

Educational Challenges in Central America and the Caribbean

Results Report

June 2020

About SUMMA

It is the first Laboratory of Education Research and Innovation for Latin America and the Caribbean. It was created in 2016 by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), with the support of the Ministries of Education of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. Since 2018, the Ministries of Guatemala, Honduras and Panama have also joined.

About the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)

OECS is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to regional integration in the Eastern Caribbean. Guided by strategic objectives, OECS works in different programmatic areas and in all its Member States to consolidate a common economic space for sustained economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

About this report

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The authors would also like to acknowledge the contributions and comments received from Rebecca Stone (American Institutes for Research) and Florencio Ceballos (International Development Research Centre).

Executive Summary

This report analyses the educational challenges facing the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that are partners in the Global Partnership for Education: Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia and St. Vincent & the Grenadines.

It has the dual objective of a) informing the KIX Regional Call of the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and b) contributing to the baseline diagnosis for the work of the KIX in LAC in the coming years, through the identification and definition of the education policy agenda, and the subsequent mobilization of knowledge and innovations.

To this end, between April and June 2020, documents and databases provided by countries and international organizations were analyzed, and key informant interviews and a focus group were conducted in the context of the launch of the KIX LAC Hub.

Although each of these countries has its own particular educational agenda (some of which are detailed in due course), it is possible to identify the following common challenges:

1. Adapt the education system to the new demands imposed by the COVID-19 context.
2. Increase access, coverage and retention in the school system.
3. Improve the quality of education and the learning outcomes of students.
4. Innovate in mechanisms to focus education spending on vulnerable and excluded students.
5. Strengthen teacher professional development.
6. Improve education for rural people.
7. Reduce gender disparities, and address sexual and gender identity diversity.
8. Strengthen the public education system.
9. Moving towards an inclusive intercultural education.

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A. Introduction

1. Knowledge Sharing and Innovation Initiative (KIX)

The KIX initiative seeks to connect the experience, innovation and knowledge of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partners to collaborate with developing countries to build stronger education systems. Through the sharing and funding of proven solutions and innovations, KIX will: (a) ensure that evidence-based solutions reach the hands of national decision-makers and feed directly into policy dialogue and planning processes; (b) build capacity to produce, integrate and scale up knowledge and innovation in GPE partner countries. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is the implementing agency of the KIX fund.

In its early stages of implementation, KIX is setting up Regional Centres in different regions, where partners meet to share information, innovation and best practices. KIX is also a funding mechanism that provides funds at the global and regional level for the generation of knowledge and innovation, and for the scaling up of proven approaches.

For Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), a consortium was formed by SUMMA and OECS. Through them, the Regional Center will work between April 2020 and December 2023 to support the education systems of the partner countries and help guarantee the right to education in Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines. To fulfill its purpose, LAC KIX has established three pillars of action: (i) definition of a policy agenda; (ii) mobilization and exchange of knowledge; (iii) building local and regional capacities.

2. Regional context

The socio-economic reality of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean shows a series of difficulties that impact on their education systems. Indices of poverty and inequality, the isolation of rural areas, and the effects of natural disasters are some of the elements that make access to, and permanence in school, difficult.

Honduras and Haiti are the countries in the region where the greatest socio-economic challenges exist. Honduras' GDP per capita (2018) is \$5,810 (PPP at current international prices), its HDI (0.623) indicates a medium level of development (UNDP, 2019), and the country's Gini coefficient is the highest of the countries studied at 52.1 (World Bank, 2018). Over 55% of the population was living in poverty (World Bank, 2018), while in 2015 40% of the population was living in extreme poverty (ECLAC). In 2016, 83% of children under 15 lived in households that did not meet their basic needs, and a significant percentage of children under five suffered from chronic malnutrition, with areas where this varied between 39% and 48%. It is estimated that in 2017, 15.2 per cent of Honduran children were working, of whom 6.2 per cent were working and studying and 9 per cent were working only (National Education Council, 2019).

Haiti, for its part, is the poorest country in Latin America and has one of the lowest Human Development Indexes in the United Nations (0.503). Nearly 60% of the population lives in poverty (World Bank, 2012), a quarter of households (40% in rural areas) do not have access to a source of drinking water and two thirds of households use a precarious sanitation facility. Twenty-two per cent of under-fives are stunted, a sign of chronic malnutrition, and 4 per cent are acutely malnourished (Cambridge Education, 2019). According to data from 2012, the country's Gini coefficient was 41.1.

On the other hand, according to World Bank data (2016) a quarter of Nicaragua's population lives in poverty, its GDP per capita (2018) is less than \$6,000 (PPP at current international prices), its Gini (2016) was 46.2, and its Human Development Index (0.651) is ranked at the medium level (UNDP, 2019). Guyana's HDI (0.670) is also ranked at this level (UNDP, 2019), the country's per capita GDP is less than \$6,700, and 73% of its population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2018).

In the Eastern Caribbean countries, the percentage of the rural population may even exceed 80%, as is the case in Saint Lucia (World Bank, 2018). These countries have a total population ranging from 70,000 to 180,000 (World Bank, 2018), a high Human Development Index (UNDP, 2019) and a per capita GDP ranging from \$11,000 to \$15,000, in PPP at current international prices (World Bank, 2018).

Table 1. Social and economic indicators of the countries

	Dominica	Grenada	Guyana	Haiti	Honduras	Nicaragua	St. Lucia	St. Vincent
Incidence of poverty rate, based on national poverty line (% of population)	N/A	N/A	N/A	58,5	48,3	24,9	25	N/A
Gini Index	N/A	N/A	44,6	41,1	52,1	46,2	51,2	N/A
GDP per capita, PPP (\$ at current international prices)	11.814	17.234	9.539	1.810	5.810	5.833	13.960	12.770
Human Development Index (HDI)	0,724 High HDI	0,763 High HDI	0,670 Average HDI	0,503 Low HDI	0,623 Average HDI	0,651 Average HDI	0,745 High HDI	0,728 High HDI

Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank and UNDP data

This socio-economic context is a complex reality for children and adolescents in these countries, putting at risk the fulfilment of their right to quality education.

In particular, high levels of inequality are also reflected in differentiated access to quality education. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds attend the lowest performing schools, perform less well academically, repeat grades more often and are more likely to drop out of school before completing the secondary level.

Thus, for example, the high rates of school exclusion observed in Honduras mainly affect the lower sectors. The figures reported in the Education Sector Strategic Plan (PESE) 2018-2030 indicate that the school exclusion rate for five-year-old children differs by 10 percentage points between the extreme family income quintiles; in the school population between 12 and 14 years of age, nearly a third of the first income quintile did not attend school in 2016, while the percentage of those excluded from the top quintile was 7%; and for the 15-17 year-old group the figure reached 66% of those excluded among the poorest (nearly 90,000 young people) and 20% in the top quintile (National Education Council, 2019).

In order to guarantee the right to education, a system of rights protection is needed that is reflected in the law. While in more developed countries a minimum of 12 years of compulsory schooling has been agreed, this is not always the rule in the countries studied. In particular, the cases of Guyana, Haiti and Nicaragua stand out. In the latter country, compulsory schooling is from 5 to 11 years of age, while in Haiti and Guyana, it is from 6 to 11 years of age (UIS-UNESCO).

Table 2. Regulatory framework around the fulfilment of the right to education

	No. of years of free education guaranteed by law	No. of years of compulsory education guaranteed by law
Dominica	12	12
Grenada	12	12
Guyana	6	6
Haiti	6	6
Honduras	11	11
Nicaragua	9	6
St. Lucia	12	10
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	12	12

Source: UNESCO e-Atlas for Education 2030 (2018)

To help respond to some of the problems that arise, IDRC has asked the Regional Learning Partner of the KIX project (Knowledge and Innovation Exchange) in LAC, formed by SUMMA and OECS, to carry out an exploratory study about the educational challenges in the region, which will serve as an input for the regional call of IDRC-GPE that will be launched in July.

