraries (Infante and Letelier, 2005; Blazich *et al.*, 2010; Internacional, 2017).

The analysis of YALE policies and practices highlights this complexity, revealing the necessity of deploying approaches and strategies for an education that takes account of poverty, seeks to respond to multiple and diverse motivations from a perspective of interculturality, gender and intergenerational learning, seeks to increase participants' self-esteem as

a fundamental element of the learning process and generating other opportunities for people, and tries to offer concrete ways to improve students' quality of life (UNESCO OREALC, 2013a).

YALE works with the crisis being experienced in the education system and social system and addresses the multiple forms of inequality and exclusion present. The inequity caused in income distribution and the lack of opportunities to break intergenerational poverty are fundamental conditions for understanding the role of YALE in the region. The problems that can be identified in the field of YALE are not only attributable to its policies and programs, but also to the economic and social contexts in which it operates.

An in-depth understanding of YALE reveals its importance for achieving the SDGs. While the perspectives that sustain YALE policies are mainly contained in SDG4 (guaranteeing inclusive, equitable and quality education and promoting ongoing learning opportunities for all), from a broader perspective, its facilitating and relational nature means that YALE has enormous potential to impact all of the aspects that nations have committed to: eradicating poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all.

Along these lines, this chapter seeks to identify the trends in the development of YALE in the region in recent years. While the new frameworks for thinking about lifelong learning invite us to focus on the multiplicity of spaces of YALE beyond educational institutions, including both formal and informal education (UNESCO, 2020c), the available comparative information only allows us to address some aspects. As such, the chapter focuses on levels of literacy and the highest educational level achieved by the population. Next, an analysis is made of education and training program attendance for the youth and adult population. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the situation of young people between the ages of 15 and 24.

However, it is important to note that the analysis of YALE in the region is not limited to the description of statistical indicators regarding literacy and level of schooling. The lack of information systems and program monitoring has been repeatedly mentioned at international conferences and ratified in the document that the region presented at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA). Among other key recommendations, it includes "promoting reliable, valid, transparent and accessible information and monitoring systems to promote the creation

of knowledge through government and non-governmental institutions, academia and civil society" (UNESCO OREALC, 2021b, our translation).

Youth and adult learning and education opportunities

The acquisition of basic literacy skills is of fundamental importance in the exercise of the right to education and has implications in various areas of social life. Estimates suggest that some 27.5 million young people and adults in Latin America and the Caribbean are illiterate. Of these, 15.1 million are men and 12.4 million are women. Over the past ten years, the illiterate population dropped by 8.1 million.[2]

The available information allows us to make an initial estimate of the level of literacy of the population through SDG indicator 4.6.2 on the literacy rate, which is part of the thematic monitoring framework of SDG4. This indicator takes as its main source household survey data, including a self-assessment regarding whether people know how to read and write.[3]

While these numbers offer an initial approach to the magnitude of illiteracy in the region, they may be underestimating the problem. Various studies and reports have warned that these measurements have some limitations. Based on this, various international proposals for classifying literacy levels and competencies that seek to improve it have been developed (Letelier, 2008). For example, the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) is one of the initiatives that proposes working on measurements based on assessments of literacy skills (UIS, 2009). This study was implemented in two countries in the region: a pilot project was implemented in El Salvador in 2008, and then the full study was

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[2] Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

[3] The literacy rate is defined as the percentage of the population that knows how to read and write. The definition of the indicator states that the measurement should refer to the capacity to understand a brief, simple statement about everyday life. However, the way in which each country captures this data varies. They use different definitions of and criteria for literacy, equate individuals who have not attended school with illiterate individuals or change the definitions between censuses. Furthermore, this is often based on self-reported information (UIS, 2021e). As such, the data do not represent this conceptual definition in all cases. The page that contains metadata for SDG4 global and thematic indicators includes a table with the definition of literacy implicit in the tool that each country uses to estimate SDG indicator 4.6.2. See "Metadata and Methodological Documents," UNESCO, at https://on.unesco.org/377oioj.

conducted in Paraguay in 2011. Another case is the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) (2020a). Chile participated in PIAAC in 2014, and Mexico, Ecuador and Peru did so in 2017.

The global SDG indicator 4.6.1 aims to represent the population achieving at least a minimum level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills, but there is not yet enough information available in the region to include this aspect in this monitoring report.[4] The acquisition of at least a minimum level of proficiency in digital literacy skills is also a core monitoring area of SDG4 (SDG indicator 4.4.2). This is a key component of the basic skills that people need for inclusion in the society of today and the future, and it cannot yet be monitored at the regional level due to a lack of information.

The percentage of the population that is literate has grown steadily over the past 20 years. The rates of growth vary by age group (**Figure 6.1**). The literacy rate of the population age 15 and over increased by approximately 0.3 points per year. The rate for

2015-2020, the period that is the focus of this report, remained steady at 0.4 points per year.

There is a sustained increase towards near universal rates for those aged 15 to 24, which is a reflection of the historically high levels of primary education coverage. The age group that has seen the greatest increase is those 65 and over, presenting a sustained rate of 0.6 points per year over the past five years. This improvement may be due to the combined impact of adult literacy policies implemented in the region and the existence of new cohorts that reach these ages with higher levels of education. These cohorts benefited from the expansion of primary education in the region between 1940 and 1960.[5]

The disaggregated data in **Figure 6.2** show that the majority of countries achieve values close to universal in the literacy of the population between 15 and 24 at around 2020, with values similar to those observed in 2015.

By contrast, the population aged 65 and over shows more heterogeneous results. These differences are

4 The UNESCO Institute for Statistics recently developed a simplified proposal called mini-LAMP (UIS, 2018c) to provide a less costly and complex tool for conducting a study in order to build information for this indicator.

5 The data available for 20 Latin America and Caribbean countries suggest that the gross primary education enrollment rate grew on average from 56.3% to 84.2% between 1940 and 1960 (calculated by the authors based on Frankema, 2009).

Figure 6.1. Literacy rate (SDG indicator 4.6.2) by age group 15 years and up Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
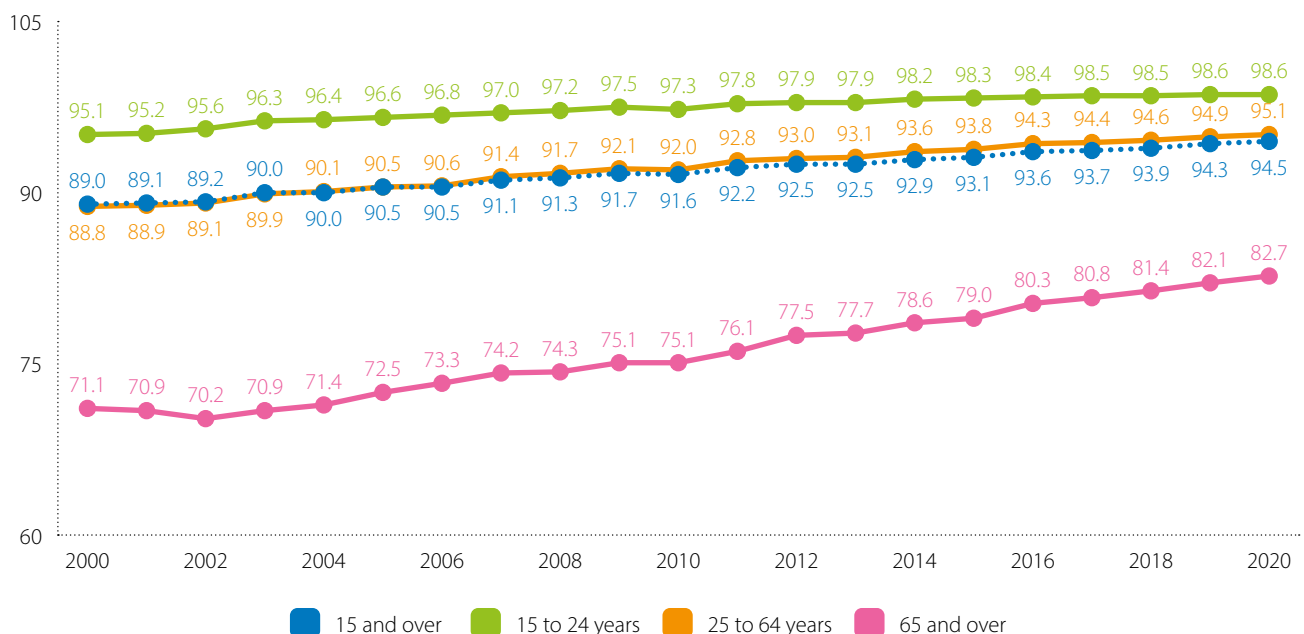
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Based on UIS, available in https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 data (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 6.2. Literacy rate (SDG indicator 4.6.2) by age group 15 years and up Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015 and 2020

Note: For the years circa 2015, values from that year were used except for Chile and Puerto Rico (2013) and Guatemala (2014). For the years around 2020, values from 2020 were used except for Argentina, Aruba, Brazil, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Suriname (2018), El Salvador, Honduras, Panama and Uruguay (2019), and Chile and Puerto Rico (2017). The values for 2015 for Aruba, Costa Rica, Panama, Puerto Rico and Suriname were estimated on the basis of linear data projections in adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Based on UIS, available in https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

linked to the different rates of development of primary education universalization. Those countries that guaranteed generalized earlier access are the ones with higher literacy rates. On the other hand, it is important to consider that these high literacy rates are also the result of the implementation of widespread policies to reduce the adult illiteracy rate.[6]

The available information reveals that enormous literacy gaps persist in some countries, especially in the oldest age groups. For example, in Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Suriname, one quarter or one fifth of the population aged 65 and over is not literate. The situation is particularly critical in some Central American countries. While this indicator is expected to progressively improve as a result of the aging of better educated cohorts within the population, these data reveal the significant number of older adults who do not have basic reading and writing skills. This limits their capacity to develop and to exercise their rights, and it is necessary to introduce mechanisms that offer effective opportunities to access literacy programs.

Youth and adult illiteracy rates continue to be high in rural areas of the region (**Figure 6.3**). On average, they represent 12.8% of the total. While this gap has shrunk over the past 15 years, this process is happening too

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6   For example, between 2003 and 2015, in the context of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), a set of national and supranational initiatives were developed to reduce illiteracy, which have improved the educational conditions of the population (Torres, 2009).

Figure 6.3. Literacy rate (SDG indicator 4.6.2) by area. Population aged 15 and over. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2005-2020

	2015		2020
Brazil	94.1 / 80.2		82.9 / 95.1
Chile	97.6 / 92.2		91.8 / 97.2
Colombia	96.3 / 86.8		89.1 / 96.9
Ecuador	96.8 / 89.2		87.2 / 96.4
El Salvador	92.4 / 80.1		82.6 / 92.9
Guatemala	88.9 / 72.1		72.0 / 87.8
Honduras	93.2 / 81.2		81.6 / 93.8
Mexico	96.5 / 87.0		88.9 / 97.0
Panama	98.2 / 87.3		89.3 / 98.2
Paraguay	97.4 / 92.0		88.9 / 95.6
Peru	96.6 / 85.2		85.8 / 96.5
Uruguay	98.6 / 97.5		98.1 / 98.8

● Rural ● Urban ● Difference between rural and urban
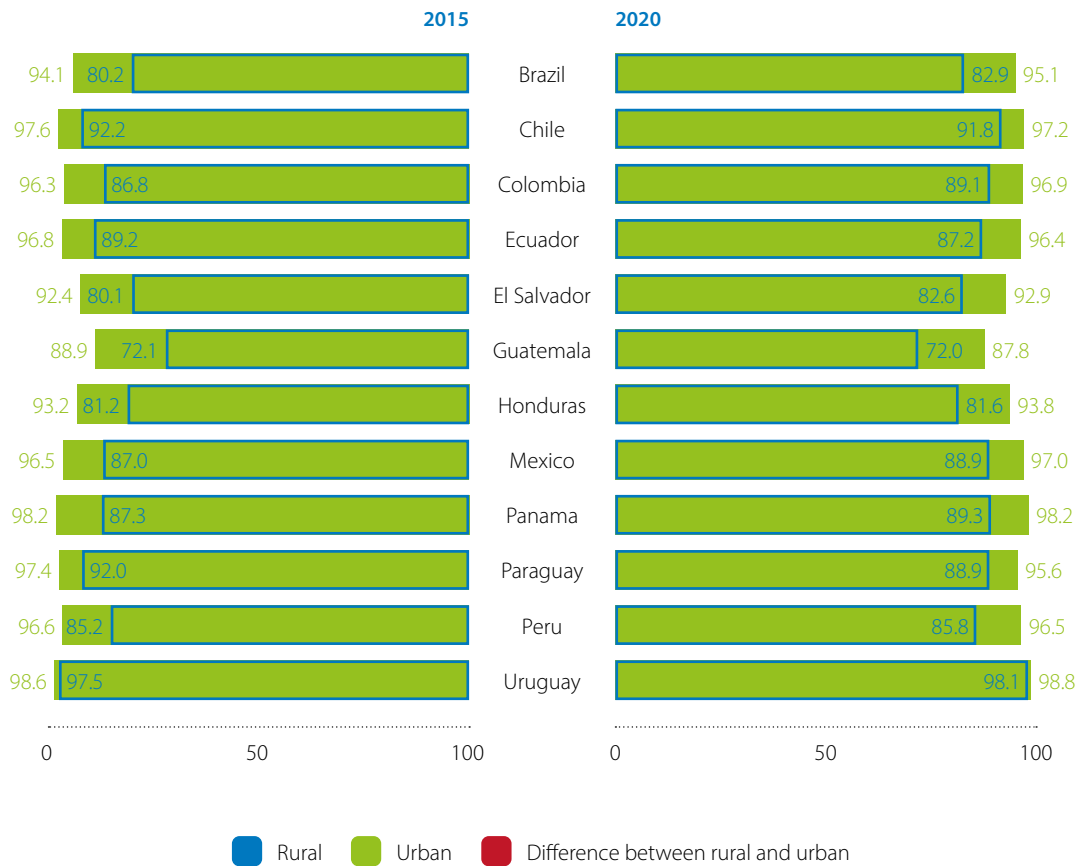
Note: The data for 2015 are 2014 values. For data circa 2020, values from that year were used except for El Salvador, Honduras and Uruguay (2019), Brazil and Guatemala (2018) and Chile (2017). For the simple averages, data from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay were used. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Based on UIS, available in https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 6.4. Youth/adult (25 and older) educational attainment rate (SDG indicator 4.4.3) for primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and tertiary-university education Circa 2015-2020

Completed primary education and higher

Belize	81.4 / 90.6
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	79.9 / 97.6
Brazil	77.6 / 80.3
Colombia	76.0 / 81.4
Costa Rica	81.3 / 83.1
Curaçao	99.4
Ecuador	82.6 / 83.4
El Salvador	57.9 / 61.5
Guatemala	46.6 / 50.8
Honduras	59.4 / 67.8
Mexico	79.2 / 83.5
Panama	85.3 / 87.5
Paraguay	76.0 / 77.5
Peru	80.5 / 81.9
Uruguay	89.4 / 91.3

Completed lower secondary education and higher

Belize	52.2 / 68.0
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	65.1 / 95.3
Brazil	57.6 / 60.0
Colombia	50.3 / 57.7
Costa Rica	53.1 / 55.4
Curaçao	90.4
Ecuador	52.2 / 52.5
El Salvador	42.5 / 46.5
Guatemala	27.7 / 32.3
Honduras	32.5 / 40.3
Mexico	59.5 / 65.8
Panama	65.9 / 69.5
Paraguay	49.1 / 53.2
Peru	62.3 / 64.1
Saint Lucia	46.0 / 46.8
Uruguay	54.1 / 57.6

Completed upper secondary education and higher

Belize	40.1 / 43.3
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	51.3 / 79.8
Brazil	43.8 / 47.4
Colombia	45.4 / 53.2
Costa Rica	38.0 / 40.9
Curaçao	51.0
Ecuador	42.3 / 43.4
El Salvador	29.2 / 32.6
Guatemala	24.0 / 26.1
Honduras	22.9 / 29.9
Mexico	33.3 / 38.6
Panama	49.3 / 54.3
Paraguay	38.8 / 42.4
Peru	56.0 / 58.0
Saint Lucia	40.5 / 41.3
Uruguay	28.7 / 31.5

Completed tertiary or university education and higher

Belize	13.3 / 21.0
Bolivia (the Plurinational State of)	26.6 / 31.1
Brazil	13.6 / 16.5
Colombia	19.5 / 22.5
Costa Rica	21.9 / 22.3
Ecuador	13.6 / 13.9
El Salvador	9.0 / 9.6
Guatemala	4.5 / 7.7
Honduras	9.7 / 10.0
Mexico	16.3 / 18.8
Panama	24.3 / 26.7
Paraguay	14.5 / 15.9
Peru	20.9 / 21.9
Saint Lucia	9.3 / 9.9
Uruguay	12.4 / 13.7

Legend: ● Circa 2015   ● Circa 2020

Note: For completion of primary education and higher for circa 2020, values from that year were used except for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay (2019) and for Brazil and Peru (2018). The 2015 values for Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama were estimated on the basis of linear projections of data in adjacent years. For circa 2020 values in lower secondary education and higher, upper secondary education and higher and tertiary-university education and higher, values from that year were used except for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Lucia and Uruguay (2019) and for Brazil and Peru (2018). The 2015 values for Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama and Saint Lucia were estimated based on linear projections of data in adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Based on UIS, available in https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

slowly to ensure that universal literacy is reached by 2030. Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Brazil have the highest rural illiteracy rates. In the first two cases, this situation has only improved in the past few years.

These data show that it is the adult rural population that is most excluded from literacy policies and that there is a need for action focused on this population, as it is one of the most profound shortfalls in the region.

A second aspect to explore in this chapter is linked to the educational attainments of the youth and adult population defined in regard to education levels completed. SDG indicator 4.4.3 expresses the youth/adult educational attainment rate by level of education. The data are presented in **Figure 6.4**.[7]

The available information reveals the deficits that persist in the region in regard to guaranteeing minimum educational attainments for all, at least in regard to primary and lower secondary education. On average, 19% of the youth and adult population of the countries analyzed did not complete primary education. This percentage is as high as 30% to 40% of the population in some countries.

On average, 44% of the youth and adult population has completed secondary education, and 17% has completed higher education. As the educational level increases, not only does the educational attainment reduce but also the differences between countries increase in relative terms. The coefficient of variation in the rates is from 0.15 for the percentage that has completed primary education, 0.27 for lower secondary education, 0.29 for upper secondary and 0.41 for tertiary education.

An additional challenge presented for expanding youth and adult educational opportunities is due to the gaps produced from early childhood by failing to complete the subsequent levels. They seem to accentuate over the course of the life cycle, which deepens inequities and makes them more difficult to resolve.

An analysis of long-term trends for this indicator points to a certain dynamic of improvement in the majority of countries. Lower and upper secondary education attainment rates have grown the most. On average, countries improved between 4.2 and 5.1 points,

respectively. For primary education, the improvement was 3.3 points, and that of tertiary education was 1.6 points.

Compared to the long-term trends, which are only available for a small group of countries, 2015-2020 presents a deceleration in the improvement in the percentage of the population that has completed primary education. That rate is nearly half of what it was during the two previous five-year periods. By contrast, the rate of growth observed for 2010-2014 for lower and upper secondary education remained steady at higher rate than that of the previous five-year period.[8]

Given the wide age range considered, these indicators are not very sensitive to short-term changes and reflect more structural behaviors of social and education systems. For example, for primary and secondary education, the increased rate of attainment by the youth and adult population can be linked to two main causes: first, the vegetative growth of the education level as a result of the existence of child and adolescent cohorts with higher levels of completion; the other is access to educational programs designed for the youth and adult population that cover these levels.

Figure 6.5 presents the differences between men and women in the percentage of youth and adults who have completed upper secondary education and higher. The simple average tends to present a situation of parity between men and women. However, in four countries of the region, the difference is negative for women by at least three percentage points (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Peru). This is particularly intense in Peru. In these cases, the past five years do not show clear signs of improvement.

Inequities are higher in rural areas, and the indicators, which are only available for the last year, reveal the magnitude of exclusion of young and adult women in terms of the right to education. This situation is particularly serious in Honduras and Peru. By contrast,

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7   It is worth noting that the definition of the indicator also includes other aspects of educational attainment such as economic activity status and program orientation. However, the data available does not enable the description of these other aspects at the regional level.

8   These data are based on the simple average of data for Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. The values obtained differ from those analyzed in the text because it is not the same set of countries. The average growth for 2015 to 2019 in this processing is 2.8 for primary, 5.7 for lower secondary and 5.1 for upper secondary. These values in 2011-2015 were 4.3, 5.3 and 5.2, respectively. They were 4, 3.6 and 3.3, respectively, in 2007-2011. Estimates based on UIS databases.

Figure 6.5. Differences between men and women in the percentage of youth and adults (25 and over) who have completed upper secondary education and beyond (SDG indicator 4.4.3) by area (in percentage points). Circa 2015-2020

Note: For the years circa 2015, values from that year were used. For the years circa 2020, values from 2018 were used.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Based on UIS, available in https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

exclusion affects rural males more in Brazil and Saint Lucia.

Figure 6.6 summarizes the main inequities observed in regard to the highest level of education attained by the youth and adult population based on some population groups and allows us to reflect on some of the coordinates that the gaps in the indicators establish.

As the general averages suggest, trends over time show a systematic improvement of the indicator in the various populations, with uneven rates of growth. One exception—and the element that raises one of the first alarms—is the scant improvement in the educational attainments of persons with disabilities. This group presents both higher levels of exclusion and very similar scenarios between 2010 and 2020.

In the rural population, just 60.2% of young people and adults completed primary education. That number increases to 84.1% in urban areas. Those numbers are 29.5% and 63%, respectively, for lower secondary education, and 19.8% and 50.9% for upper secondary education. In the three cases, the differences have decreased over the past few years, though at a slow pace.

In the case of the indigenous population, it is also possible to observe low levels of educational attainment (69.9% completed primary education, 48.9% lower secondary and 31.7% upper secondary). In this case, improvements over 2015 have been practically non-existent—just a few percentage points—in a context in which there was more intense improvement between 2010 and 2015. Here we observe, as is the case with other indicators, a marked slowing of growth and thus a slowing of the reduction of inequities.

The outcomes for the low-income population are similar. Educational attainment levels improved between 2010 and 2015 in three categories: the percentage of the population that completed primary education or higher increased from 52.7% to 59.7%, the percentage for lower secondary education grew from 24.3% to 30.4%, and that of secondary education and higher increased from 12.6% to 16.7%. These encouraging improvements declined between 2015 and 2020, when the rate of growth was much lower, nearly half of that of the previous five-year period.

Finally, the migrant population[9] presents educational levels that are similar to the rest of the population.

The third area that this chapter addresses is YALE program attendance based on educational and training proposals for both formal and non-formal education. This allows for a measurement that is consistent with the frameworks described at the outset of this chapter. The description of various age groups' educational opportunities in the context of lifelong learning must include different contexts, conditions and opportunities.

ISCED 2011 defines formal education as institutionalized, intentional education offered in accredited institutions which, together, constitute a country's formal education system. It includes all education prior to entering the workforce, and it tends to be organized in a system conceived of as a continuous path of gradual education in the form of a ladder. Some programs offered in the workplace can also be considered to be formal education if they lead to a certification that is recognized by the appropriate authorities (UIS, 2013a).

Non-formal education is also organized in the context of an institutionalized, intentional and organized format. It represents an alternative or complement to formal education for people within the lifelong learning process. It is open to all age groups, though its structure does not necessarily involve a continuous path. It tends to be offered in the form of courses, seminars or workshops. In general, non-formal education leads to certifications that are not recognized as equivalent to formal education.[10] In fact, in some cases no certification is offered (UIS, 2013a).

Non-formal education can cover youth and adult literacy programs, education of out-of-school children, teach basic life or labor skills, social and cultural development or may be focused on personal development. It may also include training initiatives in the workplace, job training for economically inactive people and, in certain cases, it may represent alternative pathways to formal education.

To describe this area, SDG indicator 4.3.1 will be used, which refers to the participation rate of youth and adults (15 and over) in formal and non-formal education and training. As **Figure 6.7** shows, few countries in the region are in a position to produce this indicator of access to education and training programs. Furthermore, in some cases, the available information

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9 This information, which was taken from the countries' household surveys, defines migrants as individuals who state that they were born in another country.

10 In some cases, non-formal education may offer formal certifications through exclusive participation in specific programs aimed at improving skills acquired in another context.

