

# Regional Forum on Education Policy 2020

## Inclusion and education in post-pandemic times

Virtual edition, 9-12 November 2020

The main objective of the Regional Forum on Education Policy is to open a space for policy debate, consultation and reflection between education policymakers of Latin American and the Caribbean countries, focusing on the policy implications of the Education 2030 Agenda and on effective strategies for its implementation in order to strengthen the capacities of UNESCO Member States in the region.

This year, the Regional Forum on Education Policy will build on the work of the 2020 *Global Education Monitoring Report* – and its Regional Edition – by focussing on inclusion and education. It will explore the barriers that remain in Latin America and the Caribbean to *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all*, and identify concrete measures that education policymakers can implement in order to accelerate progress towards the realization of the ambitious vision set out by Sustainable Development Goal 4. Special emphasis will be put on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the increase of education exclusion in the region.

## Context

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets out 17 goals with 169 integrated, indivisible targets that relate to the economy, society and environment. These 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were elaborated during more than two years of public consultations, interaction with civil society and negotiations among the Member States.

Considering the interconnected nature of the 17 SDGs, success in achieving them depends to a large extent on educational outcomes. The importance of education within the 2030 Agenda becomes manifest by the existence of a specific goal (SDG 4) which calls to ensure, “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Furthermore, the SDGs include education-related targets in other goals relating to health, economic growth and employment, consumption and sustainable production, and climate change. Together with SDG 4, these targets constitute the Education 2030 Agenda.

The Latin American and Caribbean countries reasserted this global commitment in the Buenos Aires Declaration of January 2017, which addressed the main socio-economic and educational challenges of the region, described the guiding principles and the strategic objectives for achieving SDG 4 and the Education 2030 Agenda, and provided an action-oriented guide to Member States and the education community. These commitments were confirmed in July 2018, in the Cochabamba Agreements, during the Second Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Contextualizing this framework, countries have defined or are defining national goals, based on the SDGs, and are developing strategies for their implementation. In the case of education, this process of redefinition of national agendas presents a unique opportunity to take stock of advances made in the last decades, to identify the core of the educational agenda, and to review education policy tools that states can use to fully enforce the right to education.

The Regional Forum on Education Policy is framed within UNESCO's efforts to support Member States in the implementation of Education 2030 Agenda's commitments. Consequently, it is organized jointly by UNESCO IIEP Buenos Aires, together with the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (OREALC Santiago), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the UNESCO Division of Education 2030 Support and Coordination, and UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report.

## Inclusion and Education

By ratifying SDG 4, countries made a commitment to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and lifelong opportunities for all. Education has a longer tradition of being assessed through the lenses of *quality* and *equity*, whereas to have *inclusion* as one of the parameters defining the horizon of education is a more recent development. It is also one of great relevance, since it puts at the centre of the current agenda the need to move towards the eradication of all forms of discrimination persisting in educational systems.

The notion of inclusion was initially developed in the field of education to make visible and eradicate the barriers – formal and non-formal – that individuals with disabilities encountered in education systems. The right to inclusive education was first guaranteed in the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but it took another ten years for the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to provide a broad interpretation of this right through its General Comment 4. However, the concept of inclusive education has been acquiring a more comprehensive character at least since 1994, when the Salamanca Statement established that not only people with disabilities had special educational needs, but that there were multiple and very diverse reasons why a person requires a treatment that is sensitive to their characteristics. The concept of inclusive education became universal when the Salamanca Statement proclaimed that "every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs".

This approach to the notion of inclusion in education invites us to develop a special sensitivity to identify the

mechanisms through which certain groups are excluded and discriminated against, and to think about actions to eradicate these forms of discrimination and exclusion. In terms of educational policies, this translates into an agenda structured around three specific focuses of attention.

**First**, in the design of educational policies, it is important to identify the groups or collectives which, due to their specificity, are most affected by the current characteristics of educational systems. Certain groups of people, such as migrants, indigenous peoples, women, the LGBTI community, people living in poverty, and those in situations of confinement, amongst others, are exposed on a daily basis to various forms of discrimination and exclusion.

**Second**, an inclusive education agenda focuses on the need to identify and make visible the specific mechanisms through which these forms of discrimination occur. In many cases, the underlying causes are formal aspects of educational systems, such as their regulatory frameworks, their curricular designs, or their financing strategies. In other cases, they are rooted in non-formal mechanisms, such as the persistence of certain patterns of a discriminatory culture, the lack of institutional resources to promote relationships based on recognition and inclusion, or the harassment from fellow students or school staff.

**Finally**, a third focus of attention aims to recognize the range of policy tools available to the States to address these situations of discrimination and to promote inclusive education. Responses are diverse and may involve a variety of actions ranging from curricular adjustments to eliminate the reproduction of discriminatory stereotypes, changes in building infrastructure and reforms in teacher and managerial training, to changes in regulatory frameworks, reallocation of resources, or awareness-raising work with members of the educational community.