As will be seen, in the eight education systems there are inequalities in effective access to quality education. Thus, low levels of performance in learning assessments are reported, especially for the most vulnerable groups, and gender and territorial disparities.

Some of the policies that could respond to these problems constitute, in turn, new challenges, such as the construction of better institutions (governance and administration of the system), sufficient financing, quality measurement, strengthening of the teaching profession (in particular, the inclusion of the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in teaching), curricular adaptation for more relevant training (in which

technical-professional training has a key function as a link between school and work), among others.

In the following sections, each of them is detailed, starting with the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, which has forced education systems to adapt to a new reality.

In the next section (B), the research methodology is described, detailing objectives, phases, principles, teamwork, data collection techniques.

In section C, the results are presented. Specifically, nine educational challenges facing the eight countries in question will be analyzed: (i) adapting the education system to the new demands imposed by the context of COVID-19; (ii) increasing access, coverage and permanence in the school system; (iii) improving the quality of education and the learning outcomes of students; (iv) innovating in mechanisms for targeting education spending on vulnerable and excluded students; (v) strengthening teacher professional development; (vi) improving education for the rural population; (vii) reducing gender disparities, and addressing sexual diversity and gender identity; (viii) strengthening the public education system; and (ix) moving towards inclusive intercultural education.

Finally, in sections D and E, the conclusions and keys for reading are presented in the framework of the regional call. They summarize the main challenges encountered and provide guidance to inform the process that IDRC will undertake.

B. Methodology

1. Objectives and phases of the research

The diagnosis and research of the main educational challenges in Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia and St. Vincent & the Grenadines will be carried out in two phases:

- a) **Phase I:** April - June 2020. This phase aims to identify the main educational challenges, particular and common to the countries of the region, helping to guide the KIX Regional Call that IDRC will open in July 2020. In addition, it seeks to inform the terms of reference and guidelines for the preparation of the reviews of each of the 8 countries (country reviews), scheduled for the second half of 2020.
- b) **Phase II:** July - December 2020. The objective of this phase will be to deepen the challenges identified in the countries, in order to define a national and regional education policy agenda that will constitute the basis for research, innovation and knowledge mobilization in the coming years of KIX implementation in LAC.

2. Work team

The research project was directed by SUMMA, in collaboration with the OECS. The following people made up the team:

- Javier González (Chile) - Director, SUMMA
- Raúl Chacón (Canada) - Project Director, SUMMA
- Ivana Zacarías (Argentina) - Researcher, SUMMA.
- Manuel Sepúlveda (Chile) - External consultant.
- Carlene Radix (Saint Lucia) – Head of Health, Ag Head Human and Social Cluster, Social and Sustainable Development Division, OECS.
- Sonia Rees (Saint Lucia) – Information Management Officer, Communications Unit, OECS.
- Sisera Simon (Saint Lucia) – Head, Education Development Management Unit, OECS.
- Rafer Gordon (Saint Lucia) – Education Specialist, Education Development Management Unit, OECS.

3. Principles guiding the research

The working team starts from the premise that, together with the data from the education system, the voices and views of the key actors in the education systems of the countries analyzed constitute a starting point for the research. From this perspective, this is a qualitative study with a broad *inductive base*; in other words, it seeks to reveal educational problems and challenges through a general sweep of information on the entire system and on each of the stages of human formation. Consequently, the six KIX thematic priority documents produced by GPE provided an important frame of reference. However, the analysis of this stage was not limited to these issues, as the actors raised other critical points in the interviews and group meetings.

4. Data collection techniques

Primary and secondary sources were analyzed between April and June 2020. The collection instruments are summarized in the following table:

Table 3. Sources of information

Data collection instrument	Sample size	Countries represented
Institutional documents ¹	51	8
Interviews	16	8
Discussion Group	26	6

4.1 Secondary Sources: Institutional Documents

For the secondary sources, statistical analyses of individual countries were analyzed, as well as the databases of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the World Bank. Available current and recent strategic education plans, sector plans, and country documents produced by GPE and international agencies were also taken into account (see Bibliography).

The dimensions and variables surveyed by country include:

- Size of the system: number of students and teachers, according to level
- Access, transition and exit at the initial, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level
- Levels of socio-economic, gender and territorial equity.
- Private sector participation in education.

¹ Sectoral plans, statistical analyses and country reviews by international organizations are included.

- Investment: expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, expenditure per pupil in (constant) price parity, expenditure by educational level
- Teacher training: requirements for entry into the profession, percentage of trained teachers
- Infrastructure and equipment.
- Situation of minorities.

In a first stage, a synthesis per country was prepared, and then a transversal analysis of the challenges was started, which constitutes the present working document.

4.2 Interviews

In the case of primary sources, interviews were carried out with focal points, education ministry officials, and representatives of education system organizations in the countries studied. Annex II contains a guide to the interviews.

Table 4. Interviews conducted

Name	Position	Country
Jeffrey Blaize	Assistant Chief of Education Officer, Ministry of Education.	Dominica
Weeferley Jules	Education Planner, Ministry of Education.	Dominica
Kevin Andall	Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Youth Development, Sports, Culture & the Arts	Grenada
Nicola Warrinna	Deputy Chief Planning Officer, Ministry of Education	Guyana
Michael Scott	Deputy Vice-chancellor for Academic Engagement, University of Guyana	Guyana
Jennifer Cumberbatch	Director of the NCERD (National Center for Educational Resource Development)	Guyana
Mark Lyte	President of the Guyana Teachers Union	Guyana
Gustave Joseph	Inspecteur général, Ministry of Education	Haiti
Itazienne Eugène	Professor of Social Sciences, State University of Haiti	Haiti
Bayard Lapommeray	Director, Studies and Programming Unit, Ministry of Education	Haiti
William Thelusmond	Secretary General, CSO-Education for All.	Haiti
Gloria Menjivar	Viceminister of Education, Ministry of Education	Honduras
Luis Hernandez	Director of Primary Education, Ministry of Education	Nicaragua

Dixton Findlay	Deputy Chief of Education, Ministry of Education	St. Vincent & the Grenadines
Keith Thomas	Education Planner, Ministry of Education	St. Vincent & the Grenadines
Dawson Ragunanan	Deputy Chief Education Officer, Ministry of Education	Saint Lucia

Source: Own elaboration

4.3 Discussion Group

In order to legitimize and validate the first findings of the research, a group discussion was held with members of the countries.

A preliminary version of the results was discussed at the KIX launch event on June 9, 2020, in the presence of representatives from Nicaragua, Honduras, Guyana, Haiti, St. Lucia and St. Vincent & the Grenadines, including a deputy minister, heads of educational planning, a president of the national teachers' union, university professors, heads of civil society organizations, and officials from international agencies, among others.

Representatives from IDRC and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) also participated in the meeting, as well as members of the OECS and SUMMA teams. In total, more than fifty people from ten countries participated.

The event was shared through the Zoom platform, and was broadcast in English, French and Spanish simultaneously.

The agenda included presentations from the member organizations of the consortium and a main block dedicated to presenting the preliminary findings of the research, represented in nine discussion points. At the end, representatives of the different countries that are members of KIX presented their opinions, in a general context of approval and ratification of the problems presented.

The suggested nuances and some of the themes that emerged were included in this final version.

C. Results

The analysis of documents, interviews and the group meeting revealed that in the countries studied there are challenges in terms of access, equity and quality of education, which threaten the fulfilment of the right to education of children and adolescents, particularly in the new context imposed by the COVID-19.

In this regard, countries are trying out different policies in education, with the objective of seeking, with greater or lesser success, to reduce inequalities in the system and to improve student performance. Many of these policies appear as challenges or pending reforms in order to achieve the objectives of the system.