Figure 6.6. Maximum educational attainment by the population aged 25 and over (SDG indicator 4.4.3) for different populations. Latin American countries. Circa 2010, 2015 and 2020
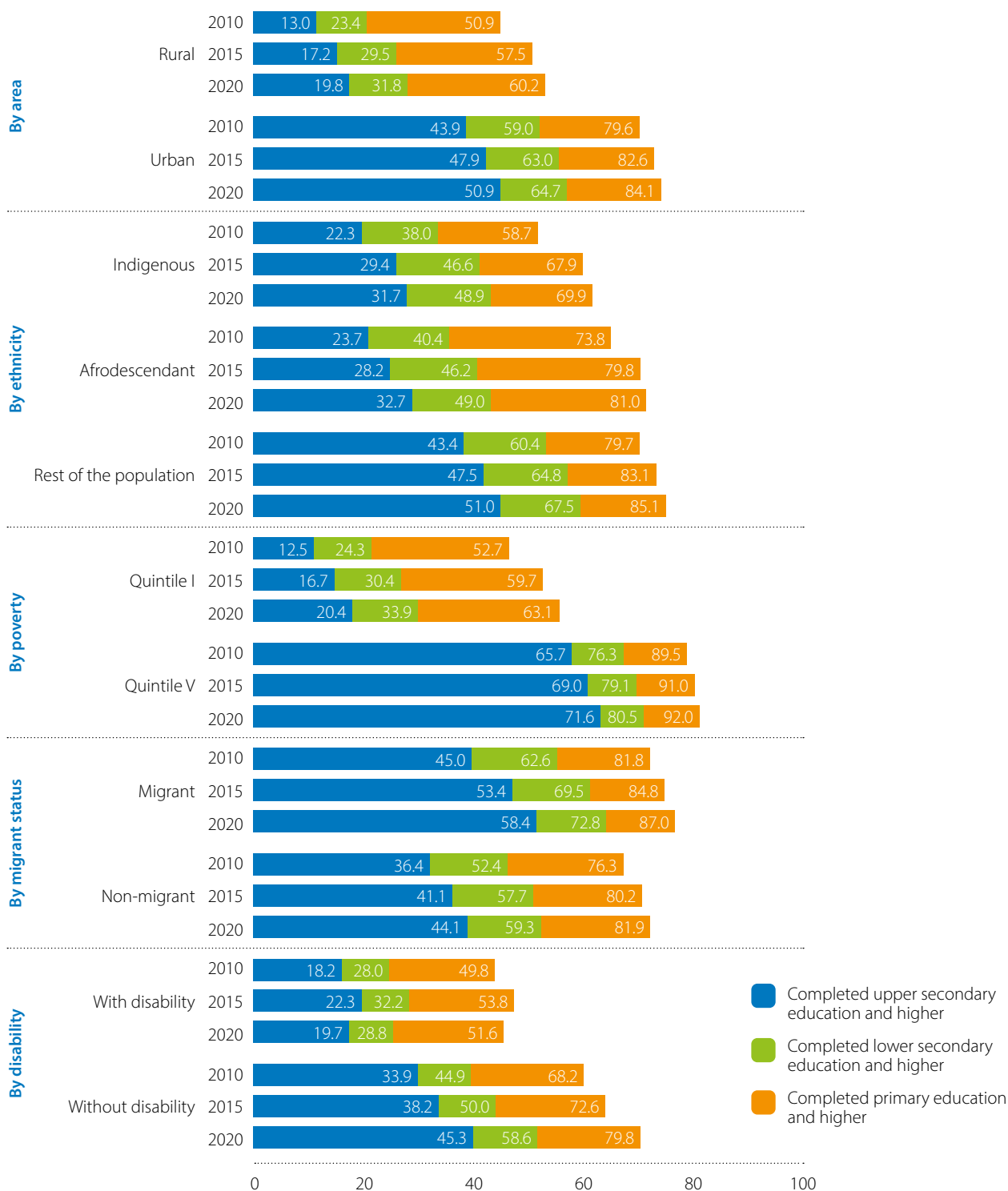
Note: The data correspond to simple averages for countries for which information was available. For the averages by area, data from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay were used. For averages by ethnicity, data from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay were used (except for the Afrodescendant population, where only data from Brazil, Ecuador and Uruguay were used). For the poverty averages, data from Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay were used. For the migration averages, data from Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay were used. For the disability average, data from Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico were used. The circa 2019 data correspond to 2019, except for Mexico (2018) and Chile (2017). The circa 2015 data correspond to 2015, except for Argentina and Mexico (2016). The circa 2010 data correspond to 2010, except for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Panama (2011). Data from Mexico and the Dominican Republic from 2020 were used for the migration averages, and for Paraguay, 2015 linear projections were used based on adjacent data. For the disability average, data from 2020 were used for Mexico, and 2015 linear projections were used based on adjacent data for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Data for Argentina correspond to urban areas.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Database of household surveys.

Figure 6.7. Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months (SDG indicator 4.4.1). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2015-2020
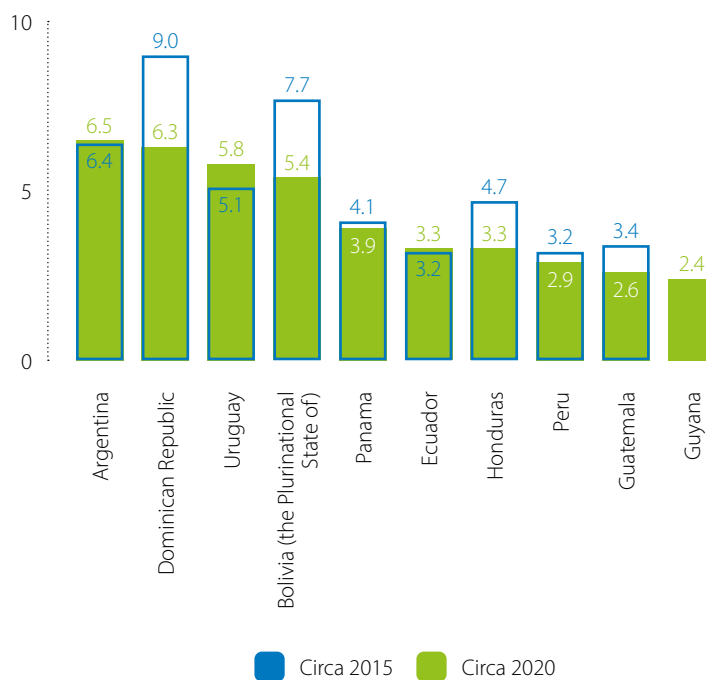
Note: For the years circa 2020, values from 2017 were used except for Ecuador and Uruguay (2018) and Peru (2016). For the years circa 2015, values from 2014 were used except for Guatemala and Peru (2013). The values circa 2015 for Panama and Uruguay were estimated based on linear projections of data in adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Based on UIS, available in https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

presents certain limitations in terms of coverage due to the complexity inherent to its calculation.

This is mainly due to the fact that non-formal education and training programs can be offered in a variety of locations (schools, universities, workplaces, civil society organizations, and others), and may vary in length. Both administrative education system data and household surveys tend to present limitations in terms of adequately capturing these programs (UIS, 2018b).

Despite these limitations, the available information offers some evidence of the participation levels. In general, they are relatively low and show marked variations over time. This variability may represent some weaknesses in the calculation (for example, associated with errors in estimates based on samples) and the instability of the phenomenon analyzed.

A fourth area of analysis is related to the educational insertion of the youth population and its connection to the world of work. During the transitional stage between compulsory education, higher education and the job market, marked gaps are manifested that limit opportunities for development and the exercise of rights for numerous young people in

the region, particularly those who belong to the most disadvantaged populations (ECLAC and OEI, 2020). These unequal opportunities directly impact emancipation processes and the development of people's autonomy.

This challenge is represented in the existence of a significant number of young people who neither study nor work. Beyond certain representations with negative connotations regarding this population (D'Allesandre, 2013), this indicator is a symptom of the challenges in the region regarding an adequate conditions guarantee for transitioning to adult life, particularly for accessing decent jobs, engaging in enterprise and living a full civic life.

For the countries for which information is available (**Figure 6.8**), approximately 16.4% of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 live outside of the world of work and education. This percentage increases to 21% if only adults between the ages of 20 and 24 are included. The context is very unequal in terms of gender, impacting women (23%) much more than men (10%) because the existence of predefined gender roles tends to be more focused on care and domestic work.

Figure 6.8. Percentage of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 that neither studies nor works by sex. Latin American countries. 2015-2020
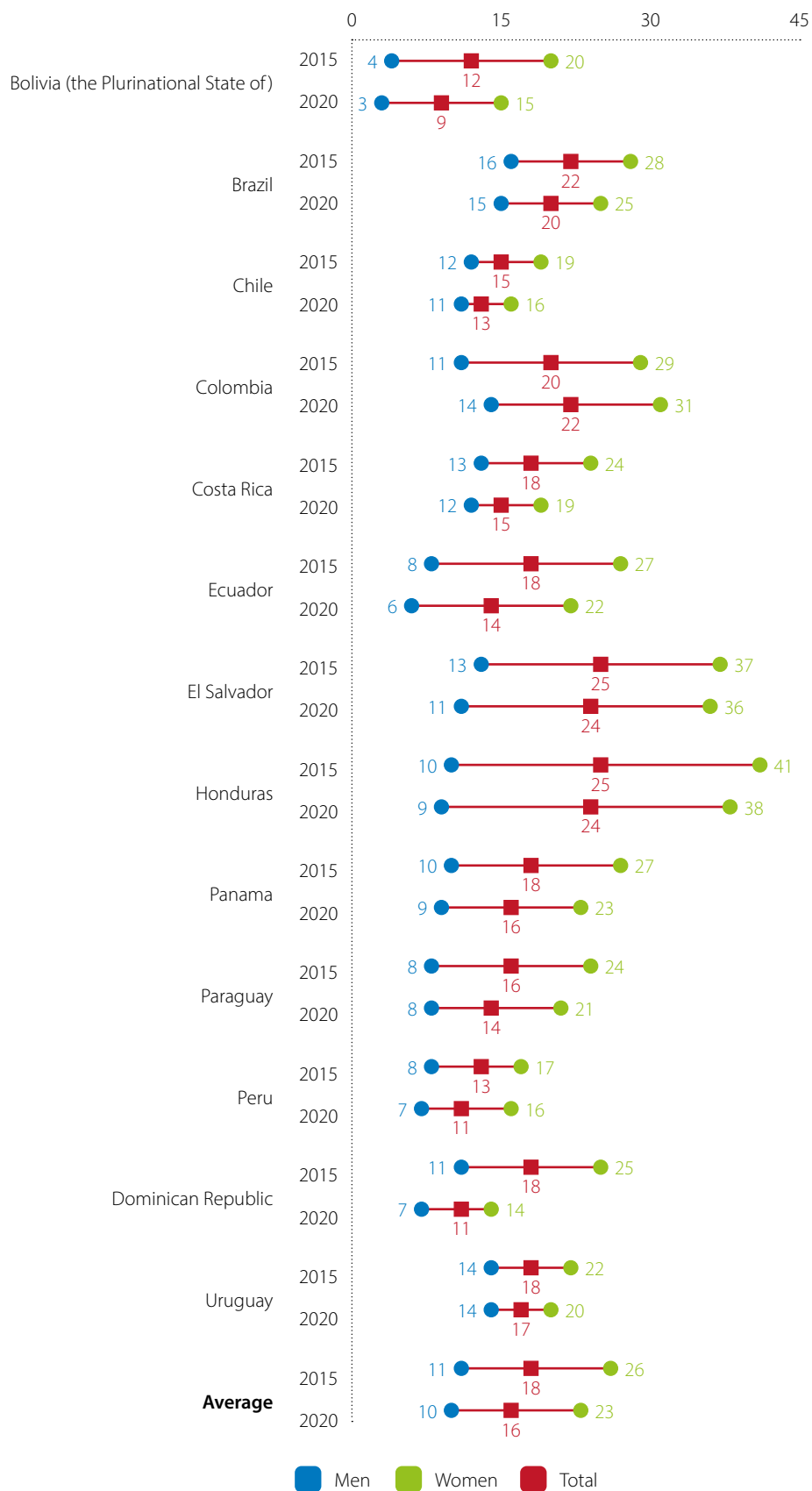
Note: For the years circa 2020, values from 2019 were used except for Chile (2020). For the years circa 2015, values from 2015 were used.

Data source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). CEPALSTAT statistical databases and publications, available at https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/.

Box 6.1

The COVID-19 pandemic and youth/adult educational attainment rates

The suspension of in-person learning impacted the continuity of YALE programs for the youth and adult population, which were carried out remotely. This has manifested in numerous situations that make the assessment of the potential impacts of the pandemic on access to these education programs difficult.

On the one hand, it is possible that participation has increased in some of them. The distance learning format has expanded access to certain educational programs for those who cannot attend in person due to distance, responsibilities at home and other factors.

These opportunities for continuity have been reduced due to dependence on access to computer equipment and Internet connections. These resources may be less available to these groups given that education programs oriented towards youth and adults have greater participation of at-risk groups due to the close relationship between living conditions and opportunities to complete educational programs.

On the other hand, the continuity of the distance learning experience for this group also requires the existence of proposals that are sensitive to age differences given the various conditions for using ICT tools.

It is important to consider that living conditions have worsened for many during the two years of pandemic, and that there are concerning projections regarding the out-of-school child and youth population, which allows us to surmise that new youth populations will join YALE in the coming years.

Over the past five years, this situation has remained very stable. For the countries considered here, the average percentage was 18% in 2015 for young people aged 15 to 24. There has been an improvement over the past five years if only women are considered.

While the overall average data show limited changes during the period, it is worth highlighting the decrease observed in the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Ecuador. In terms of the differences between men and women, there was also a marked relative improvement benefiting women in the Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

This phenomenon of the youth population that neither studies nor works presents marked stability in the region, which points to how difficult it is to improve the conditions of young people and the limited number of policies that manage to have an impact with an approach that efficiently addresses the unequal opportunities that impact the female population.

For example, ECLAC estimates that the percentage of the population aged 15 to 24 that neither studies nor works in Latin America was 20% in 2002, 19.2% in 2010 and 18.1% in 2019. In other words, the past 20 years or so have only brought a 2-point decrease. For women, the percentages were 28.9%, 27.5% and 25.4%, respectively. Here there is a larger relative improvement, which reduces the gaps, though they still persist in high magnitudes.

Key education policies between 2000 and 2015

The policy trends between 2000 and 2015 were influenced by the international discussions and agreements that accompanied the development of policies in the field of YALE in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since the end of the last century, the Education for All Movement has made its mark, with three world conferences being organized in 1990, 2000 and 2015 and the production of the Delors Commission report (Delors *et al.*, 1996), and its continuation, the "Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?" document (UNESCO, 2015e), as well as the International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V in 1997 and CONFINTEA VI in 2009) and the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE) (UNESCO, 2015d). At the regional level, the education ministers signed the "Education and skills for the 21st century" agreement (UNESCO OREALC, 2017c).

These references offer and expand on perspectives that have accompanied the policy discussion: education and learning as a basic component of lifelong learning, the right to education for all as a fundamental human right, and inclusion as a condition for building democratic societies in search of a sustainable future and dignified existence.

Lifelong learning takes on a central role as a philosophical and conceptual framework and

Box 6.2

The Plurinational State of Bolivia: Institutionalization, inclusion and productive work

The strength of YALE programs in the Plurinational State of Bolivia is based on its institutionalization as a right within a plurinational education system. Thus, Education Law 070 establishes the right to alternative and special education as a subsystem that includes literacy and post-literacy as part of primary education for youth and adults; secondary education for youth and adults; technological and productive education; and continuing education as a non-formal and community modality. Furthermore, it has a significant policy of inclusion of diversity and a strengthening of vocational training and labor for local and community development through shared responsibility of Autonomous Territorial Entities (regional and municipal governments and the autonomous governments of indigenous peoples).

The literacy process includes materials, teaching and learning in Spanish and indigenous languages.

Primary and post-literacy education use a flexible curriculum built around modules for achieving continuity of studies and training for life modules that can be adapted to include a wide variety of populations. These include detained persons, domestic workers and migrants, with adjustments made to the various activities, ways of life, needs and territories. In 2021, the Year of Recovery of the Right to Education, the Plurinational State of Bolivia continued to develop cross-sector work on educational processes, organization and leadership with indigenous nations and peoples, rural residents and Afro-Bolivians.

Technological and vocational education, for its part, is offered in Alternative Education Centers through a strategy of regional capacity building in which the leaders of social and community organizations are trained as facilitators and cross-sector partnerships positioned in the annual departmental plans built with local stakeholders. For its part, the Plurinational Competency Certification System highlights the value of all of the learning developed through practice, work and daily life, which contributes to establishing fundamental principles of lifelong learning.

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organizing principle of all forms of education (UIL, 2010). From this perspective, learning is seen as a process that occurs throughout one's life and is not limited to school-based educational processes. This perspective was incorporated into the regulations of various countries in the region at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. In 2002, Mexico created the National Education Council for Life and Work (*Consejo Nacional de Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo*, CONEVyT) as an intersecretariat commission and collegiate advising body that was to provide technical support and coordinate actions aimed at guaranteeing that young people and adults would have access to education for living and working. The Political Constitution of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2009) recognizes adult education and interculturality; the General Law of Ecuador (2010) incorporates lifelong learning; and Chile's General Education Law (2009) recognizes formal and informal educational processes from the perspective of continuing education.

Along these same lines, policies focused on developing continuing education systems were advanced. Paraguay created the Continuing Education General Directorate (*Dirección General de Educación Permanente*) (2011) in order to guarantee the right to quality, effective and equitable education for young people and adults, making lifelong learning possible. Chile created the *Chilecalifica* program (2002-2010) to develop a continuing education system. Flexible equivalency programs were advanced in Argentina (2008-2011) with the Plan for Completion of Primary and Secondary Education (*Plan de Finalización de Estudios Primarios y Secundarios*, FINES), and in 2004, El Salvador introduced EDUCAME, a flexible program for young people and adults who have not completed secondary education. In Brazil, the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (*Secretaría de Educación Continuada, Alfabetización, Diversidad e Inclusión*, SECADI), part of the Education Ministry (2004-2019) promoted a YALE policy that includes flexible equivalency programs.

Systems for recognizing previous studies were promoted in the context of general training to facilitate training pathways. This led to automated monitoring and accreditation systems, which achieved a notable level of development in the first years of the new century, including the Automated Monitoring and Accreditation System (*Sistema Automatizado de Seguimiento y Acreditación*, SASA) in Mexico, the

Box 6.3

The Dominican Republic: Youth and Adult Education Sub-system

Recognition of youth and adult learning and education as a subsystem led to the repositioning of this field in the Dominican educational system. During the 2010s, a new institutional structure was built that goes beyond the traditional trend of linking YALE to literacy actions and programs based on a remedial and compensatory perspective. The slogan "From Literacy to Educational Continuity" (*De la alfabetización a la continuidad educativa*) expresses a policy based on the right to lifelong education with a perspective of gender and interculturality in order to contribute to educational justice and living well.

The process of building this new institutional structure expands the field of YALE, involving various social sectors, civil society entities and the State. From a cross-sector perspective, the policies set out various programs and educational provision. The Quisqueya Learns with You Literacy Plan (*Plan de Alfabetización Quisqueya Aprende Contigo*) based on broad social mobilization encourages participation and public policies offering educational continuity.

The subsystem was strengthened and expanded through a new curricular and pedagogical management model organized into modules that facilitate flexible pathways for continuing studies (Education Ministry of the Dominican Republic, 2014; National Education Council, 2018). To encourage its implementation, basic education centers were reorganized as learning centers in communities and territories in order to expand the range on offer beyond school. Educational material production was increased, training processes were developed for teachers and technicians, and a learning assessment system was designed. The courses on offer were coordinated with the development of labor skills through labor schools.

This new institutional structure was possible due to increased investment in YALE. Free access to secondary education was offered and teacher pay was stabilized. The nation's political will and international cooperation have been fundamental. The systematization of the entire process is a contribution to the region, a lesson based on the Dominican Republic's national effort to restore the value of YALE.

National Youth and Adult Competency Certification Exam (*Examen Nacional para Certificación de Competencias de EPJA*, ENCCEJA) in Brazil, and Chile's National Assessment and Studies Certification System for Youth and Adults (*Sistema Nacional de Evaluación y Certificación de Estudios para Personas Jóvenes y Adultas*).

From the perspective of the right to education and inclusion, specific programs were developed, such as the Bilingual Literacy for Life (*MEVyT Indígena Bilingüe*, MIB) in Mexico, which covers literacy through secondary education and is focused on populations that speak indigenous languages in various states in the country. The Plurinational State of Bolivia advanced a proposal that includes the issue of alternative and special bilingual education.

During the first decade of the 21st century, various curricular innovation initiatives were promoted in order to improve the quality and relevance of the educational programs available. In Paraguay, curricular reforms were introduced for primary education, paying special attention to bilingual education. The Plurinational State of Bolivia passed a new curriculum guided by

criteria of flexibility and relevance with a special focus on plurilingualism. Mexico created the Life and Work Educational Model (*Modelo Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo*, MEVyT), which addresses issues related to people's lives together with the attainment of basic skills. Brazil promoted the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (*Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para Educação Básica*) (2013). In the Dominican Republic, the National Education Council (2011) authorized flexible programs for youth and adults, which led to a review of the curriculum and the design of a modular and flexible model, which was approved in 2018. In order to respond to the agreements reached at CONFINTEA VI and the countries' interest, UNESCO undertook an interregional project that included the participation of eight countries in the region. This process led to the document *Construcción de criterios para un currículum de calidad para la educación de personas jóvenes y adultas* (Building criteria for a quality YALE curriculum) (UNESCO OREALC, 2013b).

Even as these initiatives were being promoted, the absence of teacher training policies was noted. During that period, few countries implemented initiatives

related to teacher training. Exceptions include Mexico and Brazil, which have universities that include research and training in the field of YALE, and Jamaica, which has Adult Teacher Training Workshops for the Jamaican Foundation of Lifelong Learning Teacher of Youth and Adults. At the regional level, the OEI and the Latin American and Caribbean Council for Popular Education (*Consejo de Educación Popular de América Latina y el Caribe*, CEAAL) initiative developed with Universidad de Barcelona is worth highlighting. It offered a virtual Ibero-American course for leading, coordinating and managing youth and adult literacy and education programs and institutions in 2011.

At the regional level, the Ibero-American Plan for Literacy and Basic Education (*Plan Iberoamericano de Alfabetización y Educación Básica*, PIA) 2017-2015 (SEGIB/OEI, 2015) developed by the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), which coordinates the Latin American countries, incorporating a perspective of lifelong learning and the right to education.

In short, an effort was made to establish the foundations for policies and programs that would facilitate the creation of continuing education systems based on the principles of the right to education, inclusion and lifelong learning, during the first decades of the century. In addition, procedures for evaluating and certifying studies and flexible equivalency programs were promoted or consolidated and efforts were made to promote curricular innovation and develop specific programs with an intercultural approach. However, since 2015, although there has been progress in some areas, these policies were often not continued or did not manage to take shape, mainly due to institutional weakness and the lack of priority of YALE in educational policies together with the impact of the pandemic.

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

The impact of the discourses, recommendations and policy agreements meant to move towards lifelong learning and education was significant during this period. However, this was not reflected in practice, as a civil society study shows. The title of the study *Procurando acelerar el paso* (Trying to speed up the pace) (CEAAL, 2017) is eloquent. Matching the need to expand definitions of YALE and its impact on decision-making, the Ibero-American Plan for Literacy and Lifelong Learning (PIALV) (SEGIB/OEI, 2015) proposes considering YALE beyond school, recognizing forms of knowledge and impacting curriculum and teaching plans in context.

This position was taken up at the 2014 meeting of education ministers (OEI, 2021: 5) and especially at the regional level in the Meeting of Education Ministers of Latin America and the Caribbean, "Education and skills for the 21st century." The final statement of the latter sets out a regional agenda that points to the challenge of:

Identifying which essential skills must be acquired over the course of one's life and how to recognize, validate and accredit learning in non-formal and informal modalities; promoting innovative learning environments (...) and recognizing these different learning environments and modalities; building confidence, credibility and transparency in the process of learning recognition and validation (LRV) and reaching a consensus regarding the benefits of LRV among all interested stakeholders (UNESCO OREALC, 2017c: 14).

A 2021 OEI study states that although the perspective of lifelong learning is recognized as a concept, it does not permeate policies or practices. For their part, the region's civil society organizations allude to the lack of progress on the underlying concepts of YALE policies (CEAAL, 2017), which has been exacerbated during the pandemic.

In this context, the policies present heterogeneous development in government actions. The contexts and ways in which governments define the public problem related to YALE lead to policy agendas and shape their situation preceding the reported period, as do the impacts of the pandemic. In general, YALE policies define their actions on the basis of the remedial concept and as yet limited government actions that move towards broad alternatives, as is the case of the Plurinational State of Bolivia in the area of alternative and continuing education; the City of Buenos Aires (Argentina) with the Lifelong Learning Agency; and the Dominican Republic, which created the Youth and Adult Education Subsystem.

The perspective proposed by international agencies and civil society for the design, implementation and monitoring of YALE policies supports the idea of defining them as being comprehensive: "addressing learning in a wide range of spheres"; integrated: "with the use of inter-disciplinary and cross-sector knowledge and techniques"; inclusive: "with equitable access, differentiated strategies and without any discrimination" (UNESCO, 2015d); State managed; and oriented towards long-term improvements whose progress is strengthened by the respective governments (Campero and Zúñiga, 2017, our translation).

Various challenges and areas of progress emerge based on this framework. One of the internationally recognized trends is the progress made on legal frameworks for the design and development of plans, programs and actions as well as high-level progress based on the right to education (UNESCO, 2015d; UIL, 2017b, 2020). This trend is heterogeneous, for example, in terms of the year in which the laws were passed and their perspective on the right to education. Some current laws date back to 1957 or 1961, while nine countries have passed new laws this century. The most recent examples are found in Honduras, Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (CLADE, 2015: 7, 26). In terms of perspectives, Ecuador's law emphasizes the guarantee of the right to education, while Brazil does so from the perspective of the demandability of this right.

Some laws explicitly refer to non-formal and informal education. This is the case in countries such as Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay (CLADE, 2015: 26, 33). The laws set out various concepts, such as alternative education in the Plurinational State of Bolivia and alternative basic education in Peru. Mexico's National Education System includes opportunities to follow different modalities. Argentina offers a non-formal modality. Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also institutionalize it as a non-formal modality.

Another trend is concepts related to and the development of flexible modes. This is the case of Panama's YALE Program, Mexico's MEVYT, and Uruguay's Always Learning program (*Programa Aprender Siempre*, PAS). The three policies are specific but provide flexibility by creating access to the right to education for young people and adults based on their unique characteristics.