Discrimination mechanisms are different for each social group, and therefore the responses from the educational policy must be diverse. The inclusive education agenda places individuals at the centre of attention, with their identities, particularities and cultural backgrounds, and encourages the development of institutional practices based on the recognition of their individuality.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has brought about an unprecedented crisis on all fronts, and the problem of inclusion has become central and more pertinent than ever. In the area of education, the pandemic resulted in massive closures of educational institutions in more than 190 countries around the world in order to prevent the spread of virus and mitigate its impact. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the current health crisis forced out more than 160 million school-aged children out of school at a peak, threatening their rights to education, protection and wellbeing. Already before COVID-19, more than 12 million children were out of school. How many more will there be after the crisis is over? We have learned from previous humanitarian crises that, the longer children remain out of school, the higher is the risk they never return, especially for the most vulnerable. Given the dramatic impact of the pandemic on the state of national economics and socio-economic conditions of citizens in the region this year and beyond, the Forum will provide participants across the region with a timely and necessary platform to rethink policies and strategies towards building resilient national education systems.



**C:** Data systems

**D:** Curriculum, textbooks and assessments

- **Workshop session 3** (on 12 November) will include three simultaneous workshops:

**E:** Schools

**G:** Students, parents and communities

**F:** Teachers, managers and support staff

The 2020 Regional Forum on Education Policy will close with a **Plenary Session**, which will seek to discuss the policy recommendations emerging from the panels and workshops, in order to propose possible priority lines of action to promote inclusive education in the countries of the region.

## Participants

The Regional Forum aims to produce a space for dialogue among education policymakers of the region. The meeting will be open to:

- Education policymakers of the Latin American and Caribbean States.
- Representatives of sub-regional organizations of the Latin American and Caribbean States.
- Experts that specialize in education policy.
- Representatives of UNESCO.
- Representatives of other international organizations.
- Representatives of regional civil society organizations.

## Event dynamics

Due to mobility restrictions produced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Regional Forum on Educational Policy will take place in a virtual format within four days, through a videoconferencing tool.

To balance other professional activities during this time, all Forum participants will be requested to devote only 10 hours, distributed thus:

- 1 hour and a half on Monday 9 November (to attend the opening remarks and the inaugural presentation)
- 4 hours and a half on Wednesday 11 November (to attend the introduction to the workshops and workshop sessions 1 and 2)
- 4 hours on Thursday 12 November (to attend workshop session 3 and a plenary session)

In addition to the above, participants will be encouraged (but not required) to join any the five elective panels that will take place on Monday 9 and Tuesday 10 November, of 1h15 to 1h45 each.

# Preliminary agenda\*

## Monday, 9 November

GMT - 6	GMT - 5	GMT - 4	GMT - 3	Activities
8:00-8:30	9:00-9:30	10:00-10:30	11:00-11:30	<b>Opening remarks</b> (duration 0h30)
8:30-9:30	9:30-10:30	10:30-11:30	11:30-12:30	<b>Inaugural presentation</b> - Inclusion and Education in the world and in the region (duration 1h)
10:00-11:45	11:00-12:45	12:00-13:45	13:00-14:45	<b>Panel 1</b> - Education, Gender Inequality and Sexual Diversity (duration 1h45)
12:15-13:30	13:15-14:30	14:15-15:30	15:15-16:30	<b>Panel 2</b> - Education and Disability (duration 1h15)

## Tuesday, 10 November

GMT - 6	GMT - 5	GMT - 4	GMT - 3	Activities
8:00-9:45	9:00-10:45	10:00-11:45	11:00-12:45	<b>Panel 3</b> - Education, Socioeconomic Status and Geographic Location (duration 1h45)
10:15-12:00	11:15-13:00	12:15-14:00	13:15-15:00	<b>Panel 4</b> - Education, Human Mobility and Ethnicity (duration 1h45)
12:30-13:45	13:30-14:45	14:30-15:45	15:30-16:45	<b>Panel 5</b> - Education for Persons Deprived of Liberty (duration 1h15)

## Wednesday, 11 November

GMT - 6	GMT - 5	GMT - 4	GMT - 3	Activities
8:00-8:30	9:00-9:30	10:00-10:30	11:00-11:30	<b>Introduction to workshops</b> (duration 0h30)
8:30-10:30	9:30-11:30	10:30-12:30	11:30-13:30	<b>Workshop session 1</b> - (duration 2h) <b>Workshop A</b> - Laws and Policies <b>Workshop B</b> - Governance and finance
11:00-13:00	12:00-14:00	13:00-15:00	14:00-16:00	<b>Workshop session 2</b> - (duration 2h) <b>Workshop C</b> - Data Systems <b>Workshop D</b> - Curriculum, textbooks and assessments

## Thursday, 12 November

GMT - 6	GMT - 5	GMT - 4	GMT - 3	Activities
8:00-10:00	9:00-11:00	10:00-12:00	11:00-13:00	<b>Workshop session 3</b> - (duration 2h) <b>Workshop E</b> - Schools <b>Workshop F</b> - Teachers, managers and support staff <b>Workshop G</b> - Students, families and communities
10:30-12:30	11:30-13:30	12:30-14:30	13:30-15:30	<b>Plenary and closing</b> - Final conclusions (duration 2h)

\* Shaded areas correspond to optional activities.

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