Table 4 summarizes the main challenges raised by the KIX LAC Hub in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Although each country has its own challenges, this study also confirmed the existence of a series of problems that are common to all of them.

Table 5. List of Educational Challenges Identified for LAC GPE Countries

1.- The adaptation of the education system to the new demands imposed by the COVID-19 context.
2.- Increase access, coverage and permanence in the school system
3.- To improve the quality of education and the learning outcomes of students.
4.- Innovate in mechanisms to focus education spending on vulnerable and excluded students.
5.- To strengthen the professional development of teachers.
6.- Improving education for the rural population.
7.- Reducing gender disparities, and addressing sexual and gender identity diversity
8.- Strengthen the public education system.
9.- To advance towards an inclusive intercultural education.

Each of the identified challenges is described and explained in detail below:

1. The adaptation of the education system to the new demands imposed by the COVID-19 context

COVID-19 has generated a complex and extremely challenging scenario in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the ECLAC report "The social challenge in times of COVID-19" (ECLAC, 2020), in 2020 poverty in Latin America would increase by at least 4.4 percentage points over the previous year, which translates into an additional 28.7 million people living in poverty, reaching a total of 214.7 million people, or 34.7% of the region's population. At the same time, extreme poverty would increase by 2.6 percentage points (15.9 million additional people) and would affect a total of 83.4 million people.

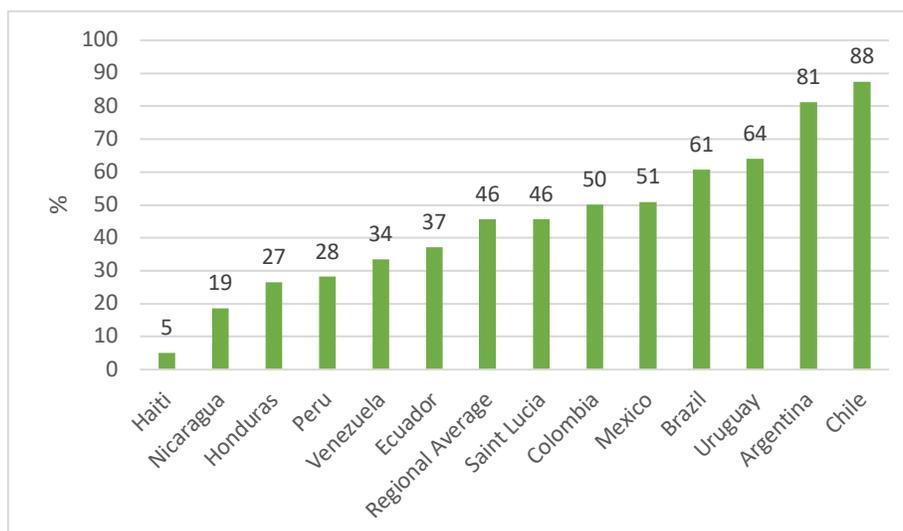
But the challenges are not only socio-economic. The pandemic has affected the education of more than 1.5 billion students worldwide and according to UNESCO figures of March 31, 2020, 185 countries closed schools and universities throughout their territory, affecting 89.4% of the world's student population (UNESCO, 2020).

This situation has placed enormous demands on school communities and educational authorities, who, among other tasks, have had to adapt teaching strategies to online education, make curricular adjustments, modify assessment guidelines and tools and, fundamentally, deal with the socio-emotional well-being of girls, boys and young people who have seen their immediate environment and daily routines completely transformed. This requires fostering resilience in education systems to respond in the best possible way to the context of restriction and uncertainty.

Some recommendations that UNESCO has made to ensure continuity of learning during school closure relate to taking into account the context of students in choosing the most relevant teaching tools; ensuring inclusiveness in distance learning programmes; protecting privacy and data security; focusing on students' psychosocial problems before teaching; building communities among teachers and fostering social links; and providing teachers and students with assistance in the use of ICTs, among others (UNESCO, 2020).

On the last point, the challenge of strengthening the capacities around information technologies is widespread in the countries studied. According to figures reported by OREALC/UNESCO (2016), in Nicaragua and Honduras around 50% of the country's students stated that they did not use a computer at school on any day, and the availability of Internet or even electricity at home is limited.

Figure 1. Percentage of households with Internet access (selected countries)



Source: International Telecommunications Union, 2018.

In this regard, promoting the use of new communication technologies is a major challenge for the region. This requires expanding the coverage of computers and the infrastructure needed for their online use, as well as developing policies that facilitate and promote the adaptation of teaching methods to these new learning spaces (National Education Council of Honduras, 2019; MINED Nicaragua, 2017). As shown in Figure 1, the regional average of internet coverage is less than 50%, and in Haiti, Nicaragua and Honduras it is less than 30%.

Given the magnitude of this contingency, this is a major challenge from the point of view of national public policy. Even when education policies have specific actions to be developed within the sector, this situation must be addressed intersectorally, in articulation with health and social development policies.

In addition, considering the macroeconomic and fiscal impact of COVID-19, some countries already report immediate negative effects as a result of a decrease in current budgets for the education sector. Moreover, a proportion of public resources for education today compete with other sectors of vital importance for the population, such as the health, employment, and productive sectors. This means maintaining an important focus on this dimension associated with the regular financing of education systems.

In summary, avoiding a deep educational crisis requires progress on at least six lines of action. First, to address the significant proportion of students who do not have Internet connectivity, using strategies that deepen the role of TV and radio, and that contemplate the direct weekly delivery of printed and offline digital teaching materials to homes or schools. Second, to improve the online educational offer for those students who have connectivity. Third, generate social-emotional support programs for students and support orientations for parents. Fourth, urgently train and support teachers who have not been

trained to provide remote education. There is a need to provide training in order to face the crisis, particularly in regard to the use of pedagogical strategies to teach at a distance and provide socio-emotional support to students. Fifth, prepare now the strategy for next year's return to classes. The focus should be on developing effective remedial plans that allow each student to be engaged. Sixth, strengthen social protection systems that safeguard the physical, mental and emotional health of NNA.

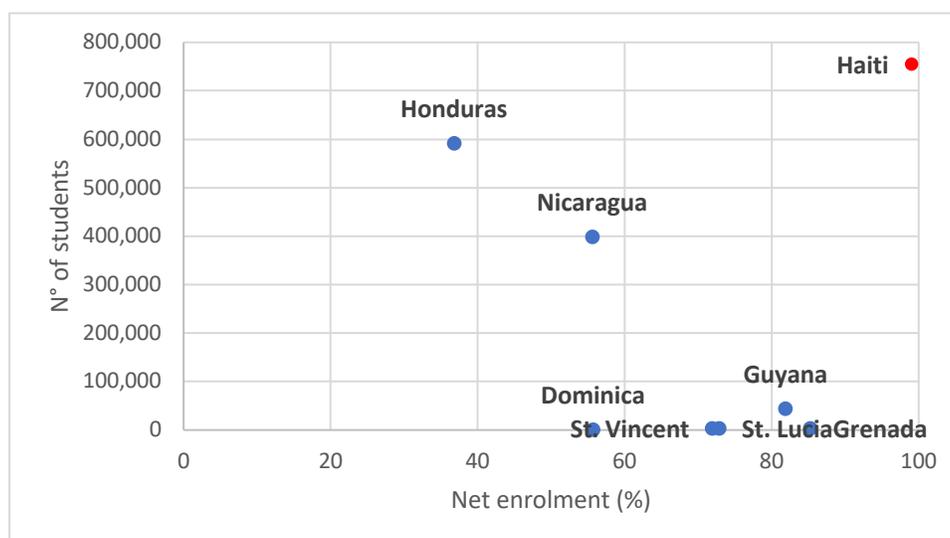
2. Increase access, coverage and retention in the school system

2.1 Challenges in entry level access

Access to the entry level is a pending issue in practically all the countries analysed. According to UNESCO, education at the pre-primary level is offered to children between the ages of 3 and 5 in Guyana, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua, while in Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent it is for children between the ages of 3 and 4. The average net enrolment rate in all these countries is 65%, but this average masks the huge differences between countries in the size of their populations (see Figure 2). Thus, for example, Honduras, with nearly 600 thousand students in the level, has a net rate of 36.8%, while in Grenada the 3,680 students in the level are equivalent to a net rate of 85.3% in the level (UIS-UNESCO, 2016, 2018).