Another trend involves defining the public problem of YALE solely from the perspective of not attending school and its remedial and compensatory nature. While this is one of the areas of the right to education, it limits government initiatives to this action, which leaves aside broad areas of the lives of individuals, groups and society as a whole. In addition to this general trend in the region, YALE is reduced to three levels of education: literacy, primary education, and job training. Key actions that form part of this trend are the FINES Plan in Argentina; the initiatives of the Costa Rican Investment Promotion Agency (CINDES); the Youth and Adult Education Program (flexible modes), Accelerated Adult Education and Education through Maturity initiatives in Guatemala; the study circles and National Institute for Adult Education (*Instituto Nacional para la Educación*

de Adultos, INEA) Community Plazas in Mexico; or the Literacy and Educational Continuity (*Alfabetización y Continuidad Educativa*) Program in Nicaragua.

Other actions that stand out in the region involve programs derived from alternative education for popular education: the Plurinational State of Bolivia has Alternative Technical-Humanistic Education Centers (*Centros de Educación Alternativa Técnico-Humanística*); Buenos Aires (Argentina) has the Lifelong Learning Agency (*Agencia de Aprendizaje a lo Largo de la Vida*); Colombia created the Caja de Compensación Familiar Continuing Education Program (*Programa de Educación Continuada de CAFAM*); and Cuba has the *Universidad del Adulto Mayor*. These actions go beyond the compensatory vision, moving towards the inclusion of other parts of people's lives that are not limited to attending school.

In regard to training for work, the region presents various trends. On the one hand, the trend towards training can be observed in YALE actions, as seen in the Dominican Republic. The Quisqueya Learns with You (*Quisqueya Aprende Contigo*) national literacy program, part of Quisqueya Without Misery (*Quisqueya Sin Miseria*), offers training in order to improve people's quality of life. The Literacy and Post-Literacy program (*Programa de Alfabetización y Posalfabetización*) is a non-formal program that includes a job training component in Paraguay. The Plurinational State of Bolivia has Alternative Education (*Educación Alternativa*), which is technical and humanistic and thus offers job training options. In Costa Rica, the Integrated Adult Education Centers (*Centros Integrados de Educación de Adultos*) offer training for employability in the context of education offered outside of school. Guatemala has Municipal Human Training Centers (*Centros Municipales de Capacitación y Formación Humana*), and Uruguay has an Education and Labor program (*Programa de Educación y Trabajo*). On the other hand, in the second trend of training for work, policy actions are designed and launched with cross-sector approaches through labor ministries and institutions connected to the field. Examples of this are actions such as the Argentine programs to foster the inclusion of young people in the workforce (*Programas de Inclusión Laboral y Productiva*, PROEMPLEAR), El Salvador's Professional Training Institute (*Capacitación del Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional*), Costa Rica's Social Aid Training Institute (*Capacitación del Instituto de Ayuda Social de Costa Rica*), and Ecuador's National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Plan.

There is also a policy trend with labor ministries and private initiatives linked to labor skills. Chile has been working on the technical and vocational education and training qualifications framework since 2008, while Ecuador has a national professional qualifications system. Mexico meanwhile has the National Labor Skills Normalization and Certification Council (*Consejo Nacional de Normalización y Certificación de Competencias Laborales*). Colombia has a Labor Skills Project and Coordination Programme (*Programa de Articulación y Proyecto Competencias Laborales*). In Peru the Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion has its National Youth Employment Program (*Programa Nacional de Empleo Juvenil*), and Uruguay's Ministry of Labor has the I Study and Work Program (*Programa Yo Estudio y Trabajo*).

It is important to mention that job training is a focus of YALE in the Caribbean. The initiatives identified through the VII Sub-regional Consultation of the Caribbean highlight the creation of the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA), which coordinates the National Training Agencies. By 2021, these entities were present in 21 countries (UNESCO OREALC, 2021c). However, there is no general YALE framework, which is one of its main challenges.

The cross-cutting nature of YALE is made visible in SDG4 and SDG8 regarding decent work. However, these actions have been insufficient given the limited funding available and lack of attention paid to the population that requires such services, as it tends to present a trend towards lower levels of attainment (UIL, 2017a) and lower impact implementation (UIL, 2020). This shows that political will is necessary but insufficient. There is a need for sustained action from a long-term perspective. Furthermore, governments must refrain from conditioning progress on changes in administrations, as this produces institutional weakness. An expanded approach to YALE is needed that involves reconsidering its contribution to civic education, covering the environment, politics, health, digital skills, culture, the economy and education from an intercultural and intergenerational perspective.

Another trend is the participation of international agencies in the region. In Guatemala, with support from UNESCO, the UNESCO Malala Centers were set up to educate indigenous women and girls. Peru's Adult Education and Development (*Educación de Adultos y Desarrollo*) program supports the development of the Basic Alternative Education Program. In Costa Rica, we can find the Unit for Educational Permanence,

Retention and Success (*Unidad para la Permanencia, Reincorporación y Éxito educativo*, UPRE) and the EU-supported program in Costa Rica to support secondary education and help reduce student dropout rates (*Apoyo a la educación secundaria para la reducción del abandono estudiantil*, PROEDUCA) which in 2019 promoted people's reincorporation into the education system. This was revisited in the context of the pandemic with the text *Orientaciones para el abordaje integral de la población vulnerable y las personas en riesgo de exclusión educativa 2021* (Guidelines for Comprehensively addressing the Disadvantaged Population and Persons at Risk of Educational Exclusion 2021) (CLADE, 2021). However, the CONFINTEA VI mid-term review states that international cooperation's contribution to the development of YALE activities in the region is relatively small. Only one-third of countries report having received external cooperation funding with this purpose (UIL, 2017a: 31).

The region presents both greater participation of the stakeholders involved in policy design and decreased participation of the target population in the design of plans and programs. This highlights the assumption of a political culture (UIL, 2017a) in decision-making and the democratization of power, which contributes little to achieving more just and equitable societies and solid institutions, as set out in SDG17, and to obtaining democratic governance. It is difficult to identify the specific policy design approach given that processes and results tend to be monitored, but not their design or social participation in those processes.

It is already well-known that funding is a key issue that enables the implementation of plans, programs and actions that are timely and align with legislative approaches and the achievement of the SDGs. In this area, while there is certain progress in Latin America and the Caribbean, where 12 of 25 countries (48%, the highest rate at the global level) report that expenditure on YALE has increased as a percentage of total public education expenditure since 2015 (UIL, 2020: 59), the data also point to a decrease and stalling (UIL, 2020).

Given the concept of YALE that policies use and its marginal nature or clear invisibility, there are no data or indicators of other entities such as the labor and health ministries that provide an overall vision of YALE funding (UIL, 2017a: 30). Furthermore, critical perspectives hold that it is not enough to demand increased funding, and that there is a need for accountability policies, particularly in regard to funding (CEAAL, 2021a: 4).

Governance shows a trend towards improved cross-sector and interministerial cooperation and a great deal of progress in strengthening with civil society (UIL, 2020). However, there continues to be a need for cross-sector plans and programs and for coordinating and recognizing YALE areas and strengthening training in and for decent work. The place it occupies, in the context of national education systems, continues to be marginal, and its value in the greater context is not recognized. This is linked to how YALE is conceptualized in its governance. Current views do not yet reflect a full commitment to the perspectives of lifelong learning-education (CEAAL, 2013) and gender perspectives, nor has the contribution of the trajectory of popular education in the region been recognized.

Given the multidimensionality of educational quality, visions focused on remedying the deficiencies of the educational system through YALE -which replicate the scope, criteria and pedagogical proposals of early childhood basic education- coexist with an expanded perspective of YALE as a fundamental and enabling right that endows it with a transformative and cross-cutting nature for the achievement of the SDGs (DVV; Hanemann, 2016; Benavot, 2018; CLADE 2018b; CEAAL TV, 2019). The quality of the latter is signified by dignity (Hernández, 2017) and its essential nuclei involve overcoming its compensatory and remedial nature (UIL, 2017a, 2020; CEAAL, 2021b).

An expanded perspective on YALE elucidates connections to SDG targets 4.3, 4.4 and 4.6, maintains multiple strong links to the other SDGs in terms of eradicating poverty and hunger; peaceful coexistence, social cohesion and human rights; the capacity to think and act in a critical, autonomous and responsible manner; promoting sustained and inclusive social development and economic growth; participatory teaching and learning; and contributing to building sustainable societies of learning (UNESCO, 2015d; Hanemann, 2016; UIL, 2017b; CLADE, 2018a; UIL, 2020), among others. As such, it stands as a key strategy for achieving them (UIL, 2017a; Benavot, 2018).

Mid-term (UIL, 2017a) and global reports on adult learning and education, Grale 3 (UIL, 2017b) and Grale 4 (UIL, 2020), as well as various country reports (CLADE, 2021) highlight progress in YALE as a result of the recovery of key notions and practices for its lifelong exercise such as popular education and learning communities and a general improvement in quality processes. These have resulted in proposals for increased flexibilization and curriculum diversification

as well as methodologies and educational materials. This is the case in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, which overhauled the curriculum for primary, secondary and technical education for young people and adults. This has also occurred in Chile, with its Pedagogical Guidelines for the Plan of Study (*Orientaciones Pedagógicas para el Plan de Estudio 2021-EPJA*); Peru, with the alternative basic education modality and prior learning recognition project (*Proyecto de Reconocimiento de Aprendizajes Previos*); and Mexico, with the updates to its Life and Work Educational Model (*Modelo Educación para la Vida y el Trabajo*) (UIL, 2020; CLADE, 2021).

The aforementioned progress stands in contrast to the enormous inequities and inequalities among countries, institutional insufficiency, policies that are out of step with local circumstances, the assimilation of YALE programs into school-based learning, and limited attention paid to teacher training and active and digital citizenship (CEAAL, 2021b).

One exception is the implementation of the *globALE* educator training curriculum, which is based on a rights approach and education in and for life. The *globALE* curriculum has been especially important for Latin America and the Caribbean since 2017, and specifically in countries like Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala and Mexico, where it has served as a reference for adult educator training initiatives. Some of these have continued online, as is the case of projects with the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala and the international certificate for "Youth and Adult Educator Training" developed in collaboration by the *Universidad Amazónica de Madre de Dios* (UNAMAD) of Peru and the DVV. This is also the case of the Youth and Adult Education master's degree program offered by the YALE Open Program of the DVV and *Universidad Nacional Educación de Ecuador* (UNAE).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the research available on government quality policies suggests that they have tended to focus on promptly meeting priorities, adaptations, increased flexibility, complements and curricular digitization goals. This is the case of Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Uruguay, which have been accompanied by criteria and procedures for assessing learning based on more flexible examination deadlines, the inclusion of different types of evidence of learning and delivery of education using various distance learning channels. For example, assessments were temporarily suspended in Guatemala, and the

Dominican Republic decided to automatically pass all students based on the monitoring of evidence of educational work (CLADE, 2021).

These processes have been enriched with socio-emotional contents in countries like Chile, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. In all of the cases mentioned, access was provided through distance or hybrid learning (CLADE, 2021). However, the literature refers to important limitations in the quality of the results (GIPE and CEAAL, 2020; Robalino, Andrade and Larrea, 2020), which has had a greater impact on the most disadvantaged populations. This is true for indigenous peoples and populations on the move given the digital divide and lack of prior infrastructure specifically geared towards YALE (UNESCO UIL, 2020; CLADE, 2021).

In terms of participation, people are thought to enjoy the potential benefits of YALE equitably in different learning areas. The trends for the period refer back to statements from 1997 and 2009 (CONFINTEA V and VI) for diverse populations and minority groups (UNESCO, 2015a; UIL, 2020), while critical perspectives discuss the urgency of YALE for more disadvantaged populations and as a resource for achieving the SDGs that converge in the areas of education, healthcare and the environment, ending poverty, and social inclusion (CLADE, 2018a, 2018b; CEAAL, 2021b). However, while the reports refer to progress since 2015 in access to and participation in YALE programs (UIL, 2017b, 2017a, 2020), they are not included on national agendas aimed at achieving the SDGs (ALER, 2021). There is also a lack of data and a tendency towards policies that do not recognize the specific characteristics of populations such as women, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, the migrant population and refugees (UIL, 2017b, 2017a, 2020). This prevents culturally and socially relevant and quality education from being achieved (Regional Networks Platform, 2021).

The trends in this period show that governments have created or reinforced participation and inclusion policies that mainly address the youth and adult population in general. This is the case of Argentina's ENCUENTRO literacy program, the National Literacy and Post-Literacy Program (*Programa Nacional de Alfabetización y Posalfabetización*) in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Chile's I learn with you (*Contigo Aprendo*), the National Literacy Program (*Programa Nacional de Alfabetización*) in Colombia, I'm in (*Yo Me Apunto*) in Costa Rica, Ecuador's It's always time to learn (*Siempre es Momento*

para Aprender); the national from Martí to Fidel literacy program (*Campaña Nacional de Alfabetización De Martí a Fidel*) in Cuba and the Youth and Adult Education Strengthening Strategy (*Estrategia de Fortalecimiento del Programa de Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos*) in Nicaragua; Panama's Move! (*Muévete*); and the non-formal Literacy and Post-Literacy Program (*Programa de Alfabetización y Posalfabetización*) in Paraguay (SITEAL, 2019; ECLAC and UNESCO, 2020; GIPE and CEAAL, 2020; CLADE, 2021).

However, there are exceptions. For example, the regulations of the Plurinational State of Bolivia establish the priority of strengthening the organizational and leadership processes of indigenous and native nations and peoples, rural dwellers and Afro-Bolivians (Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2021: 11). Similarly, Guatemala's UNESCO Malala Centers for educating indigenous women and girls promote access to various non-formal education options; and Mexico has the Bilingual Literacy for Life (*MEVyT Indígena Bilingüe*, MIB) (CLADE, 2021). The absence of specific programs for women and indigenous populations is noteworthy, and the intermittent provision of education services during the pandemic aggravated this situation due to shortfalls in access and support activities aimed at ameliorating survival conditions in households and communities, which ended up exacerbating their marginality.

During this period, most of the countries in the region report having introduced modernization policies, including ICTs in literacy and other YALE programs. The Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico have infrastructure for that purpose, whether it be a website, portal or more developed platform with digitized materials or resources especially designed for youth and adult learners and educators. Examples include the plurinational alternative education distance learning center (*Centro Plurinacional de Educación Alternativa a Distancia*, CEPEAD) in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia Learns (*Colombia Aprende*), the All ABC (*Todos ABC*) campaign in Ecuador and the MEVyT portal in Mexico (CLADE, 2021). Furthermore, during the pandemic, adult education and local stakeholders—especially educators—mention having recovered or created alternative ways of delivering guidance, content and educational materials through "learn at home" programs, by using the Internet, podcasts, radio and television, as it occurred in Argentina, Chile Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic (CLADE, 2021).

Overall, in the area of ICTs, "progress is varied and heterogeneous" (UIL, 2017a: 31) due to the main issue accentuated during the pandemic: digital gaps and shortfalls in teacher training (UIL, 2017a, 2020; Robalino, Andrade and Larrea, 2020; CLADE, 2021). For example, in the case of Peru, the implementation of the I Learn at Home (*Aprendo en Casa*) program was handled by the Alternative Elementary Education Centers (*Centros de Educación Básica Alternativa*, CEBA), which allowed them to have greater continuity, while they have been temporary in other countries. As such, in the field of ICT policies, systematic programs and programs with equity and inclusion and their critical and relevant use continue to be pending issues.

Once the SDGs were established, efforts were made to create a YALE Observatory in the region. There are Grale 3 (UIL, 2017b) and Grale 4 (UIL, 2020) reports. The OEI has monitored the PIALV through mechanisms such as the meetings of ministers (UNESCO OREALC, 2017c) and the Ibero-American Cooperation and Monitoring Platform (SEGIB and OEI, 2015) and organizations like CLADE and CEAAL, which have presented assessments of the situation of YALE in the region, including during the pandemic (CEAAL, 2017, 2021b; CLADE, 2020). However, policy design, decision-making and accountability as fundamental elements of educational quality, inclusion, democracy and justice are weakened by the lack of valid, reliable and updated data and information from the countries (UIL, 2017a; CEAAL, 2021a). As such, the full implementation of the regional YALE Observatory cannot wait.

Furthermore, during the period, experiences focused on creating knowledge to support public policy and decision-making around YALE can be observed. These include the Universidad Nacional de Ecuador's YALE program and Chile's Network of State Universities for the Education of Youth and Adults (*Red de Universidades del Estado en Educación de Personas Jóvenes y Adultas*, RUEPJA), which organize training, exchange and research activities; the DVV, which supports research and curriculum work, learning resources, teacher training and pedagogical exchanges in Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru; research, strengthening and shared experiences networks such as Brazil's National Movement of YALE Fora; the Colombian Coalition for the Right to Education and the YALE Network in Mexico; studies conducted by GIPE-CEAAL, CLADE and CREFAL; and the support of agencies such as UNESCO, the OEI, the European Union, UNICEF and the Spanish Cooperation Agency. However, the breadth and scope

of these efforts are as yet quite limited (Campero and Zúñiga, 2017; Murillo and Martínez-Garrido, 2019; CEAAL, 2021b).

Future challenges

The fundamental challenge for YALE in Latin America and the Caribbean is repositioning it in order to highlight its contribution to society, enhancing its sphere of action through the design and implementation of policies and programs based on education as a lifelong fundamental human right. Furthermore, the region must recognize its facilitating and relational character in terms of promoting the acquisition of other rights and supporting the conditions that make their exercise possible. As such, this new positioning also contributes to the achievement of the SDGs.

The main challenge is education policy. It is necessary to question the idea of YALE as the space reserved for that which did not work in the regular education system for children and adolescents. This generates a circle that feeds into the idea of YALE as a residual, remedial and compensatory space with limited budgetary allocations. This is aggravated by the pandemic cycle, which has had a greater impact due to the lack of digital connectivity and devices, all of which has a knock-on effect on participation in and continuity of studies, together with the labor precarity and unfavorable living conditions that teachers have had to face.

From the perspective of the SDGs, the challenge is to recognize YALE's capacity to contribute to all of the areas covered by the 2030 roadmap. The YALE field in the region is broad. Due to its unique nature, it has the capacity to favor the development of inter-institutional and cross-sector plans, programs and actions based on democratic governance from a gender, intercultural and intergenerational perspective that impact key areas linked to labor, health and wellbeing, the promotion of a culture of peace, reducing social inequities and eradicating extreme poverty, the protection and sustainable use of the environment and encouraging good living. These include aspects in which YALE has the potential to contribute to meeting the SDGs in the region.

The pandemic cycle has made clear the needs that condition the progress of YALE. At the governance level, there is a need to promote policies designed for the creation of specific subsystems to increase the flexibility of the programs available. It is also

necessary to ensure the availability of diverse educational pathways, as well as specific educational proposals for the wide range of subjects that allows for coordination from an inter-institutional perspective. At the level of access to education, the displacement of educational processes towards digital technologies and the media poses a challenge and governments must establish commitments to provide free access, guarantee safe use, train for employment and provide the social and community infrastructure conditions for their effectiveness.

Making progress in regard to these challenges requires systematic, sustained and fair policies for achieving a structural increase in YALE funding. This is a requirement that was emphatically expressed by the region at the CONFINTEA VII preparatory meeting. One of the recommendations pointed to the need to "define budgetary increase goals with a multi-sector and multi-ministerial approach that enables to generate funding through collaboration on shared projects, taxation,

public-private and public-community partnerships, international cooperation and social mobilization. (UNESCO OREALC, 2021b: 8).

Another key condition for moving forward with YALE is having a transparent, reliable, updated research and information system that is available for decision-making and monitoring public policies and processes. Creating this system was a commitment included in the agreements of the Belém Framework of Action (UIS, 2010) and was reiterated in the recommendations of the region to VII CONFINTEA.

In the current context of profound social inequities accentuated by the pandemic, we must expand our vision to build long-term plans that explicitly position YALE in its social sense and its educational potential for society as a whole. States must guarantee education for all as a human right, as an ethical commitment of social justice, cooperation among nations and human solidarity.

Technical and vocational education and training

Technical and Vocational Education and Training in SDG4, Education 2030

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) promotes productive development and people's living conditions, and is key to social equity, productivity and the sustainability of nations. This type of training promotes employment, decent work and lifelong learning and holds an important place in educational provision as a vocational alternative, as it matches the interests, skills and talents of very diverse young people and adults (Jacinto, 2018).

The 2030 Agenda spearheaded by UNESCO and the Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2016-2021 have clearly stated the need to strengthen TVET systems in UNESCO's Member States. The proposals include fostering actions aimed at ensuring equal access to TVET for different social groups, developing technical and vocational skills in young people and adults, and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, supporting the transition to green and environmentally sustainable economies.

TVET is addressed in SDG4 within the framework of lifelong learning, and includes specific targets for actions, guidelines and challenges. This is essentially addressed in target 4.3, on technical, vocational and higher education, and target 4.4, on technical and vocational skills for employment.

These monitoring dimensions constitute domains in which educational information is scarce, since they encompass aspects that traditionally have not been at the heart of educational data system measurements across the region (Vera, Scasso and Yañez, 2022). This chapter makes use of existing data to identify trends in the region and areas in which countries must reinforce their monitoring efforts. Monitored indicators are linked to technical and vocational education and training attendance by young people and adults, followed by a focus on access to these programs for secondary education students.

Access to technical and vocational education and training

Within the SDG4 framework, target 4.3 includes a specific reference to technical and vocational education and training, emphasizing the need to ensure equal access for all women and men to quality training, including university education (UNESCO, 2016a).

Given the complexity and diversity of TVET programs and their heterogeneous institutional dependence, it is very difficult to systematize data on the coverage of these programs. The region, therefore, lacks sufficient data to diagnose access to such programs.

To monitor target 4.3, the thematic framework proposes SDG indicator 4.3.3, which measures the participation rate in technical and vocational programs for the population aged 15 to 24 (**Figure 7.1**). Regional estimates indicate that 6.9% of the population in this age range currently attends a TVET program. This value is slightly greater than the one observed in 2015 (6.3%) and shows a marked gender parity, with slightly higher participation by women (7.1% compared to 6.8% for men).

Although gender differences do not manifest visibly in access to TVET programs, they may be present within this category, depending on the different areas that comprise it. The available information does not allow for this distinction. The data by country (**Figure 7.2**) shows that the opportunities to access technical and vocational education and training is very diverse among countries. For instance, in some countries, such as the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Curaçao, TVET accounts for closely 25% of the population in this age range, while in other countries there are no such educational programs.

Most Caribbean countries stand out for their lack of TVET programs aimed at this age range.

Comparison over time does not seem to exhibit many variations; in general, countries have maintained the participation levels of recent years. Only Cuba and the Dominican Republic report a progress of more than 2 percentage points in the technical and vocational education and training programs access expansion, and

Figure 7.1. Participation rate in technical-vocational programs (15-24-year-olds) (SDG indicator 4.3.3). Latin America and the Caribbean. 2013-2020
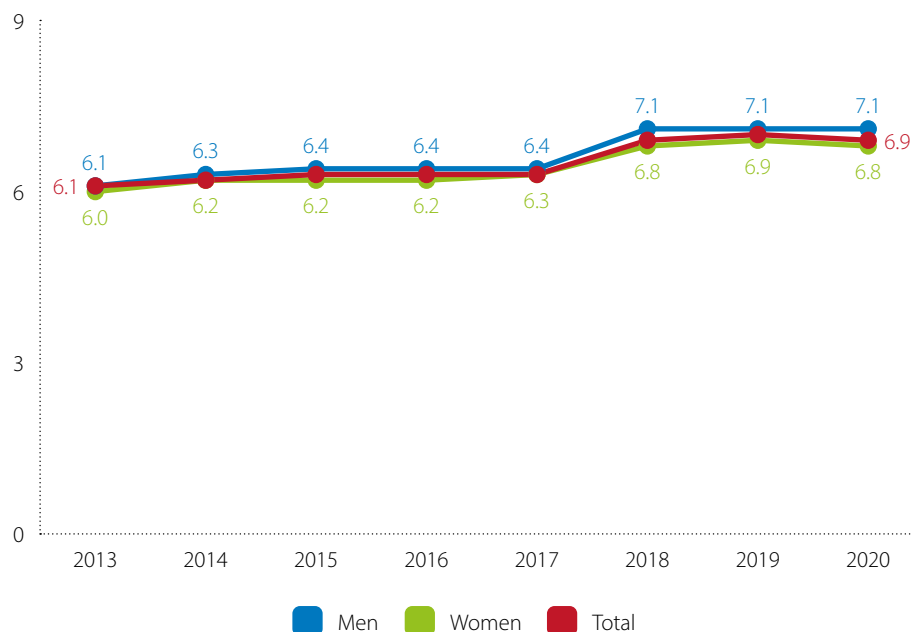
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 7.2. Participation rate in technical-vocational programs (15-24-year-olds) (SDG indicator 4.3.3). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020.
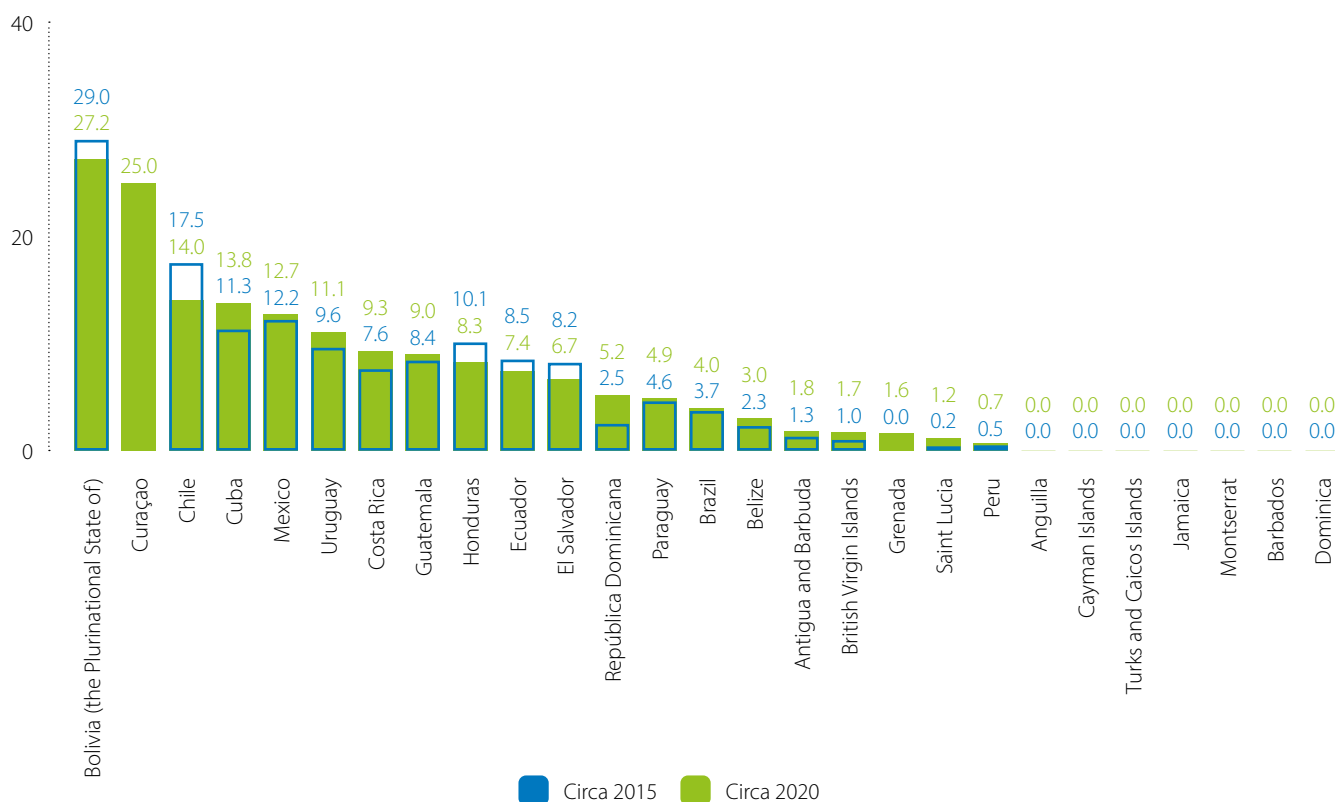
Note: 2020 data were used for the years circa 2020, except for Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Uruguay, Mexico, Chile and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2019), and for Grenada and Antigua and Barbuda (2018). For the years circa 2015, values from that year were used.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

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Chile is the only country that shows more than 2 points of decline.