It is important to note that, despite progress in terms of access, major challenges have arisen due to the impact of natural disasters such as hurricanes "Irma" and "Maria", which caused extensive damage to school infrastructure in the Caribbean.

Figure 1. Net Enrollment and Number of Students - Entry Level²



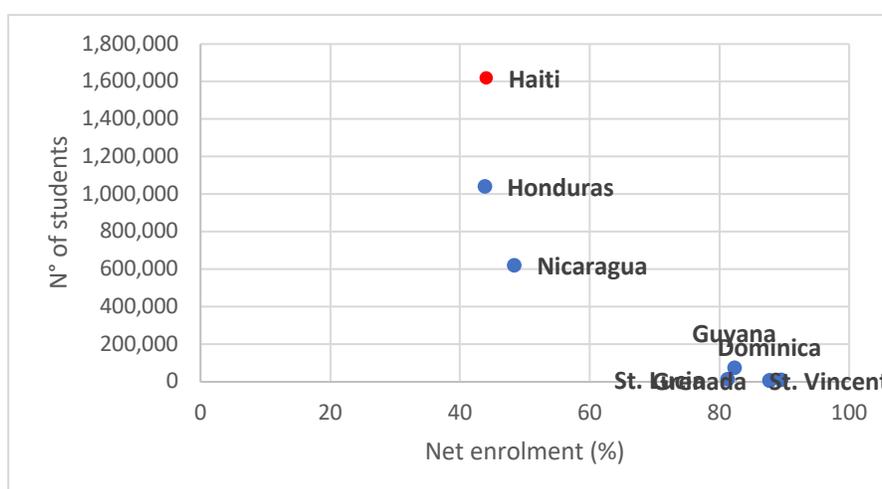
Source: Author's elaboration based on UNESCO data

² In the case of Haiti, gross enrolment is represented.

2.2 Decrease dropout and increase graduation at the secondary level

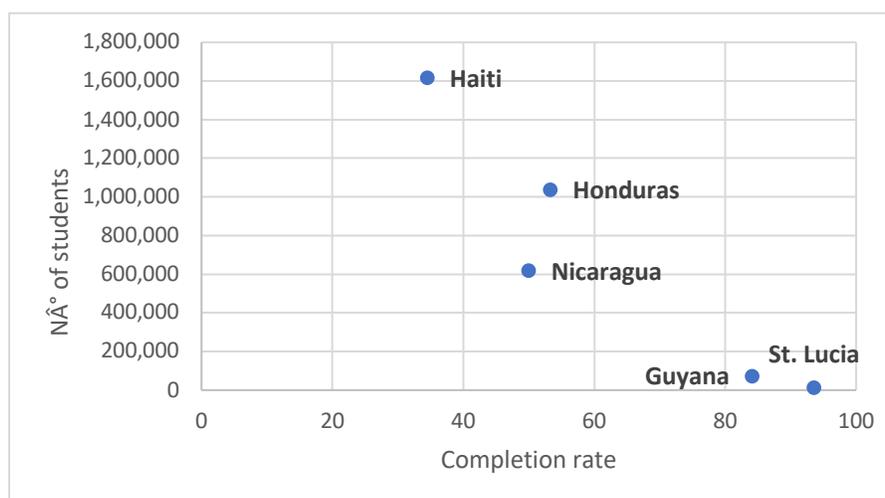
One of the most important challenges facing the region is ensuring access, retention and graduation at the secondary level. In countries such as Honduras and Nicaragua, the net enrolment rate at the secondary level is less than 50%, while the percentage of students completing the cycle of studies at this level is also less than 50% (TUI-UNESCO, 2010, 2014, 2017 and 2018). Haiti has a gross enrolment rate at the level of 44% (Cambridge Education, 2019), and less than 35% complete the education cycle (TUI-UNESCO, 2017). Figures 3 and 4 show the challenges in terms of net enrolment (gross, in the case of Haiti) and completion of the basic cycle at the secondary level.

Figure 3. Net Enrollment and Number of Students - Secondary Level³



Source: Author's elaboration based on UNESCO data

Figure 4. Completion Rates and Numbers of Students - Lower Secondary



³ In the case of Haiti, gross enrolment is represented.

Source: Author's elaboration based on UNESCO data

3. Improving the quality of education and student learning outcomes

3.1 Adaptation of the curriculum, in line with the skills and competences required for the 21st century

Countries need to ensure comprehensive educational pathways for all their students. This translates into consideration of their overall well-being as a starting point for ensuring their inclusion in the education system. Likewise, equal opportunities for the development and academic continuity of students must be provided to all, as well as ensuring the existence of adequate employability trajectories. In the case of LAC countries, the documentary review and dialogue with key informants revealed concrete challenges and policy priorities in terms of curriculum.

In this regard, the countries' concerns are about strengthening the construction of citizenship and the development of interpersonal skills that enable young people to interact and collaborate in a context of great cultural diversity. In the case of Honduras, in the context of high youth violence, in Nicaragua and in some Caribbean countries, such as St. Lucia, the need to develop comprehensive education proposals that include, for example, the arts and sports has been highlighted.

Another central issue for girls, boys and young people in the region is access to sex education and education on sexual diversity and gender identity. The high levels of teenage pregnancy in the countries require policies that promote responsible sexuality, providing information about sexually transmitted diseases and associated risks. At the same time, confronting the rates of bullying that affect LGBT students requires strategies that promote their inclusion in the school world, policies and programs that are not common in the region's educational systems.

Furthermore, one issue that has been repeatedly pointed out is the need to make the pedagogical proposal of students more relevant, particularly in relation to their labour insertion. From this perspective, emphasis has been placed on strengthening the quality of the complete secondary level and of Vocational Education and Training (VET), particularly in the Caribbean countries, where enrolment rates in higher education are very low (particularly among males) and where high rates of youth unemployment are reported.

3.2 Reducing learning gaps

Student performances in national and international assessments speak volumes about the teaching and learning challenges in the region.

According to data published in 2016 by UNESCO (through the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education - LLECE), Nicaragua obtained results that place it among the lowest performers in the region in the last regional assessment. Specifically, according to TERCE, in Reading and Mathematics more than 80% of third and sixth grade students in Nicaragua are located in the lowest levels of learning (I and II), a problem that is exacerbated in Mathematics 6th grade, where 97.1% of students in this level obtained results that classified them in these levels.

Table 6. Learning outcomes on available tests

	Proportion of students who are at minimum performance levels in priority areas, according to available assessments		
	In Grade 2 or 3	At the end of primary education	In secondary education
Dominica	N/A	N/A	76% - General 70% - English 51% - Mathematics (Exit Exam, CXC, 2014)
Grenada	N/A	N/A	N/A
Guyana	N/A	31% - Mathematics 20% - English 18% - Science (National Examination in 6th Grade, 2013 ⁴)	60% approved ⁵ (Exit Exam, CSEC, 2013)
Haiti ⁶	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honduras ⁷	57% - Mathematics 70% - Reading (TERCE, 2013)	32% - Mathematics 31% - Reading (TERCE, 2013)	15% (2015) - Mathematics 30% (2015) - Reading (⁹ th grade)
Nicaragua ⁸	44% - Mathematics 61% - Reading (TERCE, 2013)	20% - Mathematics 31% - Reading (TERCE, 2013)	N/A
St. Lucia ⁹	N/A	55% - Mathematics 61% - English 65% - General (CEEE, 2019)	73% ¹⁰ (Exit Exam, CSEC, 2019)
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	N/A	81% - Language 46% - Mathematics 80% - Science 64% - Social Studies (CPEA, 2018)	N/A

Source: Own elaboration

⁴ For 6th grade, the information corresponds to students getting 50% or more.

⁵ CSEC passes w/Grades 1-3.

⁶ Haiti participated in the pilot test of LaNA (Literacy and Numeracy Assessment) 2016.

⁷ UNESCO e-Atlas for Education 2030. For 2013, data are from TERCE (Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study). By 2015, a national assessment was implemented.

⁸ UNESCO e-Atlas for Education 2030. The information corresponds to TERCE (Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study).

⁹ Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate's website (<https://www.cxc.org/examinations/csec/>); CAMDU – Curriculum and Materials Development Unit in the Ministry of Education in St. Lucia's website (<https://camdu.edu.lc/assessment/>).

¹⁰ CSEC passes w/Grades I, II & III.

The TERCE results also place Honduras in the group of countries with the highest percentage of students in the lowest performance levels. In effect, Reading in Third Grade is the assessment where the country obtains the best results, but more than 70% were classified in Levels I and II. In Reading 6th grade and Mathematics 3rd grade more than 80% of students obtained results that classify them in these levels, while in Mathematics 6th grade this percentage reaches 93.3% (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016).

In the OECS countries, students finish secondary school without the skills needed for work or further education (OECS, 2012).

Specifically, it is important to account for existing gaps in learning outcomes in the region, which undoubtedly poses a challenge to be analyzed in depth at a later stage with partner countries. Thus, in TERCE, there is a positive relation between average learning achievement of countries, which shows that the higher the socio-economic indices of students, the higher their results. On the other hand, rural areas in the region concentrate a greater proportion of vulnerable populations, and are therefore negatively affected in terms of their performance. In the case of the Caribbean countries, it is also recognized that there is a challenge related to the trend towards lower performance by a greater proportion of students from low socio-economic groups (OECS, 2012).

3.3 Strengthening evaluation systems and the use of results

The region has made uneven progress in developing systems for evaluating its own learning and participating in international programmes. Guyana, for example, has never participated in an international assessment, and has not been able to make an in-depth analysis of the factors that affect the performance of its students.

Table 7. Participation in international evaluations

	International Evaluations
Dominica	CSEC
Guyana	N/A
Grenada	CSEC
Haiti	N/A
Honduras	ERCE; PISA for Development
Nicaragua	ERCE
St. Lucia	CSEC
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	CSEC

Source: Own elaboration

Note: Haiti participated in a pilot of an IEA-driven early literacy test, but the results have not been published and the instrument has not yet been validated.

Thus, the information it has comes from a basic analysis of the data collected by the country itself, which indicates that students in schools in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, mainly in the interior and deep coastal areas, perform significantly below the national average (Ministry of Education, 2014).

Table 8. National evaluation systems

	Administration of a nationally representative assessment in Mathematics and Reading		
	In Grade 2 or 3	At the end of primary education	At the end of lower secondary education
Dominica	X	X	
Granada	X		
Guyana	X		
Haiti	X	X	
Honduras ¹¹	X	X	X
Nicaragua	X	X	
St. Lucia	X		
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	X		

Source: UNESCO e-Atlas for Education 2030

National assessments differ among OECS countries. While St. Lucia and Dominica apply the Common Entrance to Grade 6, Grenada and St. Vincent & the Grenadines apply the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA), and the minimum standard of passing varies by region. At the primary level, OECS identifies as a challenge the low performance of students in Mathematics and English (50% score below the national average in Mathematics and about 40% perform poorly in English).

While Nicaragua has not yet implemented a national learning assessment system, high-level officials have confirmed the progress the country has made in this regard. In this regard, instruments have been developed and are awaiting piloting and support from a technical support mission by Cuban specialists (the postponement is due to COVID-19).

Finally, Honduras has institutionalized evaluation standards and systems, applying standardized learning assessments on an annual basis. However, these results are little used and, consequently, the evaluations have little impact (National Education Council, 2019).

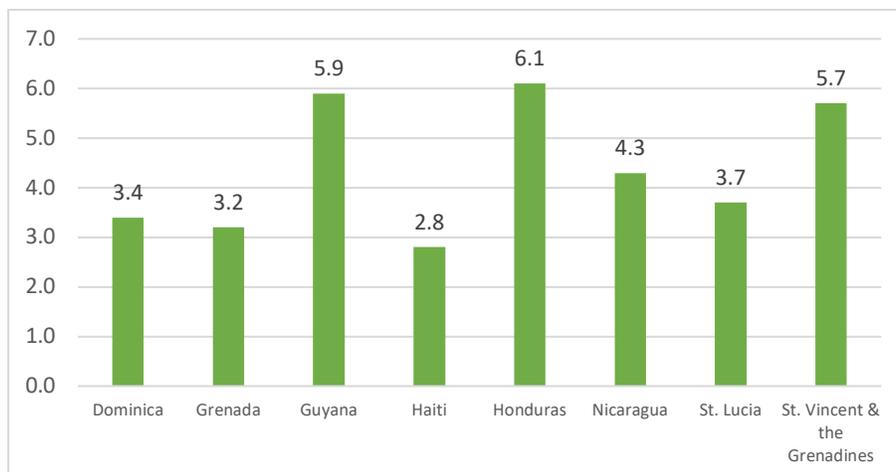
4. Innovate in mechanisms to focus education spending on vulnerable and excluded students.

Despite the remarkable progress that countries have made in recent years, a first point to note in the analysis is the low investment in education per pupil in the school system. According to World Bank data (2017 and 2018), public expenditure on education as a

¹¹ Honduras also participated in TIMSS 2010 (Source: KIX Learning & Assessment System Document).

percentage of GDP is, on average, less than 5%, and only Honduras exceeds 6% of expenditure (6.1%).

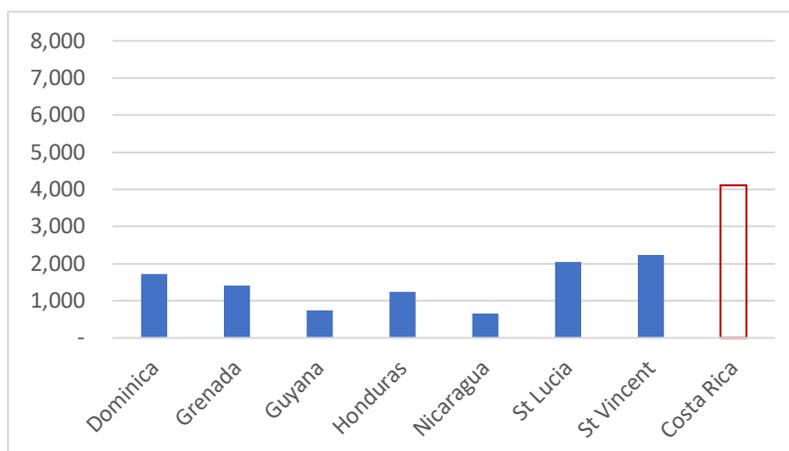
Figure 2. Education expenditure as percentage of GDP



Source: World Bank

According to the same source (World Bank, 2010, 2012 and 2013) Guyana and Nicaragua invest less than \$1,000 per year per student in primary and secondary education, which in the latter country is less than US\$450. On the other hand, Grenada, Honduras and Dominica (in primary education) invest less than \$1,500 per year per student, while St. Lucia (in primary education), St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Dominica (in secondary education) invest between \$2,000 and \$2,600 per student. St. Lucia shows the highest values of the countries studied at the secondary level, with about \$3,170 per student (World Bank, 2015, 2017 and 2018)¹². See Figures 6 and 7.