Access to vocational guidance programs[1] for students in lower and upper secondary education across the region is another relevant aspect for monitoring (**Figure 7.3**). This description complements the previous data by focusing on the percentage of secondary education students attending educational programs focused on learning to practice a specific occupation or trade.

In this case, the time horizon shows an increasing trend over almost the entire period. Particularly in upper secondary education, TVET's share of enrollment grew steadily from 14.5% to 22.4% between 2002 and 2019. There has been a slowdown of just 0.5 percentage points over four years, as seen in the last five-year

period (2015 to 2019), which is a much slower pace than that observed between 2002 and 2010.

Participation in lower secondary education is much lower, reaching 6.1% in 2019. In the last five years, it has grown by only 0.4 percentage points. It is important to note in this case that, while there was a growth trend throughout the period, its pace was much slower. The most important growth spurt happened between 2009 and 2016, achieving an expansion of 1.6 points.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia is the only country in the region among those reporting data whose TVET programs reached two-thirds of secondary education enrollment (**Figure 7.4**). Suriname, Curaçao and Honduras hover around 40%, while a third group of countries, comprised of Guatemala, Cuba, Mexico, Costa Rica and Uruguay, reach 30%.

At the other end of the spectrum, some Caribbean islands and Peru exhibit very few secondary TVET programs.

Key education policies between 2000 and 2015

In the early 21st century, Latin American and the Caribbean countries developed technical and vocational education and training policies aimed at improving the relevance of this type of education. Significant curricular

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1 According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), at ISCED levels 2 to 5 the orientation of educational programs is classified as "general" and "vocational". Therefore, TVET programs at these educational levels are classified as vocational. According to this classification, "vocational education is defined as a series of programs designed primarily to provide participants with the skills, practical knowledge and understanding necessary to pursue a particular occupation or trade or class of occupations or trades. Such programs may have a work component (e.g., apprenticeships, dual education system programs). Successful completion of these programs awards labor market-relevant certifications recognized by the competent national authority or by the labor market" (UIS, 2013a: 16).

Figure 7.3. Percentage of lower and upper secondary education students attending technical and vocational education and training programs. Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
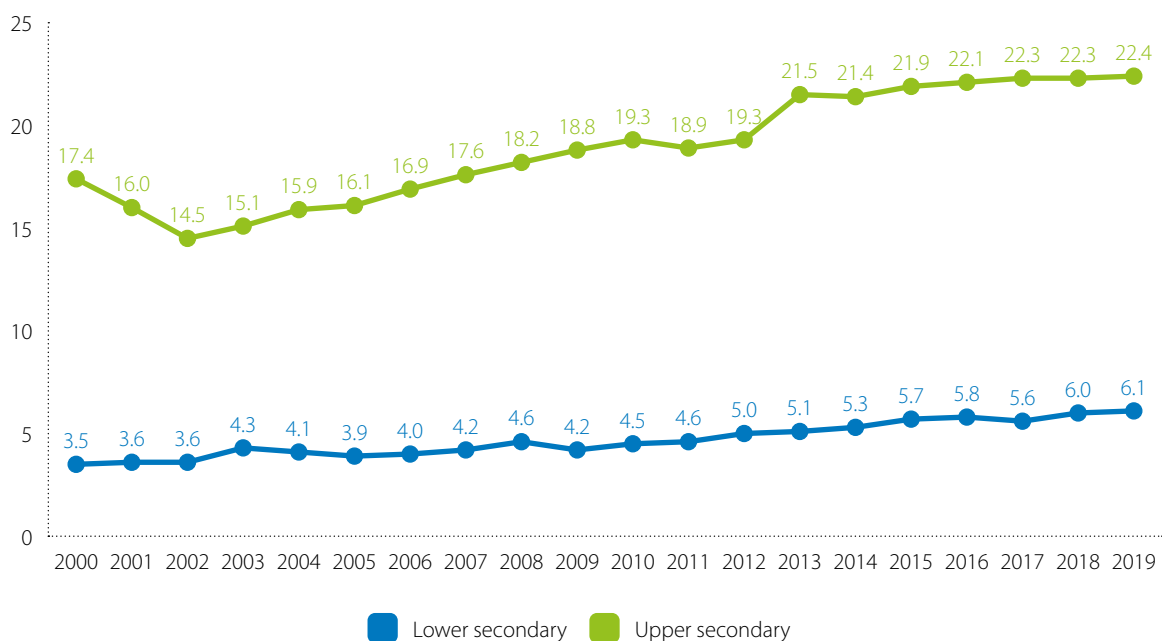
Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 7.4. Percentage of lower and upper secondary education students attending TVET programs. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Circa 2015-2020
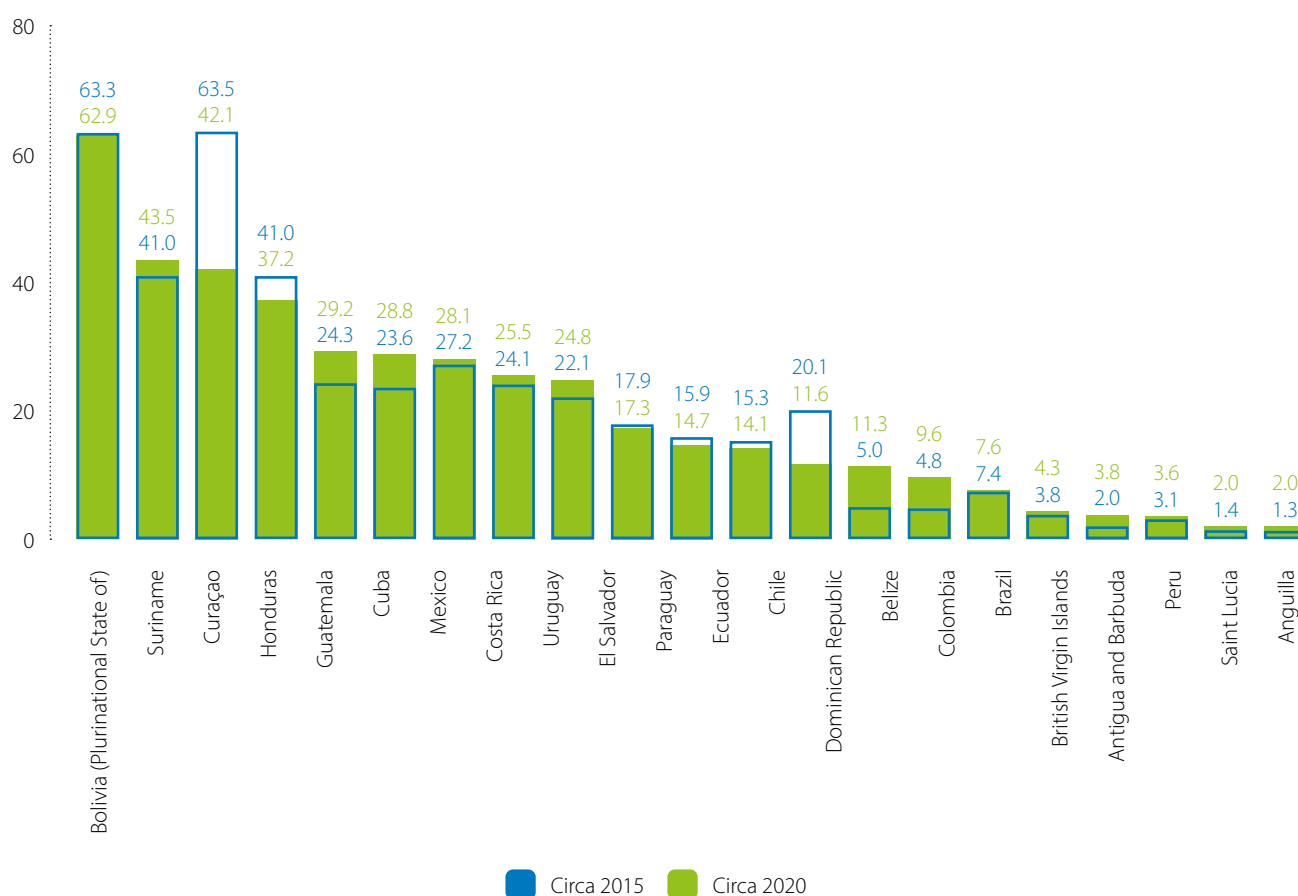
Note: For the years around 2020, data from that year were used, except for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico and Uruguay (2019), and Antigua and Barbuda and Suriname (2018). For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Paraguay (2016). The 2015 values for Curaçao were estimated based on linear projections of data in adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

and structural educational reforms were deployed in secondary and higher education systems, which resulted in the integration of the competency-based approach in curricular frameworks. The curriculum was reorganized and made more flexible, leading to the development of more general competencies (Fiszbein, Cosentino and Cumsille, 2016), while existing branches and specialties were readapted according to new production demands and technological changes. These reforms were intended to bridge the gaps between young people's academic and socioemotional skills and to establish a system of lifelong learning.

Meanwhile, there was progress in the establishment of new institutional frameworks and the strengthening of some existing ones: Paraguay created its TVET system (*Sistema Nacional de Formación y Capacitación Labora*, SINAFOCAL), Argentina enacted a new Technical

and Vocational Education Law and Antigua and Barbuda created the Framework of the Strengthening of Technical and Vocational Education Project (STAVEP), to name a few examples. In addition, TVET management bodies (directorates, departments, secretariats, undersecretariats and so on) were created, aimed at promoting policies and opening up greater opportunities for multisectoral participation (tripartite commissions) in the direction of TVET systems.

In order to strengthen links with industry, learning models were sought that would bring students and apprentices closer to businesses. The development of work-study programs, internships and professional work placements multiplied and programs aimed at promoting dual education were promoted. Among the countries that have implemented them are Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico and Chile.

Similarly, in order to strengthen training itineraries and the link between the supply of training and the needs of the labor market, different countries began to design institutional transformations that activated the development of qualification frameworks. These instruments, designed for guidance and reference, allow learning to be organized and recognized (ILO, 2020). They were promoted in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru and the Dominican Republic. At the regional level, the Qualifications Framework for Central American Higher Education (*Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior Centroamericana*, MCECSCA) was developed, which involves Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. In the Caribbean, the Caribbean Vocational Qualification is a qualifications framework that is a benchmark in the region (UNESCO, 2016c).

Another characteristic policy, which is very widespread at the regional level, is the implementation of skills certification systems or mechanisms that are part of the lifelong learning macro-policy. They enable the assessment and validation of the workers' knowledge in order to promote their integration and competitiveness in different professional roles.

Wide-ranging initiatives were aimed at improving the infrastructure and equipment of TVET institutions. Investments were made in the teaching equipment, laboratories, workshops and supplies needed to develop the teaching and learning process. Other policies were also implemented to bring TVET closer to territories with access difficulties, such as the Mobile Units deployed in Mexico, the Mobile Workshop Classrooms in Argentina and the Mobile Classrooms in Colombia, among others.

Moreover, nascent policies were developed to strengthen technical educators. The number of refresher courses on pedagogical and specific knowledge was increased, together with the promotion of curricula aimed at the professionalization of teachers with foundation degrees. However, despite this deployment, the initial training landscape in the region has been revealed to be poor in terms of specialization. As an exception, Uruguay and Cuba offer specialized training, and Argentina and Paraguay offer complementary training programs that provide pedagogical and didactic knowledge. However, as Sevilla and Arevalo (2020) point out, specific core preparation is not the norm in the region.

Towards the end of this cycle, the Latin American and Caribbean region began to experience one of the most significant transformations: the large-scale expansion of secondary education completion rates (see Chapter 2) and an increase in participation in higher education (see Chapter 5). UNESCO (2016c) has highlighted that TVET tertiary education has expanded rapidly, especially in those countries with high secondary education completion rates and their own TVET education framework, such as Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and Chile. Within this framework, public financial aid in the form of scholarships was increased, enabling large segments of young people and adults to continue their studies or get jobs.

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

As has been seen, until 2014 policies were mainly aimed at establishing a lifelong learning system and improving young people's chances of joining the workforce. There was significant progress in institutional terms, however, and consolidation continued throughout the 2015-2021 period.

The expansion of TVET at tertiary level and the persistence of certain issues mean that the 2015-2021 period is punctuated by the proposal of solutions focused on continuing the system's governance strengthening, ensuring educational pathways and reducing the barriers to exclusion. Similarly, starting in 2015, with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals, the countries of the region reformulated their national development plans with a long-term vision and associated human capital development with TVET systems. Subregional organizations have played an important role in steering TVET toward sustainable development. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) approved its Community Strategic Plan (2015-2019), which outlines a framework to guide member states in developing the critical skills required to attract and sustain the creation of decent jobs, given the need to develop a highly skilled workforce. Meanwhile, in the 2018 Declaration of Asunción, Mercosur promoted a Strategic Plan for Social Action as a fundamental instrument in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda in South America.

In identifying specific policies, it is acknowledged that new governance initiatives have been developed to generate an integrated TVET policy agenda. Although, according to Sevilla (2017), coordination between the different levels of the TVET subsystem has been promoted only in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, with

autonomous bodies in charge of coordinating public policies for secondary and higher TVET, new initiatives have emerged in this specific period. One of them is Chile's National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy (*Política Nacional de Formación Técnico Profesional chilena*),[2] enacted in 2016, with a strong emphasis on a rights-based approach. Its actions are aimed at improving the quality of TVET, increasing competitiveness and innovation, comprehensively supporting labor and educational careers, and improving the institutional framework for TVET.

Another example is Ecuador's Technical and Vocational Education and Training Plan (*Plan de Educación y Formación Técnico Profesional de Ecuador*),[3] created in 2021. Its purpose is to carry out coordinated work between government institutions and industry to promote human talent. To achieve this, it focuses on improving the country's competitiveness, developing the territories by taking advantage of their potential, and improving the quality of life of citizens through getting them involved early in the labor market or by continuing their studies with technical and vocational education and training. In Peru, the National Policy for Higher and Technical and Productive Education (*Política Nacional de Educación Superior y Técnico-Productiva*, PNESTP)[4] aims to increase access to higher and technical and vocational education with equal opportunities for all Peruvians. In this sense, it suggests promoting access strategies and mechanisms by establishing flexible and diverse educational pathways. These will allow the population to be better prepared for work, and to continue training throughout life, in order to contribute to the sustainable development and competitiveness of the country.

Furthermore, there are also policies designed to ensure the quality of TVET in higher education. Even though specific quality assurance policies are scarce in secondary TVET (Sevilla, 2017), progress can be observed in TVET at tertiary level. In Peru in particular, public and private technological institutes and colleges, as of 2016, must obtain a license granted

by the Education Ministry; this process, in the case of public institutions, also focuses on optimizing the educational supply.

Meanwhile in Ecuador, starting in 2018, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Council (*Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior, CACES*)[5] began certifying institutions, focusing on aspects inherent to TVET. Its evaluation criteria are the practical training of students, the institution's relationship with the production of goods and services, the professional experience of teachers and the production of knowledge and connection with the environment (Morales Aldean and Rodríguez Guzmán, 2019; Sevilla, 2020). CACES is also responsible for certifying TVET institutes in terms of their institutional capacity in relation to infrastructure, specialized teaching, technological innovation and applied research, so they can offer TVET postgraduate programs (Seville, 2020).

Quality assurance policies have been backed by institutional reinforcement initiatives from the State. In Chile's case, given the absence of public supply, State Technical and Vocational Education and Training Centers (*Centros de Formación Técnica Estatales*) were established in 2018. This policy is designed to provide an alternative to the private sector, in order to increase access opportunities and align training plans with local production needs. In Ecuador, a strategy for improving the infrastructure and equipment of State institutions is being implemented as part of the Higher TVET Reconversion Project (*Proyecto de Reconversión de la Educación Técnica y Tecnológica Superior*).[6]

Some strategies have also been simultaneously implemented to increase the interest and knowledge of the youth and adult population. In this regard, there have been a number of efforts to provide information and guidance on the TVET supply. In 2015, Panama began implementing its career guidance program (*Programa de Orientación Vocacional y Empleo*, POE),[7] which seeks to promote and disseminate timely information on occupational trends and demand for job skills to secondary education students in public and

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2 See Chile's national technical and vocational education and training policy, Education Ministry of Chile, available at https://on.unesco.org/3yckflN.

3 See Ecuador's technical and vocational education and training plan, Education Ministry of Ecuador, available at https://on.unesco.org/37Sj801.

4 See Peru's national policy for higher and technical and productive education , Education Ministry of Peru, available at https://on.unesco.org/3ORGqnd.

5 For more information, see https://www.caces.gob.ec/quienes-somos/.

6 See «Reporte de avance del Proyecto de Reconversión de la Educación Técnica y Tecnológica Superior» (progress report on the higher TVET reconversion project), Gobierno por Resultados (Results-Driven Governance), available at https://on.unesco.org/3KvkBXn.

7 See the career guidance program (Programa de Orientación Vocacional y Empleo, POE), Labor and Labor Development Ministry of Panama, available at https://on.unesco.org/3MLsB81.

private schools nationwide, as part of the strategies to reduce the unsatisfied demand for human talent that the country faces regarding certain technical and professional occupations.

In terms of inclusion, and as part of the 2030 Agenda, some countries in the region have undertaken commitments aimed at serving the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations in TVET, by implementing initiatives that seek to improve access for rural and indigenous populations, persons with disabilities and migrant populations. Such is the case of recent policies implemented in Peru and Ecuador (see **Boxes 7.1** and **7.2**).

In Chile, in terms of equity and inclusion, initiatives focused on the migrant population, lawbreakers and persons with disabilities have been developed through the Train for Work (*Fórmate para el trabajo*) program.[8] This project, in addition to the aforementioned initiatives, seeks to strengthen the developmental pathways of secondary technical and vocational education (STVE) graduates and disadvantaged youth, through complementary training, development of interdisciplinary skills, and labor intermediation. Brazil has reinforced the Inclusive Actions Program (*Programa de Acciones Inclusivas*)[9] of the National Service for

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8 For more details, see: https://sence.gob.cl/personas/formate-para-el-trabajo-0.

9 "Programa SESI SENAI de Ações Inclusivas, PSAI", Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (National Service of Industrial Apprenticeship), available at https://on.unesco.org/3y8BmFe.

Industrial Training (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje Industrial*, SENAI), which aims to include persons with special educational needs (disabilities, typical behaviors and high capacities) in the institution's courses, expand the service to indigenous populations, and provide opportunities for women to access courses generally thought of as male-only, and vice versa, thus increasing their chances of entering and staying in the labor market.

Also, in terms of inclusion, some countries in the region have undertaken commitments on gender equality. Specifically, the Montevideo Strategy for the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda (ECLAC, 2017b) sets out a series of measures to overcome the main obstacles in the processes of institutionalizing gender equality and women's rights. According to an overview by Muñoz (2020), the main critical issues that the agenda seeks to address are the occupational segregation of the labor market and the determining factors in the choice of career or training specialty, in which gender is a major factor. It also addresses the role of educational stakeholders and gender socialization as barriers and factors that reproduce gender inequality.

Argentina is one of the countries that has progressed the most in this area. The National Institute for Technical Education (*Instituto Nacional de Educación Tecnológica*, INET) has carried out a series of efforts aimed at improving gender equity in TVET at all levels, starting with secondary education. One of the mechanisms

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Box 7.1

Peru's National Policy for Higher and Technical Productive Education (*Política Nacional de Educación Superior y Técnico-Productiva*, PNESTP)

This policy was created in 2020 and acknowledges that the quality of higher and technical and vocational education and training is a structural factor, necessary to mainstream the efforts already underway in the country. One of its main purposes is to improve equitable access and pathways, by including populations that have been historically excluded from Peruvian higher education (Education Ministry of Peru, 2020).

To this end, it proposes initiatives related to factors that influence access to and permanence in higher

education and TVET. It establishes a pipeline for information and guidance services, develops mechanisms to identify skills, and promotes student support services, including financing. It also promotes the consolidation of training, teaching and institutional management processes. It also seeks to reinforce outreach activities and the link between educational institutions and their environment.

The PNESTP addresses system governance, redefining the roles of its stakeholders and attempting to define an orderly course for quality assurance in each of the higher education and TVET options available. It also secures the necessary resources to promote the quality and development of research and innovation, such as infrastructure, equipment, specialized and support professionals, and technology, among others.

Box 7.2

Ecuador's TVET Plan

The main objective of this plan is to strengthen the technical and vocational education and training system by promoting opportunities to acquire comprehensive skills to promote decent work and social and industrial development from an interregional and plurinational perspective. It seeks to improve the relevance and quality of education and training, strengthen human talent with technical, technological, cross-cutting and socioemotional competencies, and establish an institutionalized governance system for TVET linked to the different levels and modalities of human talent training.

This initiative stands out for its lines of work with new technologies, the transition to green economies and sustainable societies, and employment and citizen education. It strongly emphasizes the implementation of a TVET portfolio of social, industrial, territorial and intercultural relevance and the creation of a quality pedagogical culture for TVET teachers and trainers. It also includes a specific line aimed at reducing gender gaps, persons with disabilities, and inequalities between rural and urban areas.

is the Federal Program (*Programa Federal*),[10] which gradually implements actions aimed at reducing gender gaps, changing "male culture", stereotypes, pedagogical practices and improving infrastructure conditions so that they are accessible and equitable for the entire community. Outreach activities are also being conducted to increase the enrollment of women in secondary TVET schools and in the various technical and vocational education institutions and training and higher education centers.

Ecuador's TVET Plan (*Plan de Educación y Formación Técnico Profesional*) includes strategies to reduce gender gaps. Mexico has also made progress on this issue, developing an institutional model for gender equality under the Conalep System. This model seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence through lines of work and action protocols.

This period was marred by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a profound impact on educational experiences. Countries have had to create contingency plans to address some of the issues stemming from this context. They emphasize prioritizing curricula, while several countries have supported remote learning through technological apps, virtual classrooms and educational television and radio initiatives. In the case of the Caribbean, regional guidelines were developed for TVET institutions and the implementation of Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ). They were developed through collaboration between CANTA, the CARICOM Secretariat and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

A recent UNESCO study (2021d) illustrates some of these experiences, highlighting the emphasis of the plans implemented in some countries of the region. This study shows that the Plurinational State of Bolivia—given the lack of technical and human conditions to continue teaching practice—anticipated the closure of TVET institutes, since the educational authorities developed programs to strengthen the teachers' e-learning capacities. The situation in Colombia was different, since they had certain initiatives in place before the pandemic, such as *Colombia Aprende*, *Aprender Digital*[11] and even cell phone apps designed to generate spaces for learning, support and facilitation of experiences on the challenges of educational management against the COVID-19 backdrop. Furthermore, the government provided a tuition subsidy to public higher education institutions through the Solidarity Fund for Education (*Fondo Solidario para la Educación*), with the support of local governments, subsidizing 661,000 students (UNESCO OREALC, 2021d).

Future challenges

The countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have made significant progress in terms of TVET. Efforts have been made to strengthen institutional frameworks and regulations to develop more appropriate governance models and social dialogue, and to ensure the relevance and quality of the training offered. In recent years, the 2030 Agenda has promoted TVET as a cornerstone in building people's life projects and the sustainability of countries, paying special attention to inclusion and equity. These initiatives, however, failed to consolidate.

10 See «Programa Federal de Incorporación de mirada de género en la ETP, INET»(federal program for gender mainstreaming in TVE, INET), national institute for technical education (Instituto Nacional de Educación Tecnológica), available at https://on.unesco.org/3KzzCXV.

11 Aprender Digital website, available at https://contenidos. colombiaaprende.edu.co/.

In line with the statements by Tikly (2013), new development strategies are required to articulate cross-cutting economic and social policies, and promote a broad social dialogue paying special attention to the conditions in which education is provided, the ways in which capacities and freedoms are promoted, and the means available for training. This calls for special consideration of exclusion mechanisms, local identities and skill acquisition. Whereas in the past, the discourse emphasized a perspective centered on human capital and production, as today's focus is based on the rights to education, capacity building and sustainability.

Recognizing that the alternatives for carrying out these purposes may vary, the pillars should focus on the promotion of employment and entrepreneurship, as well as on equity and equality. To this end, it is necessary to foster a positive image of TVET within communities, diversify the mechanisms for program access and information, improve participation and governance, increase social dialogue, stimulate the diversity and quality of learning opportunities, make progress with skills recognition, enhance professional development policies for students, and have effective and adequate assessment systems, as part of the strategies proposed by UNESCO (2015c).

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have decided to rise to these challenges. Nevertheless, they all have particular issues that pose them to the design and implementation of the strategies. Poor income distribution, educational inequality that persists despite increased schooling, high rates of informal employment, high female unemployment and high rates of youth unemployment (UNESCO, 2012) are issues that the region as a whole must address. This is compounded by an institutional framework that has shown a historical disconnect between educational training and the competencies required by the world of work (UNESCO, 2016c).

The global health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the challenges facing TVET policies more complex and raised new questions.

The TVET agenda should consider several challenges as priorities for the coming years. The first relates to the persistence and growth of inequalities and segregation experienced by different social groups in Latin America and the Caribbean. This makes it necessary to intensify targeted policies addressing the realities and needs of women, minority groups and people with disabilities or in social disadvantage situations. Extending existing policies, recognizing unidentified inequalities and implementing new policies aimed at reducing gaps and mainstreaming rights and opportunities should be one of the main challenges.

The second challenge that remains is the need to strengthen TVET supply and demand. Increasing information and vocational and careers guidance mechanisms will allow people to design their education and work pathways for themselves. In addition, progress must be made with making training programs relevant and adequate, and improving the quality of learning and the social recognition of technical and vocational education and training. The current demands of the business world and its contexts require progress to be made with developing training proposals that promote innovation, employability, civic and environmental sustainability and transferable skills.

These challenges can be addressed through the development of TVET systems that facilitate flexible training paths between offers and qualification levels, and recognize labor competencies acquired in non-formal and informal settings. Although progress has been made in this area, it is still necessary to develop and implement instruments and mechanisms that favor the establishment of orderly and articulated TVET structures (such as national and regional catalogs, qualifications frameworks, skills certification systems, and others). Similarly, it is necessary to design TVET policies, national plans and strategies with a comprehensive approach, considering the guidelines and priorities established in other sectoral policies and long-term development plans currently in force. Multiplying the mechanisms and instances of social dialogue and improving the levels of participation of stakeholders will be key factors for moving in this direction.

The pandemic revealed the shortcomings of educational centers in the provision of information and communication technologies, connectivity and the ability of teachers to address remote education. The difficulties faced by the institutions when implementing learning activities call for policies and initiatives to improve the internal conditions and capacities to enable a digital transformation to occur in educational centers and in training. This should be coupled with the reinforcement of the pedagogical and technical skills of TVET personnel, as well as their working conditions. It should be noted that this domain has been left behind during the transformations of recent decades, making it necessary to promote effective short- and medium-term policies.

Finally, every policy requires an evaluation and monitoring of its progress. With this in mind, it is essential to move forward with a quality assurance system and a participatory model for policy evaluation. This is also true for TVET research, in order to strengthen knowledge management.

Education system funding and governance

Education funding in SDG4, Education 2030

The Education 2030 Framework for Action recognizes that progress towards meeting the targets requires an increase in investment in education, with a special focus on those dimensions where the greatest lags and deepest inequities have been identified. The framework stresses that without greater investment, moving towards more inclusive, equitable, and quality education is not possible. Thus, by acknowledging the heterogeneities and challenges specific to each country and context, it proposes that countries make a commitment to bring public expenditure on education to a threshold reaching at least between 4% and 6% of gross domestic product or between 15% and 20% of public expenditure (UNESCO, 2015a).

The Buenos Aires Declaration, issued as part of the Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017, also stated in its 19th commitment the need to maintain, optimize and progressively increase funding for education (UNESCO OREALC, 2017a).

However, it is not enough to increase expenditure alone, as the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunities states. There are at least three other government transformations that need to advance in parallel to ensure greater impact: improving expenditure efficiency, promoting innovation, and prioritizing inclusion (International Commission on Financing Global Educational Opportunities, 2016).

The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made the scenario more complex: in a context of large-scale school closures, implementing remote education measures and managing the return to face-to-face education has demanded an increase in resources, while the economic contraction (see **Chapter 1**) has impacted the coffers of the different governments (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

The United Nations has warned that, to prevent the current learning crisis from becoming a generational catastrophe, national authorities and the international community must protect education financing by mobilizing domestic resources, preserve the share of education as a priority in budgets, reduce any

inefficiencies in education expenditure, and improve international coordination and aid mechanisms (UN, 2020).

An extraordinary document was issued as part of the Global Education 2020 Meeting to consider and analyze the impact of the pandemic on achieving SDG4. The document acknowledges that the additional costs of achieving SDG4 have increased by a third as a result of the crisis, while the upward trend in international aid to education is in danger of being halted or reversed. For this reason, countries are warned that educational funding needs to be protected as a priority in order to have continued funding to enable recovery (GEMR, 2020b).

In November 2021, through the Paris Declaration, more than 40 UNESCO Member States called on governments to protect education investment to address the crises and educational inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sustaining the minimum funding thresholds incorporated in the Education 2030 Framework for Action were the main proposals for responding to the pandemic recommended in the Declaration, as well as the allocation of national stimulus packages to education, particularly towards targeted support for marginalized learners' school (re-)enrolment, learning recovery and socio-emotional well-being, development of skills for employment, and increase the volume, predictability, and effectiveness of international aid to education.

All these agreements demonstrate the importance of monitoring the resources allocated to education as a key tool for moving towards inclusive, equitable quality education and creating the conditions for expanding lifelong learning opportunities. Although all sources of funding—both public and private, national and international—play a decisive role in education, government resources are the main and most important source of education investment and, therefore, the central focus of monitoring.

Education investment over the last two decades

First, it is important to explore medium-term funding trends in the region, taking the last twenty years as a framework. **Figure 8.1** displays the evolution in Latin

Figure 8.1. Education expenditure as a proportion of total government expenditure (SDG indicator 1.a.2) and as a proportion of GDP (SDG indicator 1.a.gdp) (in %), change in per-capita GDP, base year 2000 (base 100). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
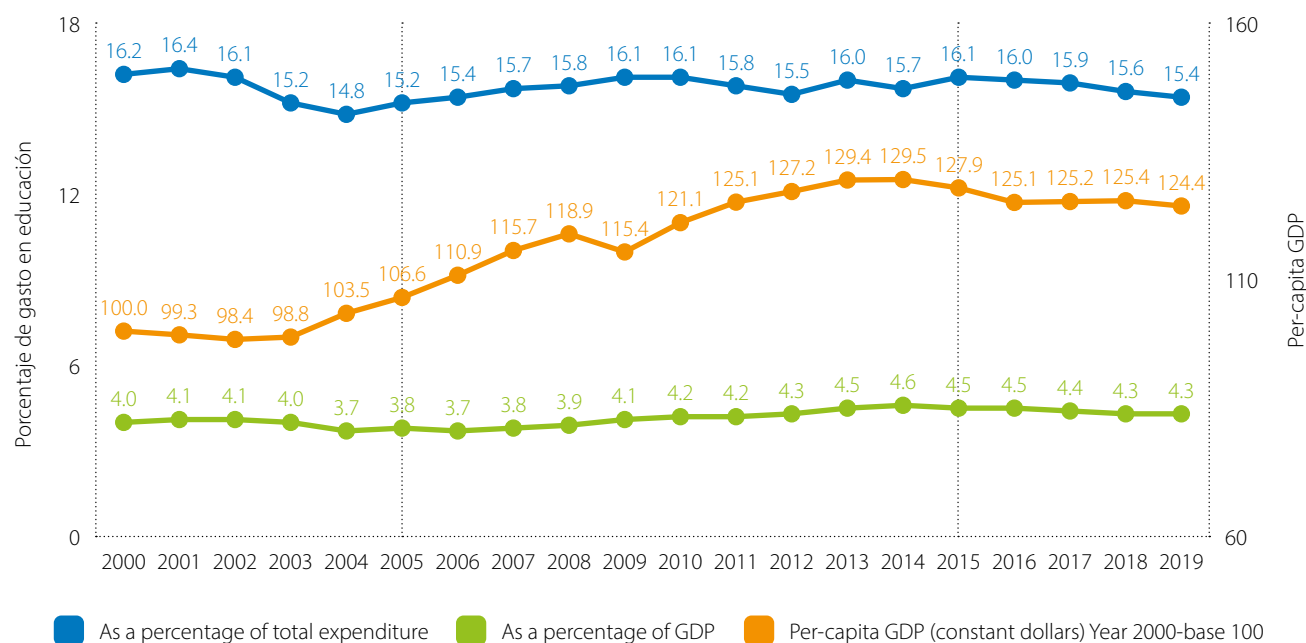
Note: For simple averages of education expenditure as a percentage of total public expenditure, data from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay were used. For education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, data were also available for Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Anguilla. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. The GDP estimate is for the region.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). CEPALSTAT statistical databases and publications, available at https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/.

America and the Caribbean of two key indicators of countries' financial effort for education: education expenditure as a proportion of GDP and total public expenditure.

The figure presents three different periods: the first, from 2000 to 2004, was a period of relative decline in education investment, coinciding in the early years with a slight decrease in the per-capita GDP indicator and, from 2003 onwards, with the beginning of the region's expansionary economic cycle. By 2004, the share of education investment as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of total public expenditure reached its lowest value in the last two decades.

The period from 2005 to 2014 was a decade of expansion for the region's economies, when average per-capita GDP increased by 25%. During these years, education investment grew in relative terms (from 3.7% to 4.6% of GDP, and from 14.8% to 15.7% of total public expenditure). A first phase of increase in both indicators (2004-2009) and a second phase in which education investment grew in terms of GDP can be

recognized within the period, but not in relation to total public expenditure.

Finally, the five-year period from 2015 to 2019 was marked by a further drop in the financial effort for education. At the same time, that per-capita GDP growth in the countries stalled, even with some tendency to decline, education expenditure as a percentage of GDP and of total public expenditure also halted and then declined.

A disaggregation of the data for each of the subregions (**Figure 8.2**) reveals some particular characteristics. In the Caribbean, the relationship between economic growth and education expenditure exhibits a different profile from the behavior observed in Latin America. The beginning of the period shows relatively high levels of financial effort for education (18.5% of total public expenditure and 4.7% of GDP in 2001), which drops in the face of the economic growth of the period 2000 to 2006. Around 2008, an education expenditure expansion cycle began which lasted until 2014, especially in relation to GDP. In the last five years, there

Figure 8.2. Education expenditure as a proportion of total government expenditure (SDG indicator 1.a.2) and as a proportion of GDP (SDG indicator 1.a.gdp) (in %), change in per-capita GDP, base year 2000 (base 100). Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
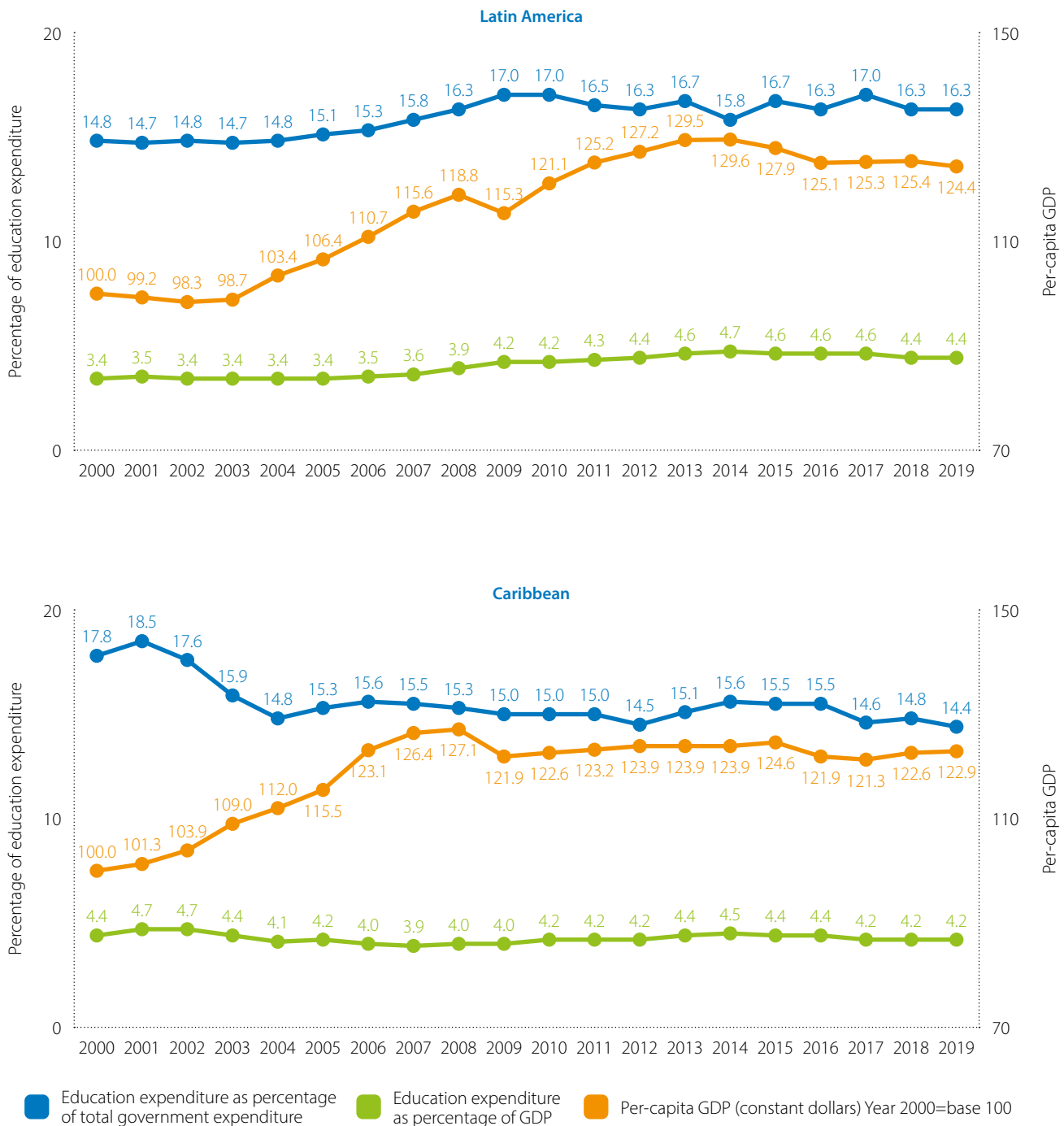
Note: For simple averages of education expenditure as a percentage of total public expenditure, data for Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago (Caribbean), Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay (Latin America) were used. To estimate education expenditure as a percentage of GDP for the Caribbean, data were also available for Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Anguilla. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years. The GDP estimate is for each region.

Data sources: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021) and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Statistical databases and publications, available at https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/.

was a drop in the financial effort indicators, which in this case was more marked for the indicator related to total public expenditure.

In Latin America, on the other hand, the cycle of economic expansion and the increase in the financing effort were simultaneous. In the case of the GDP-related indicator, this series had an increasing trend until 2014 (it went from 3.4% to 4.7% in ten years), after which it remained relatively stable until 2017 and fell in the final years of the period. The indicator on total public expenditure grew steadily until 2010, when a decade of instability began that ended with a downward trend.

Educational investment since the inception of the SDG4 - Education 2030 Agenda

Taking the two decades analyzed as a reference, education funding during the last five years takes on similar characteristics in both regions: they are years of stability or decline in the financial effort for education indicators. Economies have not grown in recent years, but education expenditure has grown at a slower rate in real terms than in previous five-year periods. With regard to GDP, there has been a decline in both subregions, and particularly in the Caribbean. The financial effort as a percentage of total public expenditure has also declined.

This scenario contains somewhat disparate situations among countries. First, **Figure 8.3** presents education expenditure as a proportion of GDP indicator. Country trends in relation to this indicator are evenly distributed: Eighteen countries have increased education expenditure and 15 have decreased it.

Moreover, inequalities between countries are observed to have increased over the period: the difference between the ten countries with the highest and lowest level of investment, relative to GDP, was 2.7 points in 2015 and 3.3 in 2019. In other words, during the last five years, the gap between countries that allocate more

Figure 8.3. Education expenditure as a proportion of GDP (SDG indicator 1.a.gdp) by country. 2015-2019
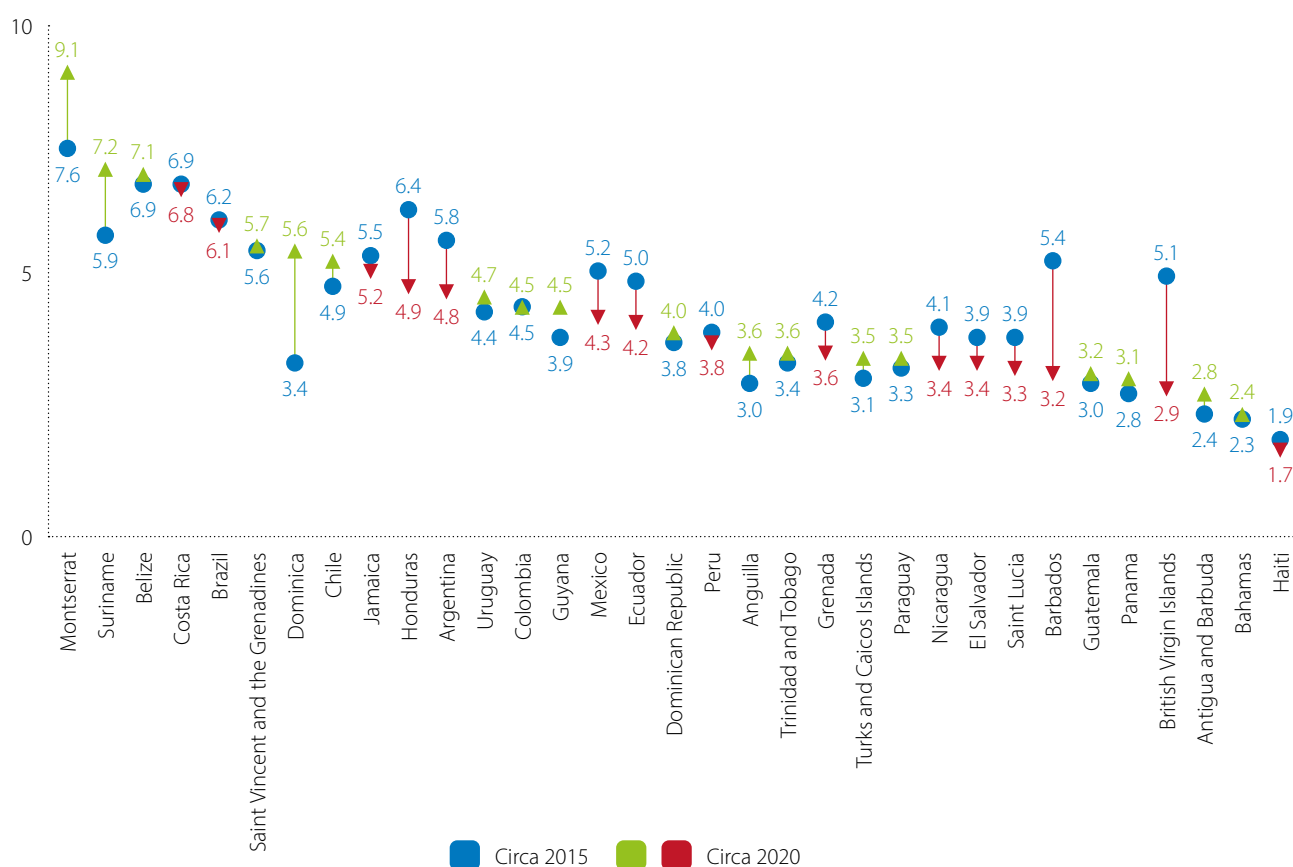
Note: Years circa 2019 used data for 2019, except for Anguilla, Brazil, Chile, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, St. Vincent, and the Grenadines (2018). For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Antigua and Barbuda (2016). Data for Monserrat, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Uruguay (2015) were estimated from linear projections of adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

resources to education and those that allocate less has widened.

Second, **Figure 8.4** analyzes trends in education expenditure as a proportion of total public expenditure. This indicator also reveals a heterogeneous scenario with profound inequalities between countries, although in this case it should be noted that most countries show a downward trend. Five of the six countries that allocate the highest proportion of public resources to education are Central American.

To complement the analysis of these indicators, the question arises as to how much the number of resources with which each country funds its education system has varied in real terms, *i.e.*, to what extent there have been changes in the total resources allocated to the sector. To this end, **Figure 8.5** analyzes the percent change in education expenditure, expressed in constant values, between 2015 and 2019. On average, countries invested 10% more resources in education in 2019 compared to

2015; however, variations between countries have been very marked. A particularly worrisome fact is that in five countries in the region with available information (Mexico, Ecuador, Bermuda, Argentina, and Barbados), the drop in education investment between 2015 and 2019 exceeded 10% in constant terms.

As mentioned, the Education 2030 Framework for Action defines recommended minimum thresholds for public education funding, expressed as a proportion of GDP or total public expenditure. **Figure 8.6** ranks countries by these two indicators, highlighting the areas that reflect compliance with these minimum thresholds.

Of the 31 countries with data available for 2015, 10 were identified as not reaching any of these minimum funding values. Most of them are Caribbean or Central American countries. By 2019, only one of these 10 countries surpassed the financing threshold recommended by the Education 2030 Framework for Action: Dominica increased public expenditure as a

Figure 8.4. Education expenditure as a proportion of total public expenditure (SDG indicator 1.a.2) by country. 2015-2019
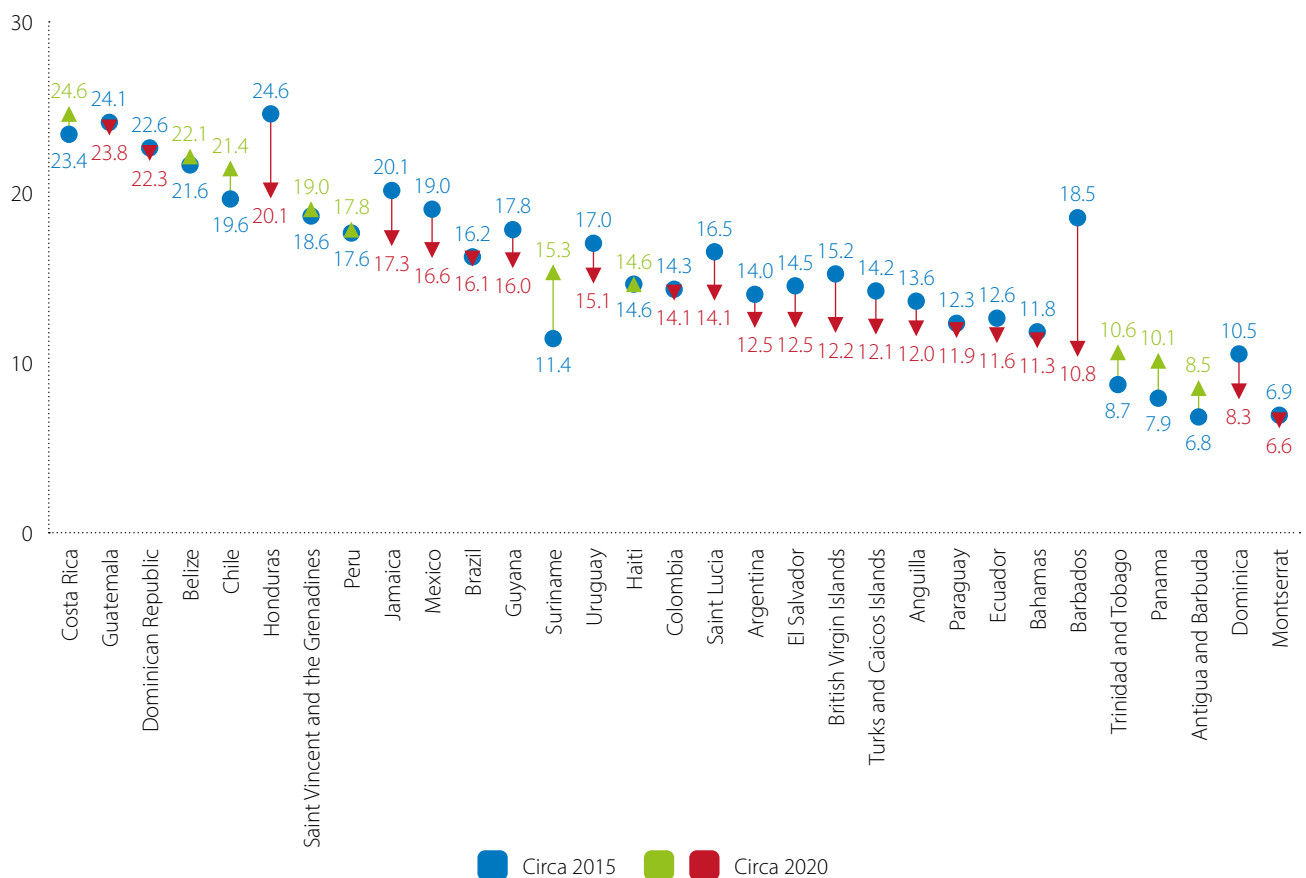
Note: Years circa 2019 used data for 2019, except for Brazil, Chile, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2018). For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2014) and Antigua and Barbuda (2016). Santa Lucia (2015) data were estimated from linear projections of adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 8.5. Percent change in education expenditure in constant PPP dollars (in percentage points). 2015-2019
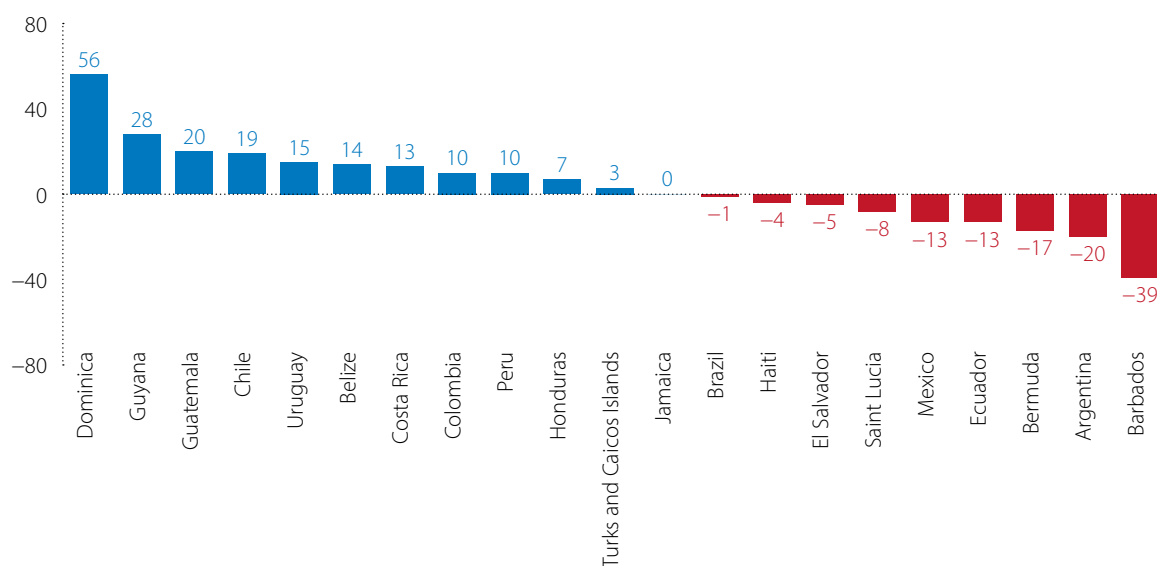
Note: Years circa 2019 used data for 2019, except for Brazil, Chile, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Mexico (2018), and Bermuda (2017). For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Bermuda (2014). The values for Barbados and Uruguay (2015) were estimated from linear projections of adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

proportion of GDP from 3.4% to 5.6%. At the same time, three countries—all in the Caribbean region—fell back in the levels of financing achieved, resulting in 12 countries that did not reach the suggested values.