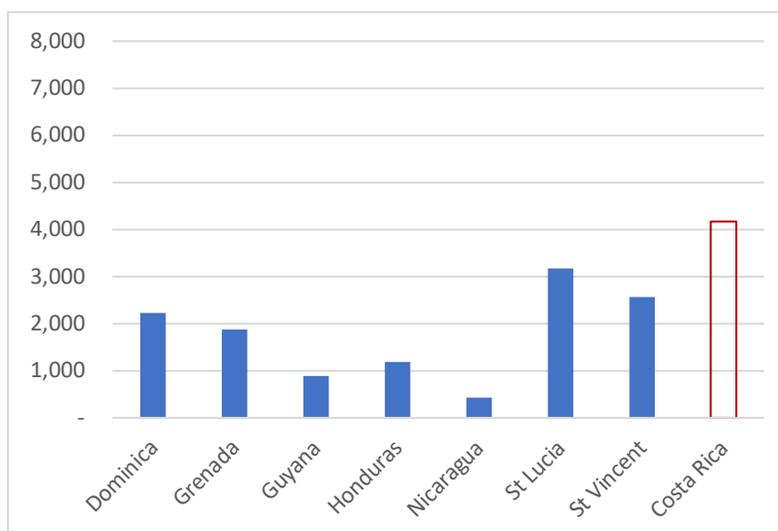
Figure 3. Expenditure per student in current international PPP/ \$ - Primary Education



Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank data

¹² All figures are in PPP at current international prices.

Figure 4. Expenditure per student in constant PPP/USD - Secondary Education



Source: Author's elaboration based on World Bank data

The World Bank does not present data on investment per student in Haiti; however, the country has a GDP per capita PPP (expressed in current international prices) of US\$1,810, so it can be inferred that investment in education and expenditure per student is probably the lowest of all the countries that are part of this study (World Bank, 2018).

Underspending is a problem, as comparative evidence in secondary education indicates a strong relationship between learning outcomes and absolute per-student spending. Indeed, this correlation is observed up to a spending of US\$8,000 per student per year (Vegas and Coffin, 2015).

The countries have defined as an objective to counteract the impact of socio-economic inequalities on access to the education system, and to this end they seek to promote affirmative action policies and differentiated intervention strategies, in addition to intersectoral and complementary interventions in education, such as health, food, clothing, and citizen security, among others (OECS, 2012; MINED, 2017; National Education Council, 2019). For this reason, the challenge is not only to increase the available funding (something probably beyond the scope of the KIX LAC Hub) but, given the available funding, to innovate with respect to mechanisms for channeling resources to provide more support where it is most needed.

These challenges become especially worrying in the context of COVID-19, since, as mentioned, governments have begun to adjust budgets and limit expenditures in order to prioritize investment in health and in basic goods and inputs for lower-income households.

5. Strengthening teacher professional development

One challenge observed in the countries is the low level of training required to teach, especially at the primary level. For example, according to TERCE data (2016), less than 50% of teachers in Nicaragua and less than 70% in Honduras have a teaching qualification. In some Caribbean countries, teachers can begin teaching by taking the secondary school leaving examination (even the first level of the teaching career may not be required to pass, as in the case of Grenada).

Attracting and retaining qualified teachers is also a challenge in OECS countries, particularly in some critical subjects such as mathematics, science, English and ICTs. In some countries, the total number of science teachers is not trained, while St. Vincent & the Grenadines has high turnover rates due to poor salary structures and incentives (Department of Education, 2018).

To address this challenge, Nicaragua has proposed developing training programs with emphasis on didactic, disciplinary and technological aspects; strengthening teachers' socio-emotional skills; and curricular and learning assessment training, among others (MINED, 2017).

Table 9. Minimum number of years required for initial training

	Tertiary	University
Costa Rica	N/A	4
Cuba	5	N/A
Dominican Republic	3	3.5
Grenada	0	N/A
Guatemala	N/A	3
Guyana	2	3
Honduras	3	4
Nicaragua	3	5
Jamaica	3	N/A
St. Lucia	2	N/A
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	2	N/A
St. Kitts & Nevis	2	N/A

Note: It is important to **note** that, in some cases, country requirements apply at the initial, primary and secondary levels differently.

Source: Own construction based on Bruns and Luque (2014), interviews with officials and review of institutional documents of the countries.

Honduras has set itself the challenge of raising the requirements for the recruitment of teachers (Bachelor's degree), implementing teacher evaluation systems, establishing mechanisms to improve the working conditions of teachers and non-teaching staff in schools, and strengthening networks for pedagogical exchange (National Council of Education, 2019).

The challenge in structuring teaching careers and in the quality of the initial training they receive not only affects Latin America, but has also emerged as a concern in interviews with key informants in the Caribbean. In this regard, it has even been pointed out that in Saint Lucia they are working to eliminate corporal punishment from teacher training as an option for school discipline. Considering that so far no Caribbean country has eliminated corporal punishment in schools, this is an encouraging sign (UNICEF, 2018).

Finally, the importance of addressing teacher and principal evaluations for training purposes, in order to provide feedback to the system and to contribute to policies related to their professional development has been noted.

6. Improving education for rural people

A relevant element for understanding the difficulties in accessing and assuring the right to education is linked to the exclusion of rural areas and the complexities associated with meteorological phenomena common to the countries studied.

Over 80% of the population in St. Lucia, 73% in Guyana and about 50% in St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Nicaragua, Honduras, Grenada and Haiti is rural, which poses enormous challenges in terms of territorial equity (See Figure 8).

About 80% of schools in Nicaragua and Honduras are rural, receiving more than 50% of the students in each country (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016). These schools have higher percentages of students who are engaged in paid child labour, boys and girls who, in general, have fewer years of schooling and higher rates of grade repetition and school exclusion (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016). In Nicaragua, specific factors associated with this phenomenon were analyzed, including the geographical dispersion of the rural population.

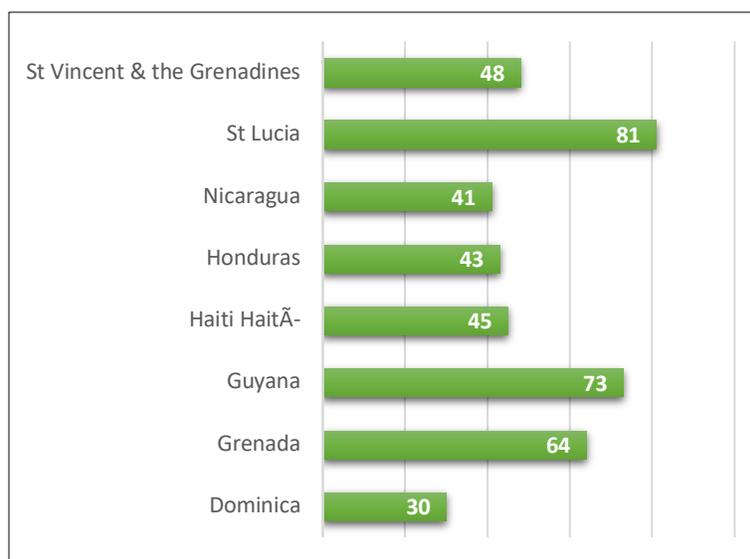
On the other hand, according to the "Index of Infrastructure and Services in Schools" developed by the Latin American Laboratory for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education (LLECE), rural schools have fewer resources available such as an office for the principal, a meeting room for teachers, gymnasium, computer room, auditorium, art and/or music room, infirmary, science lab(s), library, teacher's table and chair, drainage or sewer, bathrooms in good condition, Internet connection, trash collection and student transportation, among others (OREALC/UNESCO, 2016).

In Guyana, a comparison of net enrolment rates between different regions of the country shows differences that even exceed 40 percentage points at the primary level for the period 2017-2018, which can be explained by the existence of rural areas that are difficult to access (especially in coastal areas) (***)).

In Haiti, geographical (80% of the territory is mountainous) and meteorological conditions (rains and cyclones) accentuate the isolation of the rural world and make access to schools difficult, especially because they are used as shelters in the hurricane season. Thus, more than half of public and private schools have fewer than 50 students per establishment, which is explained, among other factors, by the fact that half of the schools operate in non-teaching premises (Cambridge Education, 2019).

The countries recognize these challenges, so that the analysis of education sector strategic plans makes it possible to observe objectives and goals around these dimensions. In this way, countries propose the promotion of programmes that raise enrolment rates to international averages, encourage enrolment in rural and hard-to-reach areas, and reduce school exclusion indicators (OECS, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2014; MINED, 2017; MENFP, 2018; National Council of Education, 2019).

Figure 5. Percentage of rural population



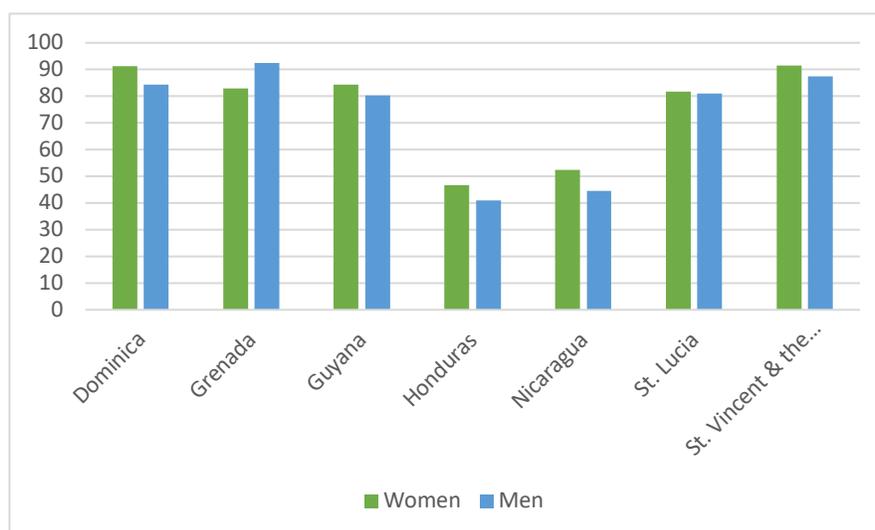
Source: World Bank

7. Reduce gender disparities, and address sexual and gender identity diversity.

Another expression of inequality in the region has to do with gender equity in the school system. In most countries, more than half of the illiterate population is female, with Haiti's indicator standing out: women make up 56% of the population that cannot read or write (UNESCO, 2016).

In terms of coverage, most of the countries studied have net enrolment rates with low gender differences between students in pre-primary and primary education, but in secondary education there are differences that favour women in most of these countries, with rates that differ by more than 5 percentage points from men (TUI-UNESCO, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2017 and 2018). In this regard, in the OECS countries, male enrolment rates have been declining in upper secondary and post-secondary education (OECS, 2012). However, the situation in Grenada is striking, as it is the only case where a difference in favour of men is observed, close to 10 percentage points (Figure 9).

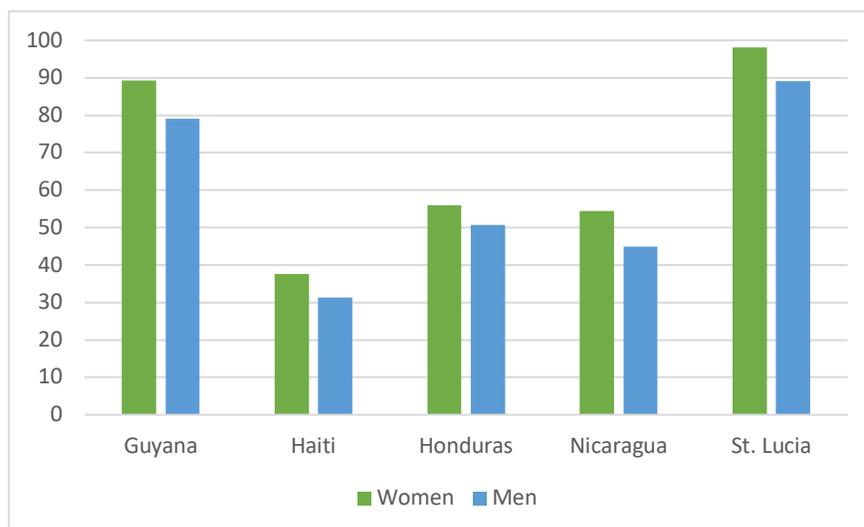
Figure 6. Net Enrolment Rate, Secondary



Source: UNESCO

When looking at school completion, the gender gap remains, with higher rates for women in primary and secondary education in virtually all countries for which data are available (TUI-UNESCO, 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2018). Thus, in Lower Secondary, female students in Guyana, Nicaragua and Saint Lucia have an average completion rate that is 10 points higher than that of males (Figure 10).

Figure 7. Completion rate, Lower Secondary



Source: UNESCO

Linked to this, in countries such as Dominica and Saint Lucia women have repetition rates that may be less than half of the values observed in men (***)

But gender differences have other, more complex expressions to analyze. In Latin America, gender inequality affecting women within the classroom has been studied and is often reinforced by curricula, textbooks and teaching materials that are based on patriarchal perspectives. Historically, these perspectives have imposed male and male domination, relegating women and the feminine as a subordinate identity category. Gender stereotypes are linked to different social mental images: the masculine to production, power, rationality and the public sphere, and the feminine to reproduction, weakness, emotions and the private sphere (Zambrini, 2014; Espinar, 2007).

In Honduras, a "variant" of the phenomenon of social violence that the country faces is related to gender stereotypes and male violence. In this regard, 23.1 per cent of women who were victims of sexual violence did not attend school as a result of this violence (National Education Council, 2019).

8. Strengthen the public education system

8.1 Building local capacity for better decision-making and support for schools

Strengthening public education systems is at the heart of countries' efforts. To achieve this, the interviewees recognized the growing need to produce data, information and knowledge

that would adequately inform decision-making for the design and implementation of education policies. At the same time, the availability of research and evidence is becoming increasingly relevant in order to provide the support required by the school system in different dimensions that range from teaching and learning processes to the strengthening of institutional and leadership capacities of actors.

Thus, the importance of strengthening the professional capacities of technical teams as well as the leadership of actors at different levels of the system (local and national) is also recognized, in order to strengthen the processes of production and use of evidence within education systems.

In the case of Honduras, the government is undergoing a process of decentralization of education, which requires highly trained personnel distributed throughout the national territory that they do not have.

The need for professionalization of data collection and systematization processes in Haiti was also discussed, where - due to technical difficulties - relevant information is lacking in key areas of the education system.

Caribbean countries also face challenges related to this issue. In Grenada, for example, they are working to strengthen leadership at the middle levels of the education system, trying to make it more decentralized. In general terms, they collect basic data on the education system, but there are difficulties in moving towards an evidence-based decision-making system.

8.2 Development of state institutions for the supervision of private supply

The role of the State in the provision and regulation of the supply of education is a subject of interest in the countries studied, especially given the leading role of the private sector in some of them and its implications in terms of organization and control of the system.

Haiti, for example, has an education supply that is mostly private (approximately 80%), unequally distributed between urban and rural areas (Cambridge Education, 2019). The categorization of non-public institutions is complex because it crosses several elements, such as belonging to a network, the profit or non-profit nature of the establishment, or the mode of leadership and management. As a result, the private network is very heterogeneous, ranging from excellent establishments with very high enrolment rates to small schools with a reduced offer to low-income families.