Resource allocation in education

In terms of education financing, it is important to monitor not only the total educational investment of countries, but also the way in which the resources are used. Although this is an area of analysis that in part goes beyond a quantitative approach based on comparable indicators, incorporating certain perspectives that contribute to understanding this aspect of financing is possible.

One of them has to do with resource allocation among education levels. One way of doing this is through education expenditure per student (SDG indicator 4.5.4), which considers the total resources allocated to the level in relation to the enrollment to which they are destined. This allows us to identify each country's investment priorities, and which levels are the most neglected in terms of access to resources. This analysis focuses on resource distribution between pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

Each triangle in **Figure 8.7** shows the extent to which education expenditure is balanced between education

levels, in relation to size in terms of the number of students. The more the shape resembles an equilateral triangle, the greater the balance between education levels, while the more distant vertices may indicate situations such as higher costs involved in the level.

With a few exceptions, resource distribution between levels has not changed over the period: the blue (corresponding to 2015) and red (2020) lines coincide almost in their entirety in each representation. This means that in those cases where there was a greater expansion of enrollment in pre-primary and secondary education—as analyzed in **Chapter 2**—the level of expenditure at each level seems to have kept pace with this expansion.

On the other hand, recognizing the different resource allocation priorities among countries is interesting. For example, in some cases, pre-primary education receives—depending on the number of students at this level—a lower proportion of funds than primary and secondary education. This may be associated with private sector participation in the supply of this level: in this group of countries, an average of 45.3% of the children enrolled in pre-primary education attended private institutions, a value much higher than the 24.9% in primary education and 24.5% in secondary education,

Figure 8.6. Education expenditure as a proportion of GDP (SDG indicator 1.a.gdp) and as a proportion of total public expenditure (SDG indicator 1.a.2) by country. 2015-2019
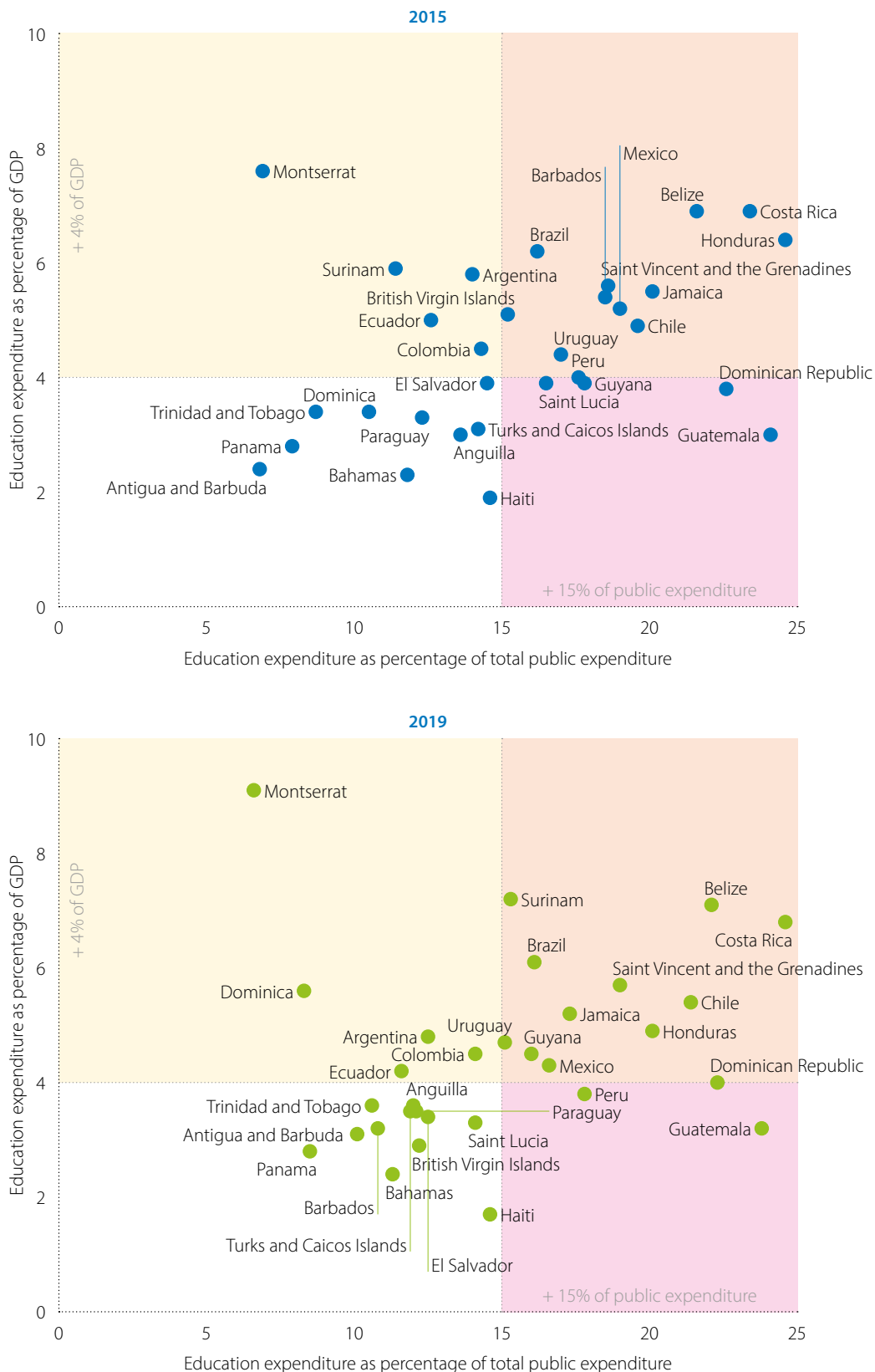
Note: Years circa 2019 used data for 2019, except for Brazil, Chile, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2018), and Anguilla, for expenditure as a percentage of GDP (2018). For the years around 2015, values from that year were used except for Antigua and Barbuda (2016). 2015 data for St. Vincent and the Grenadines were estimated from linear projections of adjacent years, and for expenditure as a percentage of 2015 GDP for Montserrat, St. Lucia and Uruguay.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 8.7. Education expenditure per student as a proportion of per-capita GDP (SDG indicator 4.5.4) by level of education. 2015-2020

Argentina
13
12
17 14
23 16

Belize
17
16
26 15
26 17

Chile
22
19
17 15
19 18

Costa Rica
18
10
23 21
24 26

Dominica
10
3
19 15
26 21

Ecuador
31
25
5 9
7 11

El Salvador
11
8
13 13
13 15

Guatemala
15
12
5 10
6 13

Turks and Caicos Islands
16
14
17 5
23 15

British Virgin Islands
0
0
14 7
16 9

Jamaica
5
5
28 22
29 23

Montserrat
32
29
30 12
31 15

Paraguay
13
11
12 12
14 14

Peru
13
12
14 11
15 13

Dominican Republic
8
8
13 13
13 17

Saint Lucia
3
0
20 12
21 13

Uruguay
13
12
14 11
15 14

Promedio
13
12
18 15
18 15

Legend:
Pre-primary
Secondary   Primary

■ Circa 2015   ■ Circa 2020

Note: Years circa 2019 used 2019 data, except for Chile and Turks and Caicos Islands (2018), St. Lucia in pre-primary education (2020), and Mexico in primary and secondary education (2018). For the years circa 2015, values from 2015 were used except for Paraguay and Uruguay (2016), and for Barbados in primary education (2016). The 2015 values for Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands in pre-primary education, and Barbados in secondary education (2015) were estimated from linear projections of adjacent years. The highlighted triangle includes countries' average values and references for interpreting each vertex.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

according to the latest available data.[1] In other cases, however, there seems to be a certain prioritization of resource allocation at this stage of education, as in Ecuador, Guatemala, and Chile.

Another important aspect of expenditure composition refers to classification by object, which enables the understanding of the main expenditure allocations and whether there have been structural changes in the period analyzed.

Figure 8.9 presents this information for the last decade by education level. In 2019, it can be seen

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1 Information obtained from the UIS database (updated in September 2021).

Box 8.1

Education funding and the COVID-19 pandemic

The outbreak of the pandemic has generated an unprecedented education funding crisis. Public budgets are strained by the decline in economic activity and the need to address urgent needs in areas such as health, employment, and social protection (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

The preliminary data available for some countries in the region allow a first approximation of the impact on education funding. In the set of eleven countries with 2020 data, education expenditure as a proportion of GDP increased from 4.3% to 4.6% (UIS database; update as of September 2021). This trend is expected to be observed in the future in other countries as well, since it is a behavior that is typical of the current economic situation. In general, in the first years of a crisis, GDP tends to fall more rapidly than education expenditure, since the latter includes structural components that make it less flexible in the short term, such as teachers' salaries. It is therefore important to monitor the future evolution of the indicator once the health crisis is over.

On the other hand, the scenario regarding the share of total public expenditure is more heterogeneous:

thirteen countries reduced the share of education expenditure in relation to total expenditure between 2019 and 2020. On average, this decline was from 15.5% to 14.3%. Conversely, in nine other countries, its share increased, on average, from 12.4% to 14.1%, a 1.7-point improvement (UIS database; update as of September 2021). In 2020, the number of countries below the minimum thresholds suggested by the Education 2030 Framework for Action increased to 14, considering only countries with data.

A survey by UNESCO, UNICEF, OECD, and the World Bank conducted in early 2021 reveals that 42% of countries report that they were anticipating an increase in public education expenditure for that year, and the increase would mainly focus on increasing running costs. It reported a forecast of increased resources for school meals, conditional cash transfers, and other types of student aid, such as scholarships or subsidies (UNESCO OREALC and UNICEF, 2022).

In the coming years, countries face the challenge of expanding the financial effort in education, increasing the magnitude of the resources invested and generating more efficient expenditure strategies, an essential condition for implementing actions to reverse the deepest impacts of the pandemic and accelerate improvement processes.

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that expenditure distribution by object is, in country averages, similar among education levels. There is a greater weight of capital expenditure in tertiary education, and also a greater proportion of resources are used for non-salary running costs in pre-primary and tertiary education.

The evolution of the time series reveals some changes in the last five years compared to the previous period. During 2010-2014, an increase in the capital expenditure share is seen at all education levels, with variations approaching two percentage points. The last five years, however, have been marked by a systematic reduction in the allocation of funds to capital expenditure, in much greater proportions. Consequently, in most cases the 2018 and 2019 values are the lowest for the period.

Conversely, there is an increase in the share of non-salary running costs in the internal composition of education expenditure in pre-primary, primary, and secondary education. This increases steadily over the

period 2015 to 2019. This behavior is more pronounced in the secondary education sector, where capital expenditure has been more affected.

Governance of education systems: Policy trends between 2000 and 2015

The Buenos Aires Declaration established a triple commitment, in which States committed to: (i) strengthening and modernization of the institutional frameworks and governance of educational systems in our countries, so that they may promote accountability and transparency, and strengthen the participation of all partners involved at all levels of the education system. ii) advocating for the strengthening of quality public education as a guarantor for building democracy and fairer societies, adopting lifelong learning as the organizing principle of education; and iii) maintain, optimize, and, progressively increase funding for education in our countries, in accordance with the national context, and in keeping with the economic, social and cultural rights of our citizens.

Box 8.2

Monitoring household education expenditure

Although national governments assume most of the costs associated with sustaining educational activities, families are a relevant stakeholder when it comes to analyzing the resources invested in the sector. For this reason, having information on the volume and characteristics of this investment is key to monitoring education funding.

Households allocate part of their income to support school attendance. More generally, they do so for the most basic items, such as clothing, school supplies and materials, but many also invest in private education fees or extracurricular educational activities, among others.

In this sense, the magnitude of the resources allocated by families to education depends on certain structural conditions, the most important of which is the level of participation and the method of government investment to the extent that the State guarantees the existence of free education services and implements policies for the distribution

of education resources, access opportunities are democratized, particularly in compulsory education.

On the contrary, the greater the investment in education required from households to ensure school attendance, the more inequalities are likely to emerge. In the case of higher education, this relationship between State and household participation is more complex, since strong State participation with low coverage at this level can result in a regressive investment, since it favors social sectors with the greatest purchasing power, who have the most widespread access to this education level.

The availability of comparable information for household investment in education is limited in the region. As shown in **Figure 8.8**, only eight countries have sufficient data to analyze the evolution of this expenditure over the last five years. In this area, it is necessary to increase regional monitoring capacities, expand the number of countries that report this data and improve the quality of it, in order to contribute to the knowledge of the extent to which the conditions for democratizing access opportunities are guaranteed.

Figure 8.8. Household education expenditure as a proportion of per-capita GDP by education level. 2015-2020

Note: For the years circa 2019, values from 2019 were used except for Chile and Mexico (2018), and Colombia (2017). For data circa 2019 for tertiary education in El Salvador and Peru, 2017 data were used. For the years circa 2015, values from 2014 were used. The 2015 values for Barbados in primary and secondary education, and for Peru in tertiary education, were estimated from linear projections of adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Figure 8.9. Percentage of education expenditure in public institutions by object and education level. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2010-2019

Pre-primary

Year	Other running costs	Salary costs	Capital expenditure
2010	12.3	80.0	7.8
2011	11.9	81.3	6.8
2012	12.1	79.6	8.4
2013	12.9	76.7	10.4
2014	18.2	73.4	8.4
2015	17.4	73.4	9.2
2016	17.7	74.4	8.0
2017	17.8	75.3	6.9
2018	19.3	74.5	6.2
2019	20.3	73.4	6.3

Primary

Year	Other running costs	Salary costs	Capital expenditure
2010	14.1	79.6	6.3
2011	13.3	80.4	6.3
2012	13.2	79.1	7.7
2013	14.1	77.7	8.3
2014	14.4	77.5	8.1
2015	14.2	78.3	7.6
2016	15.3	78.3	6.4
2017	13.9	78.5	7.6
2018	17.4	77.3	5.3
2019	17.1	77.4	5.4

Secondary

Year	Other running costs	Salary costs	Capital expenditure
2010	10.5	80.7	8.8
2011	11.1	80.1	8.8
2012	11.5	78.6	9.9
2013	12.3	76.9	10.8
2014	13.3	76.9	9.8
2015	13.1	77.2	9.6
2016	13.5	79.3	7.2
2017	13.6	79.3	7.2
2018	17.2	76.6	6.2
2019	18.0	76.9	5.2

Tertiary

Year	Other running costs	Salary costs	Capital expenditure
2010	25.2	65.0	9.8
2011	27.6	63.2	9.2
2012	23.3	67.4	9.3
2013	23.5	66.7	9.8
2014	23.6	65.8	10.6
2015	22.3	66.0	11.7
2016	23.5	66.2	10.3
2017	23.1	65.9	11.1
2018	20.5	67.9	11.6
2019	23.9	66.6	9.5

Running costs

Legend: ■ Capital expenditure   ■ Salary costs   ■ Other running costs

Note: These values are the countries' simple averages with information available for the period. Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Uruguay. The data missing from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5 (accessed 1 December 2021).

Box 8.3

Education funding mechanisms that promote equity

The 2030 Agenda central principles include the reduction of inequalities and the promotion of equity, which are expressed in the principle of *leaving no one behind*. SDG4 echoes these challenges and calls for ensuring inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. In this vein, the SDG4 monitoring framework included a thematic indicator (SDG indicator 4.5.3) in its target 5 on equity, which aims to capture the existence of funding mechanisms to reallocate education resources to disadvantaged populations.[*]

This indicator currently lacks a calculation and reporting methodology. A recent Global Education Monitoring Report policy brief proposes a four-category framework of funding policies and programs that can improve equity in education: (i) global financing mechanisms to local governments or schools to cover salaries and operating needs; (ii) grants provided to schools in disadvantaged areas or that have disadvantaged students to finance development actions; (iii) education policies and programs that provide resources directly to students and their families, such as tuition fee waivers, scholarships, and in-kind transfers; and (iv) broader social policies also targeting disadvantaged students and their families, such as unconditional and conditional cash transfers with an education component (GEMR, 2021).

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have mechanisms that fall within these analysis categories and some of them have been modified during the recent validity period of the SDG4-Education 2030 Agenda. Some examples are reviewed in this box.

Global mechanisms for resource distribution to local government levels include Brazil's Basic Education Maintenance and Development Fund (*Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica*, FUNDEB). This fund, in force since 2007, consists of resource contributions from the three levels of government: central, States, and municipalities, which are redistributed, under certain parameters,

to reduce inequalities between municipalities. The central government provides additional resources to supplement State funds that fail to reach a minimum level of per-pupil expenditure. The FUNDEB was renewed and made permanent in 2020. An increase in the central government's contribution was also implemented, which gives the mechanism a greater countervailing power.

In most countries in the region, financial resources for teacher recruitment and salary payments are not distributed to schools, but are administered at some central level, whether national or subnational. In this sense, teacher allocation mechanisms and remuneration criteria incorporating equity goals can also be considered as part of these financing mechanisms. Peru is one such example: in 2013, the Teacher Reform Law (*Ley de Reforma Magisterial*) established a remuneration system based on an eight-step teaching scale with a series of additional allowances for teachers who perform under difficult conditions. The law specifically provided for additional allowances for teachers working in rural areas, border areas, and single-teacher, bilingual, and multi-grade educational institutions. In 2017, a monthly allowance was incorporated for teachers working in a set of highly vulnerable districts, and an additional incentive was put in place, in addition to those envisaged in the reform for teachers working in rural or border areas.

An exception to the central administration of the teacher payroll is the case of Chile, which has a mechanism for allocating resources to schools through a per-pupil subsidy system, in place since the 1980s. Private schools, on the other hand, receive the resources and hire the teachers directly. The amount of the subsidy varies by education level, modality, and type of school day, and a higher subsidy is also granted to schools in rural areas. In 2008, an additional funding mechanism was included for socioeconomically vulnerable students, called the Preferential School Subsidy (*Subvención Escolar Preferencial*, SEP). Educational establishments receive these additional resources for students in conditions of social vulnerability, and an additional amount for a concentration of students in this condition. The condition of vulnerability was defined for those students from the 40% lowest-income households. In 2015, the Inclusion Law (*Ley de Inclusión*) extended the SEP benefit to students from

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[*] For more information on national cases of education funding, see IDB (2020a), SITEAL, UNESCO and IIEP (2020), and Rezende (2020).

households within the 80% lowest-income bracket, although with differential amounts according to the vulnerability bracket.

Finally, another mechanism widely used in the region is that of cash transfers to families, which in some cases have education-related conditions. Latin American countries have been pioneers in the implementation of these programs since the 1990s. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, these programs experienced significant growth following their inclusion in national response plans (Rubio *et al*., 2020). While the main goal of recent programs has been to compensate for the loss of family income during the crisis, some initiatives have had an explicit educational component. ECLAC's Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin

America and the Caribbean portal shows different experiences in this regard. For example, Bono Familia (Family bonus) of the Plurinational State of Bolivia was created to help feed the children of low-income families who would not have access to school breakfast during the quarantine period. Colombia increased payments to the Jóvenes en Acción (Youth in Action) program, which supports young people in poverty and vulnerability conditions, so that they can continue their technical, technological, and professional studies. For its part, Jamaica included specific cash transfers to support the students' return to school for those who are part of the Program of Advancement Through Health and Education (For more information, please visit the website: https:// dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/index.php)

Achieving SDG4 requires combining adequate public financing conditions with strong government capacities to translate those resources into consistent and systemic actions. Governance is a key axis that brings together the multiple challenges outlined in this report. Most educational policies are inviable or unsustainable without State capacities of a legitimate and democratic government of education systems. This chapter presents some of the recent trends in the region and the open challenges in terms of State capacities for education governance.

One of the dominant trends in regional education system management has been the drive towards different education decentralization models since the 1990s. Between 1992 and 1995, federal countries such as Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil implemented policies to transfer school management to their federal states, and in the 1980s Chile embarked on the municipalization of education. Other countries have delegated school management to different government levels, such as Colombia to the Certified Territorial Entities, Peru or the Plurinational State of Bolivia to their departments, or Belize to the school network level.

While many countries with smaller populations maintained centralized management structures, the more populous countries opted strongly for decentralization to subnational levels of government. This process was part of a general trend towards the decentralization of public management as a mechanism to return capacities to local governments in search of greater efficiency in public expenditure

and more direct accountability (Eaton, 2004). In many cases, however, decentralization generated greater systemic fragmentation and imposed new coordination challenges due to the threat of greater inequality in education resources and outcomes (Bellei *et al*., 2019).

Faced with these challenges, the 2000s saw the emergence of new public management recentralization processes in Latin America (Falleti, 2010; Dickovick, 2011). This did not necessarily entail schools being transferred back to the central level, but was expressed in new governance logics that reinforced regulation, financing, and incentive policies from the central level. Some of the policies mentioned in the different chapters of this report were part of this recentralization process, such as the large compensatory programs, curricular reforms, and the creation of national agencies to evaluate the quality of education.

Public agencies with greater capacity for coordination or systemic control also emerged. For example, Brazil created the Secretariat for Education Systems Articulation (*Secretaría de Articulación de los Sistemas de Enseñanza*) in 2011, Argentina made the resolutions of its Federal Education Council (*Consejo Federal de Educación*) mandatory in 2006, Peru promoted the Regional Coordination Office (*Oficina de Coordinación Regional*), and Chile developed the Superintendency of Education (*Superintendencia de la Educación*) to control the use of resources in schools and municipalities.

This trend towards centralization was paralleled by a broadening of the stakeholders involved in decision-making processes, which does not mean a return to

the previous scenario, but rather a restructuring of the region's education systems. Latin America and the Caribbean have not escaped a global trend towards governance modalities involving private sector companies that own and sell services to schools; unions with great power to negotiate teachers' working conditions and with a duration of leadership exceeding that of ministers of education; multilateral agencies, social organizations, and new think tanks that interact in new ecosystems of policy influence. The political economy of education reforms has become more complex in a context involving different stakeholders, interests, and government levels (UNESCO, 2021c).

Policy trends between 2015 and 2021

Education system governance trends are a topic not given enough attention in regional education research. A first view emerges from the perspective of the experts consulted in the survey, who note the low weight of this dimension of education governance in the public agenda in recent years, despite its relevance.

During the period 2015 to 2021, education systems management was not a main area of change. The most important decentralization processes in the majority of the countries took place years ago and discussions about which level of government should manage schools were put on the back burner. Some countries, however, made progress in new processes to restructure their education system governance organization. One of the most outstanding cases was that of Chile, which after several decades of municipal public education management, took a progressive step towards a new governance scheme that seeks to place decisions in a new intermediate management institutional framework, while maintaining a decentralized system (see **Box 8.5**).

The possibility of opening processes involving greater participation and broad consensus was also expressed in some countries with national education councils that have an important role in the policy agenda, such as Peru and Chile. In Brazil, the National Education Council played an important role in coordinating policies in the

Figure 8.10. Percentage of enrollment in private education by level. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. 2000-2020
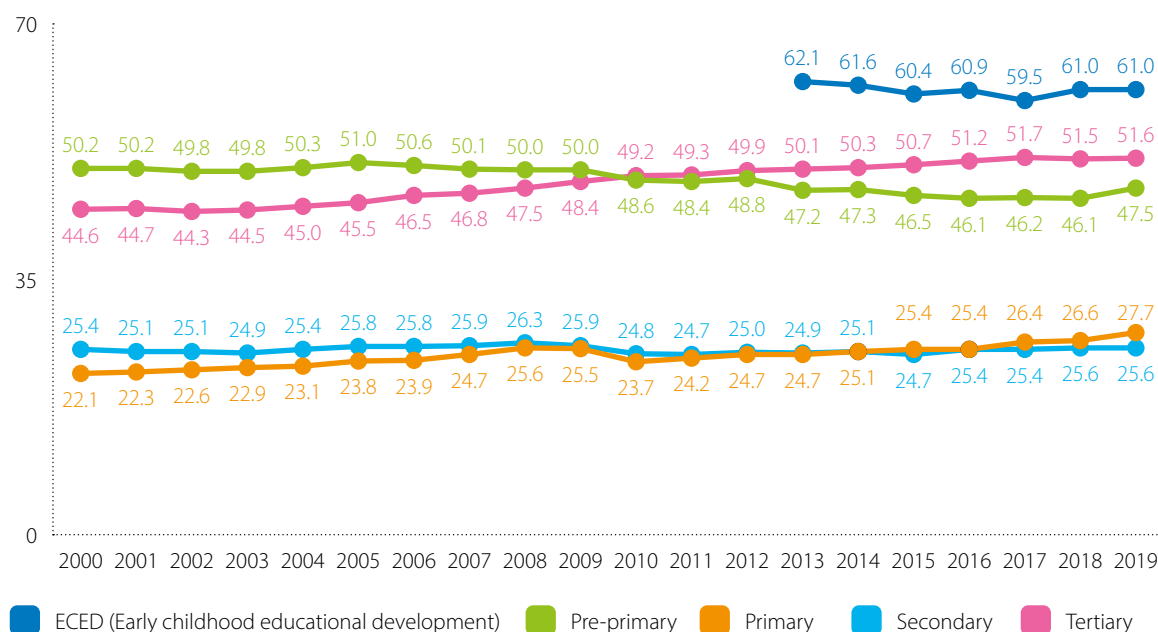
Note: The values are simple averages of the countries with information available for the period. Data from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela were used for all education levels, in addition to data from the following countries: Anguilla (pre-primary, primary), Bahamas (pre-primary, primary, secondary), Barbados (pre-primary, primary, secondary), Belize (pre-primary, primary, secondary), the Plurinational State of Bolivia (pre-primary, primary, secondary), Brazil (ECED, primary, secondary), Colombia (pre-primary, primary, secondary), Ecuador (pre-primary, primary, secondary), Grenada (pre-primary, primary, secondary), the Turks and Caicos Islands (pre-primary, primary, secondary) Montserrat (pre-primary, primary), Puerto Rico (ECED), the Dominican Republic (pre-primary), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (primary), Saint Lucia (ECED, pre-primary, primary), Suriname (pre-primary, primary, secondary) and Trinidad and Tobago (pre-primary). The missing data from the series were replaced with linear data projections from adjacent years.

Data source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS database, available at https://on.unesco.org/3vnhYT5.

Box 8.4

Expert survey results

In the survey of regional education policy experts (see Methodological Annex, p. 211), they were asked about the importance given to different dimensions of education governance at the national level in each country (Figure 8.11). First, they were asked about trends in education funding, distributive equity, and efficiency in resource allocation (see the previous section, "Education system governance"). Sixty-two per cent of the responses indicated that it had not been an important issue or that there had been no significant actions. Only 16% of respondents stated that during the period 2015 to 2021 it had been an issue involving significant policies.

The least important topic in the policy agenda— including all the responses to the questionnaire with experts—was the one referring to actions directed at the private education sector in each country. Only 9% of respondents reported significant actions in this area, while 65% stated that it had not been an important issue or had not involved concrete actions.

The next question asked about decentralization processes in education system management. Perhaps

as a reflection of policies that occurred mostly before the period consulted, 56% of the experts considered that this had not been a key area of action, while only 15% indicated that it had been an important area with concrete actions.

Then, they were asked about dialogue and the participation of different stakeholders in decision-making processes, in order to determine how consensus around educational policies is achieved. The answers were balanced: Forty-eight percent of the experts stated that this dimension had no or very low importance and 52% indicated that the participation of various stakeholders in decision-making was only partially important or very important to the public agendas of the countries in the region.

Finally, the survey explored governance quality and policies aimed at strengthening the states' education system management capacity. The vast majority of experts noted that this issue was not a priority on the education policy agenda in their countries (41%) or had no significant actions (24%). Only 8% of the experts indicated that governance quality had been an important area of actions in the period 2015 to 2021.

Figure 8.11. Importance of the policy themes by topic according to the experts in the countries across the region (in percentage of responses by importance category)
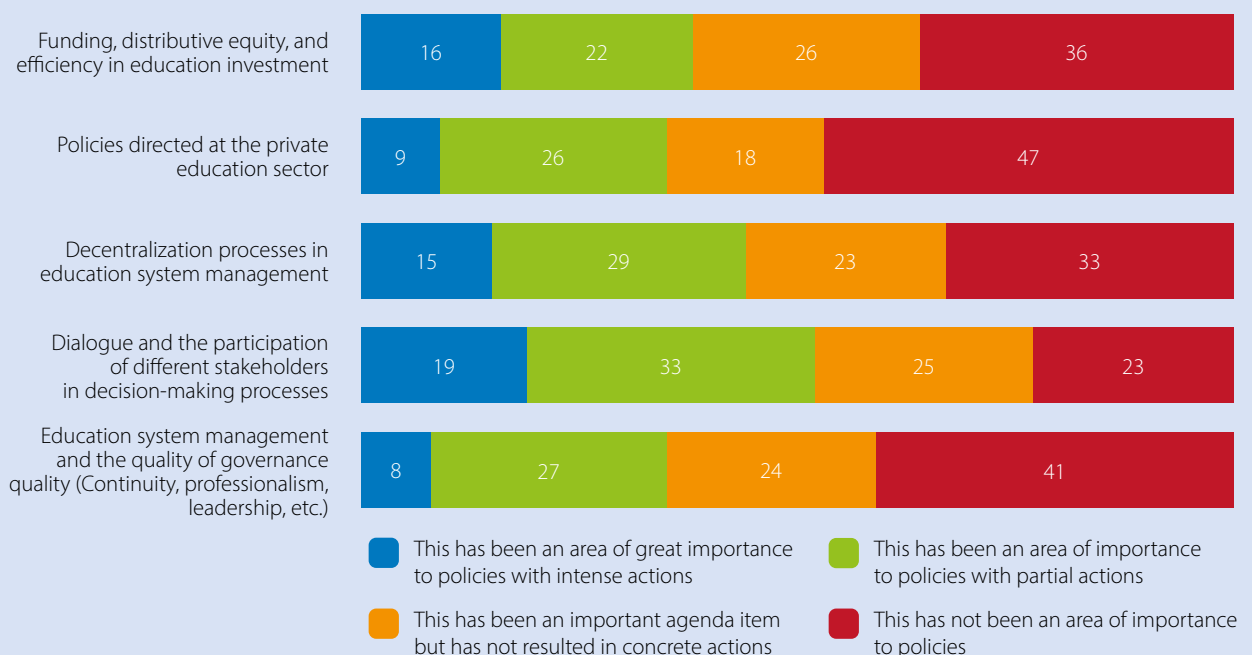
Data source: UNESCO OREALC. Expert survey for the SDG4-Education 2030 Regional Monitoring Report.

Box 8.5

New Public Education in Chile

The New Public Education (*Nueva Educación Pública*) project (Bellei, 2018) aims to generate a new institutional framework to manage public education in Chile, which for the past four decades had municipalities as its main administrators. Since then, and with the understanding that the country's municipalities are highly diverse and disparate in their capacities and resources, the need arose to create a new way of organizing and administering public education, in a project that became widely known as de-municipalization.

In this context, the New Public Education project aims to combine the administration of several municipalities in order to take advantage of scale economies and create local administration capacities in a single institution called the Local Education Service (*Servicio Local de Educación*). The plan aims to move from the 345 municipalities—that used to administer public education—to a total of 70 Local Education Services. A gradual approach has been adopted in view of the magnitude of this transfer; there are currently eleven local education services in operation, while by 2025 the migration to this new system should be complete.

midst of the pandemic. Countries such as the Bahamas (2018), the British Virgin Islands (2020), and Argentina (2020) launched their own national education expert councils in recent years.

[Education system management also includes privately managed education. This issue was identified as the least important in the education policy agenda among all those consulted in the expert survey. There is still a considerable gap in the regulation and organization of the private education sector in the region, which takes on historically consolidated forms in each country and does not seem to have been a topic of recent debate (Wolff, González and Navarro, 2002).

It is worth noting that privately managed education has a very disparate place in the region's education systems: while in Haiti and Chile it accounts for more than 50% of students, in Mexico it does not reach 10%. On the other hand, the proportion of students attending private schools over the past two decades has tended to grow in the region (Elacqua, Iribarren, & Santos, 2018) (**Figure 8.10**). At the primary education level, on average, there is a clear trend of an increasing proportion of students attending private schools, which increased from 22.1% to 25.4% between 2000 and 2015, reaching up to 27.7% in 2019. At the pre-primary and secondary education levels, the proportion of students enrolled in privately managed education has remained stable. Given that both levels are in full expansion in terms of students, however, this suggests that there has also been an increase in privately managed education at these levels. It is very likely that the greatest incorporation of new students—coming from traditionally excluded sectors—will attend public

schools and that, at the same time, there will be a shift of middle and upper sectors to private education.

This privatization process through school selection has been uneven in the countries across the region and has been matched by other parallel dynamics. In some countries, such as Colombia and Brazil, privatization has combined with new public-private partnerships and decentralization of the education system. In countries such as Peru, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, the phenomenon is based on the expansion of low-cost private schools with weak regulation (Verger, Moschetti, and Fontdevila, 2017).

The emergence of non-State stakeholders on the education scene is a central feature of recent years. As can be gathered from the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) 2021 report (UNESCO, 2021c), these stakeholders' presence crosses the entire system, in terms of provision, governance, regulation, and financing. These new, more complex and changing dynamics can generate greater participation processes; new demands from outside governments, such as social movements that organize around issues related to education; and potential new inequalities based on the different capacities for participation of private stakeholders according to the population's resources.

With the pandemic, trends toward privatization of the education system and the involvement of non-governmental stakeholders appear to have increased. In many countries in the region, privately managed schools had more pressure and autonomy to resume face-to-face classes than publicly managed schools. This may have generated new transfer processes to the private sector, which could be confirmed in the

statistics for the next few years. We could therefore be experiencing a new form of "privatization by disaster" (Verger, Moschetti and Fontdevila, 2017), with the understanding that public and private systems have responded differently in the face of the pandemic. The clearest example of this trend in the region is the virtualization of education, which has led to the emergence of a wide range of education services supplied by private providers, in a path that could lead to the commoditization of the right to education (Williamson and Hogan, 2020).

Another important chapter of education governance has been the generation of major programmatic agreements that express a long-term vision of education planning. Following the survey presented by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP UNESCO),[2] different strategic documents can be found that have been prepared with the participation of various stakeholders to define an educational course with specific targets (Table 8.1). These instruments serve different functions in different contexts. Some are ordinary, *i.e.*, they are planned— as a prototype, on a

five-yearly basis—and are part of the regular planning scheme, as in the case of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2017). On the other hand, some sectoral plans are new instruments, as in the case of Argentina (National Strategic Plan, 2021), or seek to take a longer-term view with a participatory perspective, as in the case of the Dominican Republic's ten-year plan.

Education planning has also been expressed in the regional coordination of certain initiatives (UIS, 2021c). Two outstanding cases correspond to the Central American Integration System (*Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana*, SICA), as an incipient regional governance process, and CARICOM's Human Resources Development Strategy (HRD).

A salient aspect in the area of education systems governance has been the development of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). Recent studies found important advances in the development and coordination of EMIS (Acevedo *et al.*, 2021). For example, the states of Pernambuco and Espírito Santo in Brazil managed to develop a digital data upload system that serves for educational decision-making, generating greater efficiency and equity in the use of resources

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2 Planipolis website, UNESCO, available at https://planipolis.iiep. unesco.org.

Table 8.1. National education plans for the five-year period 2015-2020 by country

Country	Regulation
Argentina	National Strategic Plan 2016-2021 *Argentina Enseña y Aprende* (Argentina Teaches and Learns).
Bahamas	Education policies declared by political parties and articulated in the National Development Plan (2016).
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Sectoral Plan for the Comprehensive Development of Education for Living Well (*Plan Sectorial de Desarrollo Integral de Educación para el Vivir el Bien*) 2016-2020.
Ecuador	Third National Plan (*Tercer Plan Nacional*) 2017-2020; Fourth National Development Plan (Cuarto Plan Nacional de Desarrollo) 2017-2021.
Honduras	Strategic Institutional Plan (*Plan Estratégico Institucional*) 2014-2018. Results-oriented with a public value approach.
Paraguay	*Plan Nacional de Educación* (National Education Plan) 2024.
Peru	Strategic Sectoral Multiyear Education Plan (*Plan Estratégico Sectorial Multianual de Educación*) 2016-2021.
Dominican Republic	Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (*Plan Estratégico del Ministerio de Educación*) 2017-2020; Ten-Year Education Plan (*Plan Decenal de Educación*) 2008-2018.
Saint Kitts and Nevis	The way forward for Skills Development in Saint Kitts and Nevis; Education for All: Embracing Change, Securing the Future. 2017-2021 Education Sector Plan.

Source: Authors.

Box 8.6

SICA and HRD, experiences in regional integration

SICA starts from the diagnosis that there is no alternative to integration, and that just like the problems, the solutions must be regional. SICA is a broad agreement that considers, among other dimensions, education, through the General Secretariat for the Central American Educational and Cultural Coordination Agency (SG-CECC). The member countries of SICA are: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic. These eight countries coordinate agreements and common frameworks for educational information surveys to follow up on various international commitments. During the pandemic,

the CECC developed a contingency plan to coordinate the different lessons learned by the region's countries and to develop strategies to meet SDG4.

The Human Resources Development Strategy (HRD) is an initiative that has resulted in the proposal of a shared, qualifications framework for the whole of CARICOM, which includes: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. This initiative aligns with SDG4 by striving for inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It considers ten levels that allow individuals, education and training providers, companies, and others to understand and compare the qualifications obtained in the countries of the region.

(Cavalcanti and Elacqua, 2018). Along these lines, some countries have made progress in the development of Early Warning Systems (EWS) to prevent school dropout using EMIS data (see **Box 2.8**). Improved monitoring of truancy in El Salvador served to significantly reduce school dropout in less than two years (El Salvador Ministry of Education, 2016).

The use of data is also important for combating corruption and increasing efficiency through transparency and accountability. A recent study identified seven experiences in the use of education indicators for this purpose: Improve your school (*Mejora tu Escuela*, Mexico), School file (*Ficha Escolar*, Guatemala), Education indicator analysis and early warning system (*Sistema de Análisis de Indicadores Educativos y Alerta Temprana*, Dominican Republic), the Synthetic Index of Educational Quality (*Índice Sintético de Calidad Educativa de Colombia*, ISCE, Colombia), School traffic light (*Semáforo Escuela*, Peru), EDU-Q Card (Peru) and Jujuy school reports (*Reportes de Escuela en Jujuy*, Argentina) (Brito, 2019).

These EMIS initiatives and accountability models, along with others surveyed in this report, highlight the possibilities that new technologies can offer education governance. The combination of strategies that generate systemic processes with universal coverage capacity, strategic vision, and reliable data for decision making can contribute to the modernization of public management.

Future challenges

State capacity building for education planning and public resource management is one of UNESCO's core working areas (IIEP, 2012). Capacity building is understood as the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain significant actions with strategic capacity (Hite and Grauwe, 2009).

Some previous studies have systematized the capacities that have the greatest impact on the quality of public policies. Weaver and Rockman (2015) highlight some central features: setting and maintaining priorities; focusing on the most effective resources; innovating when previous policies have failed; being able to impose losses on the most powerful groups and represent unorganized interests; coordinating conflicting goals to give them coherence; and ensuring the stability of policies to achieve impact.

A recent study analyzed the dimensions that contribute to improving subnational education systems in Latin America. After comparing 486 subnational education systems in six countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru), twelve cases were selected that had achieved sustained improvements in the 2005-2019 period in their educational indicators, especially in the quality of learning measured by the assessments. The research found that the selected cases shared a number of characteristics that highlight the importance of the governance quality of education systems. Some

of the most important features found were: giving long-term political priority to education; listening to the voices of students and teachers and generating genuine dialogues; defining clear and measurable goals and using data for decision making; building trust and prioritizing policy legitimacy; and enhancing meritocratic selection and professional training of State agents (Rivas and Scasso, 2020).

These approaches start from a theory of the complexity of education systems (Burns and Köster, 2016). Complex systems evolve in multilevel feedback processes that seek to reconcile over time the intrinsic contradictions between stakeholders and institutions (Sabelli, 2006). The combination of clarity in educational messages and targets with in-depth reach into the classroom strategy and process sustainability is highlighted as a formula for governance of complex education systems (Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen, 2018). Some authors also highlight the importance of building trust in the relationships between education policies and stakeholders, while emphasizing accountability mechanisms to develop lasting and effective governance capacities (Ehren and Baxter, 2021).

One of the most salient trends in the period analyzed in this report, however, has been the discontinuity of government actions in the very marked political changes context in several countries. This must be added to the interruption of face-to-face classes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and uncertainty about the future that this disruption has generated. To achieve systemic improvements in the fulfillment of SDG4, it is key to generate capacities for democratic education governance that can sustain the long and complex processes of education policies over time.

Education system governance is a necessary condition for the improvement of SDG4. The construction of pacts for education that generate consensus among various stakeholders is a fundamental way to strengthen educational actions as State policies (Tedesco, 2005). These processes seek to find and consolidate the points in common among the various stakeholders instead of accentuating the differences.

It should be noted that these considerations must be adapted to each particular context. The same occurs in relation to the decentralization of education system management, which, as has been seen, was a very strong trend in previous years. In the understanding of education system governance complexity, it is important to find the right combinations for each reality. Strategies with single, rigid territorial governance patterns meet with limited success due to an inflexible national legal and institutional framework that is poorly adapted to territorial diversity, endogenous capacities, internal mobilities, and heterogeneity. On the other hand, a complete decentralization of public territorial development strategies runs the risk of increasing inequality of opportunities between regions, thus exacerbating territorial disparities. For this reason, associating national and local policies for the co-construction of "territorial development systems" is recommended (Berdegué, Escobal and Bebbington, 2015; Modrego and Cazzuffi, 2015; Gaudin and Pareyón, 2020).

The creation of modern Education Management Information Systems is a fundamental piece of government machinery that combines local and national perspectives. Recent studies recommend taking advantage of the high technological development to generate comprehensive management platforms capable of interoperability between different educational information systems (Arias Ortiz *et al.*, 2021).

Finally, it should be noted that education system governance depends on the creation of professional teams in the ministries of education, selected on merit with adequate working conditions and continuity over time. Cases of improvement in subnational education systems such as the municipality of Sobral and the states of Ceará and Pernambuco in Brazil, Loncoche and San Nicolás in Chile, or Córdoba in Argentina share the common traits of long-term management capacity building (Rivas and Scasso, 2020). Capacity building for education system planning and governance is a key piece of the puzzle to achieve SDG4.

Conclusions of the Monitoring of SDG4 2015-2021: Ten Challenges for Addressing the Stagnation and Crisis

This regional report, which analyzes the 2015-2021 period, presents various challenges and threats to the fulfillment of the 2030 Education Agenda goals for Latin America and the Caribbean. These goals have faced several obstacles and a great deal of uncertainty, and all of this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The region's education systems face both old and new tensions in regard to guaranteeing the right to lifelong education for all. This overall vision of the region is complemented by a comparative perspective that shows certain inspiring paths by systems that have made significant progress and implemented noteworthy education policies.

The context of the 2015-2021 period has been conditioned by economic stagnation. Between 2014 and 2019, the economies of the region grew just 0.3%, the worst economic performance recorded since the 1930s. This halted a stage of significant GDP growth (2003-2014) that had favored progress in the area of education, impacting multiple indicators related to access, completion, quality and equity. The stagnation of the period analyzed was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to economic contraction equivalent to 7.7% of GDP in 2020 alone and had important ramifications for all aspects of social life, including the massive suspension of in-person learning for a long period of time.

Five major trends represent the 2015-2021 cycle for the region as a whole. The first is a historical-structural consolidation trend of the increase of completed education by the population, measured in years. In indicators such as In indicators such as adult literacy and highest educational level completed , adult literacy and highest educational level completed, the region presents growth that represents the continuation of long-term historical trends that do not seem to have been affected by specific situations.

The second is a positive trend in the improvement of certain educational indicators combined with a

decrease in inequalities. Specifically, access to pre-primary education increased. This outcome was more marked in rural areas and in the lowest-income quintiles. The indicators related to students who are over-age in primary and lower secondary education and completion rates of lower and upper secondary education also improved, particularly for the most disadvantaged population. This marks a decrease in the gaps in some key educational indicators, such as access and completion, and shows the importance of public policy interventions in terms of targeting the groups that present the greatest delays. In some cases, this involved new strategies for improving the quality and relevance of educational proposals in different social and cultural contexts, in addition to redistributing educational investment.

The third trend shows a slowing of the improvement of certain indicators that had been improving during the last few decades and that reached their ceiling in terms of growth over the past few years. Specifically, a minor increase can be seen in the lower secondary and upper secondary education completion indicators for the population as a whole between 2015 and 2020, as compared to previous five-year periods. A similar trend is observed in repetition rates at the primary education level, which do not follow the marked decrease observed during previous periods. These processes also have an internal logic given that, as they approach 100% compliance, it is more difficult to make improvements.

The fourth trend points to a concerning stagnation of key indicators such as educational inclusion in lower secondary education and learning quality assessments. A comparison between the 2013 and 2019 ERCE results shows that the region did not manage to improve outcomes for reading, mathematics and science. By contrast, between 2006 and 2013, there were clear improvements on the LLECE tests for the participating countries of the region. These learning achievements

are being threatened by the serious setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of education.

The fifth trend is an alarming increase of certain gaps at the tertiary level and the deepening of differentiated circuits in terms of the quality of programs on offer in both public and private schools. For example, access to tertiary education increased very slightly between 2015 and 2020 in the rural sector and the lowest-income quintile, while it increased much more in the urban sector and highest-income quintile. The gender gap, which points to more accelerated growth of women's access to tertiary education, continued to expand with marked segmentations associated with gender in some areas of training.

Several of these trends correlate to a concerning social and economic context in the region, and may also be partly due to the stagnation of education funding over the past five years. Between 2015 and 2019, education expenditure—as a percentage of total public expenditure—dropped from 16.1% to 15.4% in the region, and education—as a percentage of GDP—dropped from 4.5% to 4.3%. The economic crisis that many countries in the region are facing has generated a contraction of educational resources that must be urgently addressed in the coming years.

In addition, this period has been marked by a significant shift in governments in many countries of the region. These strong political changes, whether in contexts of weakness, instability or low professionalization, pose a threat to the continuity of education policies and the construction of solid governance capacities in educational systems. Medium- and long-term planning and consensuses that are passed from one administration to the next are necessary for creating professional technical teams and endowing political interventions with greater legitimacy and effectiveness.

This difficult context for education indicators was exacerbated by the pandemic. The suspension of in-person learning and the gap in access to and effective use of education resources, connectivity, priority curricular contents and pedagogical support in the home are factors that point to an increase in educational inequalities in the region. It is clear that it is not enough to simply reopen schools. The greatest challenge will involve combining initiatives aimed at bringing students with difficulties and those who have dropped out back into the school system with transformative policies designed to expand educational opportunities in a changing world (UNESCO *et al.*, 2021).

Education in Latin America and the Caribbean is at a decisive crossroads. The path to the SDG4 targets is still too long, and has become more uncertain. The historic and recent debts in regard to the exercise of the right to education as well as the new challenges that are emerging on mutually binding local and global scales must be addressed. The planet's very survival is at risk due to the trend in global warming. The workforce needs workers with new skills in order to deal with the era of automation and digitization without expanding inequalities. Educating active citizens to navigate uncertain spaces is part of a curricular approach that is still incipient in the majority of the countries of the region, but investments must be made if we are to decrease the enormous inequities that are so characteristic of the region.

This poses numerous questions looking forward to 2030: How can education systems be improved and changed and the groundwork laid for a sustainable, inclusive and peaceful future? How can new processes be designed that are characterized by full educational inclusion in such unequal societies? What kind of policies can change these perspectives and grow stronger over time, avoiding the fragmentation and discontinuity that characterizes the region?

The recent global report on the Futures of Education posits that such a complex era requires a new social contract for education (International Commission on the Futures of Education, 2021). It is necessary to reimagine the education of the future in order to ensure that no one is left behind. This means working together to develop ideas and design shared and interdependent futures that expand the spheres of social and educational justice as well as solidarity and collaboration. At the global, regional and country levels, guaranteeing the right to lifelong quality education entails reinforcing the vision of education as a public and common good (International Commission on the Future of Education, 2021).

This report has presented an analysis of the evolution of the main educational indicators that monitor the achievement of SDG4 in this report. It has also looked into the main education policy trends over the past twenty years. The revitalized and modernized role of the State continues to be central to the capacity to respond the demands that will construct the path towards truly inclusive education. This responds to differences using universal frames of reference and brings together equity and quality, to strengthen excellence without discrimination for everyone. Much can be learned from

the recent progress made on education policy in the region. Some countries have even made notable strides in their education indicators, including their ERCE test results. This is true for Peru—especially—and Brazil. Chile did not participate in the ERCE test, however, it presents higher than the average pathways and learning outcomes on the PISA tests for the region. Some subnational education systems also present notable improvement, including Ceará and Pernambuco in Brazil and Puebla in Mexico (Rivas and Scasso, 2020).

The educational challenges present in the region require a holistic and transformative vision that recovers the relevance, complexity and interoperability of education systems. The analysis of the progress made and the limitations of education policy agendas offered in each chapter enables the construction of a shared map that presents ten combined challenges.

The first is promoting the expanded vision of education as a human right. The right to education also involves the right to knowledge in its broadest sense, to a diversity of learning experiences and technological connectivity in education, which opens the doors to the contexts and needs of specific populations, recognizing their history, identity and complexity. The inclusion of a broad definition of education sustained by solid and engaging educational provision requires political will and technical support, adequate funding, distribution of resources that structurally and transparently favors the most disadvantaged populations and decided progress towards the beliefs of social justice and inclusion of all stakeholders in the educational system. In recent years, significant progress has been made on policies that favor educational inclusion and a shift towards the most marginalized sectors that must be reviewed, continued and reinforced. However, the new exclusions generated by the pandemic will require more comprehensive approaches. It is important to decisively accept that education is civic, cultural, social, economic and community policy at the same time. Furthermore, it is based on renewed contexts of cross-sector public policy coordination that reflect greater efforts to engage all students who are at risk of leaving school. It will be very important to guarantee the greatest possible access to in-person learning in the context of the pandemic, which continues to threaten the population's health.

Second, educational policies are key and can create major differences, but they are insufficient if they fail to embrace a broader perspective on economic development with social inclusion. Economic growth with inclusive development and redistribution to favor

greater equity is needed so that schools can develop their programs without the weight of basic social failings weakening their action. The recent economic cycle experienced by the majority of the countries in the region is not encouraging in that sense and must be subjected to an in-depth reframing process in the coming years. Coordinating education policy and other social policies in an effort to guarantee universal rights and social protection is key to progressing towards including the most disadvantaged members of society.

Third, continuous improvement of the quality of learning, which must be understood in terms of opportunities, processes, participation and learning outcomes, must start from this expanded vision of educational inclusion. There is sufficient evidence to support access expansion policies for early childhood and pre-primary education development programs; the creation of alternatives to repetition; promoting inclusive learning environments with teachers who have high expectations of all of their students and generate multiple support processes on their pathway; and encouraging family involvement in children's learning. These matters, which are based on scientific evidence, are increasingly central to policy agendas, but they still require better processes that can turn them into practice. It is also important to take note of the responses to the challenges of the pandemic. These include new forms of mutual understanding and cooperation among students, educators, families and communities. This contributes to expanding learning opportunities and improving outcomes using a wide range of formats and strategies.

Fourth, the curricular vision of most of the countries in the region is moving towards approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that are articulated around the skills that will allow students to take on 21st century challenges. This process must be expanded to achieve a vision of education that is centered on deep understanding, autonomous and critical thinking, global and local civic education, and creativity combined with scientific rationality that is sustained by ethics and humanism. However, it is important to note that curricular reforms are not limited to the regulatory level of the prescribed curriculum. Feedback processes must be combined with teaching practices, aligning curricula with educational materials, assessments, training and professional development for teachers as well as support programs for schools. A systemic perspective on the curriculum with a focus on students' overall wellbeing and development requires

programmatic robustness sustained by professional teams in education ministries that have continuity over time and listen to the voices of teachers and students. This has been achieved in a very partial and fragmented manner in the region and will be a key challenge in the coming years.

Fifth, the process of modernizing the teaching profession is at the heart of improved learning. The pandemic opened up new doors that could become opportunities for redesigning teaching and learning, based on the incorporation of digital technologies as a pedagogical support resource; curricular transformations that expand the understanding of key topics for educating new generations for the future; new forms of training assessment with quality feedback for learning processes; tutoring to promote situated support for students; project-based learning; and new groupings and reframings of time and space use beyond the classroom to expand and democratize learning opportunities. These emergent practices must be integrated into shared visions, appropriated by educational communities, as to be negotiable and not tied to passing innovation. In the coming years, the public policy capacity to converse new curricular and pedagogical dialogues with teachers is key to the efforts on taking up the lessons learned during the pandemic. Hybrid teaching methods may be a path to expanding educational inclusion, as long as progress is made towards reducing unequal access to and use of digital devices (ECLACS, 2022b, 2022a).

Sixth, improving the teaching profession is central to supporting and enhancing all of the actions that have been mentioned. In recent years, the education systems of several countries in the region have implemented policies designed to overhaul initial and in-service teacher training and professional careers. These efforts have often been interrupted by political shifts. Building consensus with all stakeholders, including technical representations and teachers' unions, will allow for the coordination of long-term policies that endow teaching with prestige. It is important to improve teachers' salaries while offering rigorous, quality initial training and a professional perspective on their career. Many people will join the teaching profession in the coming years. It will only be possible to move towards a virtuous circle of greater appreciation and demand for the profession if we create adequate training and labor conditions.

Seventh, lifelong learning is a goal that involves reinforcing youth and adult learning and education

programs in order to enhance their work opportunities and create virtuous connections between knowledge, disruptive societal changes and the transformation of professional profiles, occupations and tasks, along with work opportunities and spaces and their impact on the job market. However, this alone will not transform the role of knowledge and skills in a changing world. It is necessary to complement this process with a broader vision of education policy that goes beyond formal education and to incorporate new mechanisms of accreditation of knowledge and various ongoing training offerings for all ages.

Eighth, preparing students for the world of work involves taking a transformational perspective about secondary education as a whole, including synergies among secondary, technical, vocational education and training and other opportunities for higher education. Creating strong, inclusive and user-friendly learning environments with current, challenging curricula is key for allowing students to continue to study and trust in the knowledge that schools offer them for use in the world of work. Increasing information and vocational careers guidance mechanisms will allow people to design their education and work pathways for themselves. In addition, progress must be made with making training programs relevant and improving the quality of learning and the social recognition of technical and vocational education and training. The current demands of the business world and its contexts demand progress with developing training proposals that promote innovation and transferable skills.

Ninth, higher education must reassess its vision and structure so that it can provide a single purpose framework and diverse offerings that are attractive and relevant to different sectors of the population, including tertiary education. Accreditation is a key mechanism for guaranteeing the quality of these programs and the level of constant updating. The role of the State as the guarantor of free access and the enjoyment of education is also fundamental for guaranteeing equity and the role of higher education as a common good, with policies that generate inclusive alternative pathways for the diversity of contexts in the region. At the same time, it is important that the links between higher education, research, innovation and development are strong enough in a context in which governments will have to determine the strategic value of the sector for their nations' future.

Finally, all of these actions require increased funding for education and better allocation of resources, in

order to achieve the highest levels of efficiency and equity. State capacities are an inescapable and decisive foundation for turning public resources into educational opportunities, processes and outcomes. It is therefore important for reforms to focus on education system governance as well. Education policies require solid government capacities that are sustained over time in order to contribute robustness, continuity, feedback, legitimacy and efficacy to the actions. This challenge is broadly unmet in the majority of the countries of the region and at the subnational level, where a good number of the actions closest to the education system are managed. The developments of the past few years leave many unanswered questions about the continuity and legitimacy of State actions. Prioritizing education in the long term requires firm political decision and broad consensuses that inspire the confidence of a wide array of stakeholders in search of a shared educational future.

These ten challenges constitute a concrete set of recommendations for working at the regional and national levels. The next few years will be decisive for achieving the SDGs by 2030. The current scenario rings clear bells: proceeding at the current rate and taking account of the pandemic impact, the goals set will not be reached. The objective of this report is to clearly set out the challenges the region is facing and the lessons learned from the paths that Latin American and Caribbean countries have traveled in order to guarantee the right to education. This assessment offers an updated perspective on the mixed results of the education sector in the region prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing the challenges that the region is facing in the field of education will require political will, professional solvency and dialogues that engage multiple stakeholders and make use of comparative evidence. It will be key to combine a realistic perspective with a transformative one. It is not enough to continue down the same path: profound changes are needed in order to achieve the 2030 goals.

Annex - Methodology

Quantitative data processing

The quantitative data used in this report have been carefully selected to present key educational trends and highlight major challenges in the region, and are based on robust, comparable, pertinent information, considering the document's analytical dimensions.

Indicators were selected to monitor each of these issues from among those included in the SDG4 global thematic frameworks,[1] considering those for which information was available for a large enough cohort of countries in the region.

As a complement, other regional pertinent indicators in regular use were also taken into account that could shed light upon specific aspects of concern within the region's educational debate.

In line with the Buenos Aires Declaration, the primary sources of information for analyzing the indicators were:

- Data published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, in its September 22, 2021 update.

- Data included in the most recent versions of the Global Education Monitoring Report.

- The results of assessments applied by the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE).

Additionally, other relevant sources in the region were also consulted, including:

- ECLAC statistical databases and publications (CEPALSTAT) and specific data processed by ECLAC for the study, based on the Database of Household Surveys (*Banco de Datos de Encuestas de Hogares*, BADEHOG).

- Indicators published in UNICEF's Datawarehouse database, principally related to the results of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).

- The database of OECD's PISA assessments and results of PISA-D assessments for 15-year-old students.

- Comparable higher education indicators of the Ibero-American Network of Higher Education Indicators (*Red Iberoamericana de Indicadores de Educación Superior*, Red INDICES)

In selecting indicators to include in the report, a series of priority criteria were applied, as follows:

- Indicators produced, systematized, and/or disseminated by international entities. Or, failing this, indicators that can be calculated from the published databases of international entities.

- Indicators that are part of the global thematic framework of SDG4- Education 2030, produced by institutions responsible for monitoring them at the global level.

- Indicators available for a broad group of countries in the region.

- Indicators comparable over time, available for at least one year between 2018 and 2020.

- Indicators that have been constructed with methodologies that make them comparable among countries of the region.

In order to ensure international comparability, the indicators analyzed were organized under the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 2011), prepared by the UIS (UIS, 2013a). The ISCED's definition of educational levels arose as a way of adapting the statistical information reported by each country to the UIS international database, whether through questionnaires applied by the institute or those used collectively by the UIS, Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The years considered for the analysis of information fell into the 2015-2020 period in almost all cases, as no statistical data were available for 2021. For those indicators most strongly affected by the pandemic, the authors opted to analyze trends from 2015-2019, and for 2019-2020 separately, where data were available. In educational systems with an academic year that stretches over two calendar years, the year of reference

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[1] The "List of official indicators" section includes all the indicators that correspond to this framework.

corresponds to the second calendar year (for example, the 2019/2020 academic year would be reported as 2020). To take the most advantage of the information available, gaps in the data for some years were filled using data from recent years, or by estimating data from the nearest values. At the foot of each graph and table is a note that mentions the criteria used for the data (see Annex- Methodology for more detail about data sources and processing criteria).

To build a picture of the trends in the region, two complementary strategies were used: where regional estimates for the indicators were available, they were included in the regional panorama. Where such estimates were lacking, simple averages among the countries were presented. In these cases, the necessary safeguards were put in place in interpreting the data, as simple averages do not account for the countries' different populations. To construct simple averages, countries that had information available for the time range desired for the time series were selected.

For long-term (2000 to 2020) and short-term (2015 to 2020) comparisons, data gaps for some years and countries were common, for representing both national data and for simple regional averages. In these cases, the following criteria were applied:

- Use as an approximate value for 2020 (circa 2020), the latest value available in the 2018-2020 range. Only in some very exceptional cases information from 2017 was used.

- Use as an approximate value for 2015 (circa 2015), the latest value available in the 2013-2016 range. In cases where approximate estimates for 2020 corresponded generally to 2018, 2014 was chosen as an approximate proxy for 2015. Where data were available for previous and later years, the value used was the result of a simple linear projection of the trend between the first datum prior to and the first following the missing year.

- For simple regional averages, the same set of countries was always used to estimate values for all points in time in the same series.

- For long-term trends, the data missing from intermediate years was substituted with values based on a simple linear projection of the trend between the first datum prior to and the first following the missing year.

The footnotes for each graph indicate the criteria employed in them, along with details of the reference data years for each country.

Expert survey

Education experts were consulted in a survey to obtain information about trends in educational policy for the 2015-2021 period in countries of the region. The survey design included closed, multiple-choice questions as well as open questions that sought to collect notable experiences and practices in each country. Education experts were sought out in a broad sense, with no strict requirements or thematic limitations regarding specific areas of expertise. Gender equity was also a core concern in choosing the experts. The preliminary survey was tested on four experts from different countries, and a final version arose from this exercise.

The selection involved a systematic review (Hart, 2001; Greenhalgh *et al.*, 2005)but unanswered questions remain, especially around how to begin to make sense of large data sets drawn from heterogeneous sources. Drawing on Kuhn's notion of scientific paradigms, we developed a new method—meta-narrative review—for sorting and interpreting the 1024 sources identified in our exploratory searches. We took as our initial unit of analysis the unfolding 'storyline' of a research tradition over time. We mapped these storylines by using both electronic and manual tracking to trace the influence of seminal theoretical and empirical work on subsequent research within a tradition. We then drew variously on the different storylines to build up a rich picture of our field of study. We identified 13 key metanarratives fromli teratures as disparate as rural sociology, clinical epidemiology, marketing and organisational studies. Researchers in different traditions had conceptualised, explained and investigated diffusion of innovations differently and had used different criteria for judging the quality of empirical work. Moreover, they told very different over-arching stories of the progress of their research. Within each tradition, accounts of research depicted human characters emplotted in a story of (in the early stages in which different criteria were used to winnow down the field of experts. The aim was to select four experts per country. Potential candidates' research production in fields relevant to education policy since 2015 was considered (where the minimum number of experts per country could not be identified, this date was extended back to 2005 and following). For this analysis, the Scielo database was used, given it is the most inclusive and offers free access to publications.

The searches used the following keywords: "education", "educational policy" and the name of the country in question. This first search yielded an overabundance of experts in some categories, while in others, in contrast, it was difficult to reach the minimum we had set for each country. The backup criteria used in the latter case was to extend the timeframe for publications back to 2005 onwards, and then focus on key regional stakeholders in the educational area affiliated with UNICEF and UNESCO, in order to track experts with comprehensive knowledge of the educational scenario in each country. A final criterion, this time exclusionary, was to rule out experts who had served in the public administration over the past five years.

Once the selection was finalized, the team verified the personal information of each expert and their contact information (institutional emails, taken from online publications or institutional websites), academic networks (such as researchgate.com and academia.edu), and professional networks (LinkedIn). Once that contact information was verified, the survey was launched.

With the characteristics described above, the survey was launched via the online platform LIMESurvey, and for 8 weeks—in July and August 2021—it remained available to the experts from 18 countries. A total of 54 experts answered the survey, representing 75% of those invited.

The experts who responded to the survey are listed below: Marcia Alfonzo Belandria (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Nanette Archer Svenson (Panama), Bienvenido Argueta (Guatemala), Beatrice Ávalos (Chile), María Bailarín (Peru), Gloria Bodewig (El Salvador), Alba Bracamonte de González (Guatemala), Teresa Bracho (Mexico), Francisco Cabrera Romero (Guatemala), Darwin Caraballo (Dominican Rebublic), Alejandra Cardini (Argentina), Evelyn Chen Quesada (Costa Rica), Nora Corredor (Colombia), Santiago Cueto (Peru), Dora Suyapa Díaz Quinteros (Honduras), Rodolfo Elías (Paraguay), Alejandra Falabella (Chile), Jonathan Flores Martínez (Nicaragua), Jaqueline García De León (Guatemala), Silvia García Frías (Cuba), Lisardo García (Cuba), Gabriela Gómez Pasquali (Paraguay), César Guadalupe (Peru), Rolando Guzmán (Dominican Republic), Russbel Hernández (Honduras), Weimar Iño de Souza (Plurinational State of Bolivia), María Ester Mancebo (Uruguay), Alexander Montes-Miranda (Colombia), José Pascual Mora García (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Deivis Mosquera (Colombia), Cristina Muñoz (El Salvador), Mariano Nadorowski (Argentina), Teresa O'Higgins (Paraguay), Luis Ortiz (Paraguay), María Elena Ortiz Espinoza (Ecuador), Isel Parra Vigo (Cuba), Eddy Paz-Maldonado (Honduras), Filipe Recch (Brazil), Jorge Rivera (Costa Rica), Ana María Rodino (Costa Rica), Marta Rodríguez Cruz (Ecuador), Reinaldo Rojas (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Jilma Romero Arrechavala (Nicaragua), Samuel Ruíz (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), Ismael Santos Abreus (Cuba), Caterina Segatto (Brazil), Sandy Soto (Ecuador), César Tello (Brazil), Flavia Terigi (Argentina), Rosa María Torres (Ecuador), Ernesto Treviño (Chile), Denise Vaillant (Uruguay), Xavier Vanni (Chile), and Mario Yapu (Plurinational State of Bolivia).

Acronyms used in the report

Acronym	Name
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ALE	Adult Learning and Education
YALE	Youth and Adult Learning and Education
ALER	Latin American Association of Popular Education and Communication (Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación y Comunicación Popular)
LL	Lifelong Learning
ANEP	National Public Education Administration (Administración Nacional de Educación Pública)
ANUIES	The National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior)
BADEHOG	Database of Household Surveys (Banco de datos de encuestas de hogares)
BDAT	Belize Diagnostic Assessment Test
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
CACES	Higher Education Quality Assurance Council (Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior)
CAFAM	Family Compensation Fund (Caja de Compensación Familiar)
CAIPI	Comprehensive Care Centers for Early Childhood (Centros de Atención Integral de Primera Infancia)
CANTA	Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies
CARICOM	The Caribbean Community
CBC	Basic Quality Conditions (Condiciones básicas de calidad)
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CEAAL	Latin American and Caribbean Council for Popular Education
CEN-CINAI	Education and Nutrition Centers (Centros de Educación y Nutrición) and Comprehensive Child Care Centers (Centros Infantiles de Atención Integral)
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CEPALSTATS	ECLAC Statistical Databases and Publications
CINDE	The Costa Rican Investment Promotion Agency
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
CLADE	Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education
CNE	National Education Council (Consejo Nacional de Educación)
CNL	Children Not Learning
CONALITEG	National free Textbooks Commission (Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos)
CONFINTEA	International Conference on Adult Education
CRUCH	Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas)
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualification

Acronyms used in the report (continuation)

Acronym	Name
ECED	Early Childhood Educational Development
DRH	Human Resources Development Strategy (Estrategia de Desarrollo de Recursos Humanos)
DVV	DVV International is the publisher of the Adult Education and Development journal
ECDI2030	Early Childhood Development Index
GCED	Global Citizenship Education
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
EMTP	Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ENADE	National Student Performance Exam (Examen Nacional de Desempeño de Estudiantes)
ENCCEJA	National Youth and Adult Competency Certification Exam
ENTRE	National Strategy for a Successful Transition from 6th grade in Elementary Education to First Grade of Secondary Education (Estrategia Nacional para la Transición Exitosa)
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EYPA	Education of Young People and Adults
EFA	Education for All
ERCE	Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo)
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FINES	Plan for Completion of Primary and Secondary Education (Plan de Finalización de Estudios Primarios y Secundarios)
FOGAPE	Small Business Guarantee Fund
FUNDEB	Basic Education Maintenance and Development Fund (Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica)
GAML	Global Alliance to Monitor Learning
GEM	Global Education Monitoring Report
GEMR	The Education for All Global Monitoring Report
GIPE	Educational Policy Advocacy Group (Grupo de Incidencia en Política Educativa)
IAEG	Inter-agency and Expert Group
ICAE	International Council for Adult Education
ICBF	Colombian Family Welfare Institute (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar)
ICFES	Colombian Institute for Educational Assessment (Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación)
IDEB	Basic Education Development Index (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica)
IDPS	Personal and Social Development Indicators (Indicadores de Desarrollo Personal y Social)
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
IESALC	International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

Acronyms used in the report (continuation)

Acronym	Name
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IIPE	International Institute for Educational Planning (Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento de la Educación)
INAFOCAM	National Institute of Education and Training of Teachers (Instituto Nacional de Formación y Capacitación del Magisterio)
INEA	National Institute for Adult Education (Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos)
INEE	National Institute for Educational Assessment (Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación)
INEP	The Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira)
INET	National Institute for Technical Education (Instituto Nacional de Educación Tecnológica)
INEVAL	National Institute for Education Assessment (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa)
INFOD	National Institute of Teacher Training (Instituto Nacional de Formación Docente)
INICIA	Initial Diagnostic Assessment in Pre-service Teacher Training (Evaluación Nacional Diagnóstica de la Formación Inicial)
IPELC	Plurinational Institute of the Study of Languages and Cultures (Instituto Plurinacional de Estudios de Lenguas y Culturas)
ISCE	Colombia's Synthetic Index of Education Quality (Índice Sintético de Calidad Educativa de Colombia)
JEC	Full school day (Jornada Escolar Completa)
LACRO	UNICEF's Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office
LAMP	Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme
LLECE	Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE)
MBE	Good Teaching Framework (Marco para la Buena Enseñanza)
MCECSCA	Qualifications Framework for Central American Higher Education (Marco de Cualificaciones para la Educación Superior Centroamericana)
MIB	Bilingual Literacy for Life (BLL) (MEVyT Indígena Bilingüe)
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MINEDU	Education Ministry
NAP	Priority Learning Nuclei
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEI	Organization of Ibero-American States
ILO	International Labor Organization
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization

Acronyms used in the report (continuation)

Acronym	Name
OREALC/UNESCO Santiago	Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean
PACE	Program for Effective Access and Support for Higher Education (Programa de Acompañamiento y Acceso Efectivo a la Educación Superior)
PANI	The Children's Board of Costa Rica (Patronato Nacional de la Infancia)
PIAAC	Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PIALV	Ibero-American Plan for Literacy and Lifelong Learning (Plan Iberoamericano de Alfabetización y Aprendizaje a lo largo de la Vida)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PISA-D	PISA for Development
PLaNEA	UNICEF Argentina PLANEA Program of Inquiry-based Learning for Adolescents in Urban Secondary Schools (Programa Nueva Escuela para Adolescentes)
PNESTP	Peru's National Policy for Higher and Technical Productive Education (Política Nacional de Educación Superior y Técnico-Productiva)
PNFD	Argentine National Lifelong Training Program (Programa Nacional de Formación Permanent)
POE	Career Guidance Program (Programa de Orientación Vocacional y Empleo)
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PROA	Advanced Secondary Education Program (Programa Avanzado en Educación)
PROCEMA	Teacher Training Program to Improve Learning among Children, Youth and Adults (Programa de Capacitación de los educadores para el mejoramiento de los aprendizajes de niños, niñas, jóvenes y adultos)
PROEDUCA	Program in Costa Rica to support secondary education and help reduce student dropout rates (Apoyo a la educación secundaria para la reducción del abandono estudiantil)
PROEMPLEAR	Argentine programs to foster the inclusion of young people in the workforce (Programas de Inclusión Laboral y Productiva)
PRONABEC	Peru's National Scholarship and Educational Loan Program (Programa Nacional de Becas y Crédito Educativo)
PROUNI	University for All Program, in Brazil (Programa Universidad para Todos)
PTC	Conditional Cash Transfer Program (Programas de Transferencias Condicionadas)
RVA	Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of Learning
SAT	Early Warning System (Sistema de Alerta Temprana)
SENAI	Brazilian National Service for Industrial Training (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje Industrial)
SEP	Preferential School Subsidy Plan (Subvención Escolar Preferencial)
SERCE	Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Segundo Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo)
SG-CECC	General Secretariat of Central American Education and Cultural Coordination (Secretaría General de la Coordinación Educativa y Cultural Centroamericana)
SICA	Central American Integration System (Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana)
EMIS	Educational Management Information Systems

Acronyms used in the report (continuation)

Acronym	Name
SIMCE	Education Quality Measurement System - Tests used to measure school students' progress in Chile (Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación)
SINAFOCAL	Paraguayan TVET System (Sistema Nacional de Formación y Capacitación Laboral)
SITEAL	Information System on Education Trends in Latin America (Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina)
STAVEP	Framework of the Strengthening of Technical and Vocational Education Project
SUNEDU	Peruvian National Superintendancy of Higher University Education (Superintendencia Nacional de Educación Superior Universitaria)
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TCG	Technical Cooperation Group on the SDG4-E2030 indicators
TERCE	Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo)
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
TPA	Honduras summerschool program for children to catch up on grades (Todos Podemos Avanzar, TPA)
UDELAR	Universidad de la República
UGEL	Local Education Management Units in Peru (Unidad de Gestión Educativa Local)
UGGS	UNESCO's Global Geoparks
UIL	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF LACRO	UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean
UTEC	Universidad Tecnológica
WCECCE	World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education

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Education in Latin America and the Caribbean at a crossroads

Regional monitoring report SDG4 - Education 2030

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda, through Sustainable Development Goal 4, defines the importance of an inclusive, equitable and quality vision for education.

This publication takes stock of the implementation of SDG4-E2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 2015-2021 cycle, analyzing the achievements and recognizing the challenges for the fulfillment of educational goals in the region.

The report identifies the educational trends of the period, and highlights that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the achievement of the targets set for 2030 was not assured, and much less so in the current difficult situation that the region and the world are facing. It concludes that, in order to achieve significant progress towards the SDG4, it is necessary to undertake profound transformations to change the course of policies and the allocation of resources for education.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Sustainable Development Goals