For its part, in the OECS countries studied, the educational offer at the pre-school level is mainly provided by private companies, with a predominant role of the Catholic Church (OECS, 2012). This scenario has its most pronounced expression in St. Vincent and the

Grenadines, St. Lucia and Dominica, where a large part of the supply at the level corresponds to privately owned establishments. Despite these figures, there are no formal assessment methods or a regulatory framework to govern provision, so many programs focus on preparing children for primary school, and those families who cannot afford the established fees are unable to access educational services at the level (Department of Education, 2018). The high participation of the private sector in early education can be seen in Table 10.

In the case of Honduras, the percentage of private educational centers varies, attending about 15% of the enrollment (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Table 10. Percentage of enrolment in private institutions

	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary
Dominica	87 (2016)	38 (2016)	31 (2015)
Grenada	52 (2018)	77 (2018)	63 (2018)
Guyana	N/A	N/A	N/A
Haiti	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honduras	13 (2017)	10 (2017)	26 (2017)
Nicaragua	N/A	N/A	N/A
Saint Lucia	88 (2017)	6 (2017)	3 (2018)
Saint Vincent & the Grenadines	90 (2017)	11 (2017)	28 (2018)

Source: TUI-UNESCO

In this context of high school privatization, the governments of the region recognize the challenge of strengthening their regulations, accountability systems, and internal coordination. Countries such as Guyana and Honduras recognize the need to address the effectiveness and efficiency of their management and service systems, while the latter and Nicaragua set as an objective the necessary articulation between different institutions in the system (Ministry, Councils), as well as between the central and local levels (Ministry of Education, 2014; MINED, 2017; National Education Council, 2019).

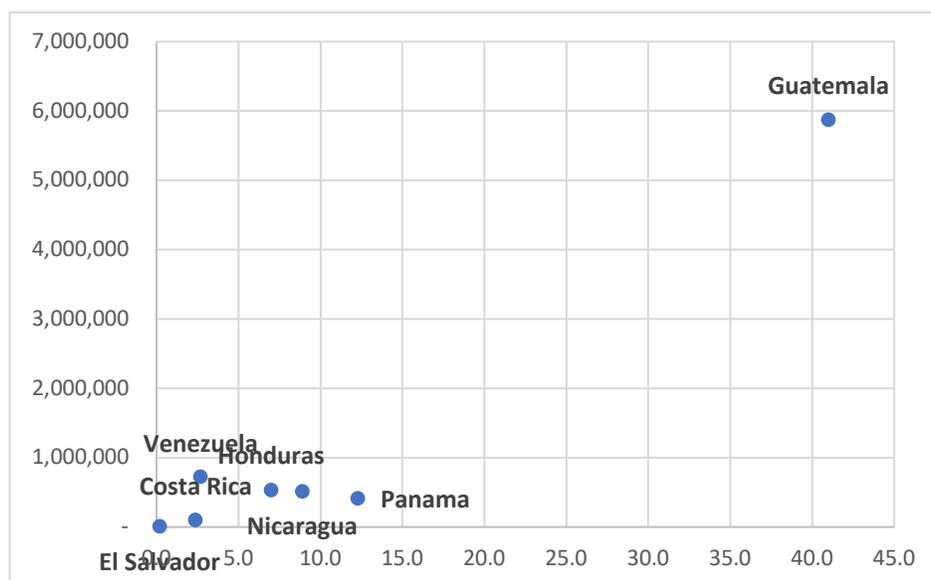
9. Moving towards an inclusive intercultural education

Another challenge facing the region is the inclusion of indigenous peoples' rights among policy priorities. Indigenous peoples and people of African descent have been historically excluded in the region, social processes that began centuries ago and have established discriminatory practices that persist to this day (ECLAC, 2014).

In Latin America there are more than 800 indigenous peoples, with a population of about 45 million people. They are characterized by a wide demographic, social, territorial and

political diversity, ranging from peoples in voluntary isolation to a presence in large urban cities (ECLAC, 2014). The diverse values, beliefs, religions and languages of these groups require educational strategies that integrate this diversity (OREALC/UNESCO, 2017). Figure 11 shows specific data for selected countries.

Figure 8. Population of indigenous peoples according to censuses and estimates, around 2010¹³



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of data from ECLAC, 2014

In this regard, in countries such as Dominica, Haiti and Saint Lucia, there are Creole languages that pose an additional challenge to school systems. In Haiti, it was highlighted in the interviews that this situation is complex, insofar as the language used in the education system (French) is not the one used at the grassroots level (Creole). All learning manuals are written in French and the teaching-learning of reading is mainly done in this language, so when students are assessed, the results in reading speed, number of phonemes read correctly per minute, number of letters correctly identified, number of known words read correctly or number of invented words read correctly, show significantly lower results when texts are read in Creole versus those read in French.

Finally, despite the progress made in recent decades, literacy is still a challenge among aboriginal populations. According to TERCE, indigenous students present learning achievement results that are consistently lower in the different countries of the region, and in countries such as Nicaragua there is a high relationship between performance and indigenous origin, defined by the indigenous status of the mother and the use of the indigenous language in the home (OREALC/UNESCO, 2017).

¹³ Costa Rica, 2011; Panama, 2010; Venezuela, 2011; El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua: estimates to 2010

D. Conclusions

In a matter of months, COVID-19 has radically changed the daily lives of a large part of the world's citizens, challenging the political system to come up with responses that will bring the pandemic under control and lessen the serious economic effects associated with it.

Education systems have also been extremely stressed by this scenario. In the vast majority of countries, in a few weeks this has resulted in the suspension of the educational process or, among those who manage to have connectivity, the transition to on-line education that requires the development of new pedagogical and assessment strategies, in a context where safeguarding the socio-emotional well-being of students and school communities is a priority.

All this is happening amidst budget adjustments that limit the response capacity of ministries, and demands that are linked to food delivery, health campaigns, shelter provision and other relevant aspects.

This complex scenario impacts on some of the educational challenges that the region already faced before the pandemic. In the countries studied, there are challenges that threaten the fulfillment of the right to education, where the low availability of financial resources, the limited access to education in vulnerable and rural areas -especially in early childhood and upper secondary schools-, the low completion rate of students from families with lower socioeconomic levels, and the low levels of learning and high levels of equity associated with it, are some of the elements that are likely to be exacerbated by COVID-19.

In order to respond to the demands that arise, challenges are posed regarding the length of compulsory schooling, the relevance of the curriculum to the demands of the XXI century, and the monitoring of private supply. It also seems necessary to implement teacher professional development systems that strengthen teacher training and improve their working conditions, as well as assessment systems that make it possible to monitor the state of learning in order to make informed decisions. Similarly, the rise of online education prioritizes the challenge of implementing the necessary infrastructure for the use of ICTs in the teaching/learning process, as well as related teacher training.

Finally, the challenges of context observed in some of the countries studied are taking on a new prominence today. In recent weeks we have observed how the effects of the pandemic are translated into social manifestations that often occur in contexts of political instability and social violence.

E. Reading keys for KIX Regional Call

Below, we propose some keys for interpreting the nine cross-cutting education challenges identified and present, by way of example, various initiatives and experiences that have been implemented in countries of the region.

1. Adapting education systems to the context imposed by the COVID-19

The pandemic context has forced countries to try measures to protect the health of the population, trying to ensure that the actions implemented affect as little as possible the activities carried out in times of normality. In the educational field, it has been almost impossible to maintain the original scenario, particularly in contexts of high urbanization and poor school infrastructure.

To respond to the challenges posed during the pandemic, and projecting a post-pandemic scenario, governments should, on the one hand, strengthen teacher training programs focused on distance education and the pedagogical use of ICT technologies to work with students, either with those who can connect to the Internet from their homes, or through alternative devices for disconnected populations, such as radio, television or even the distribution of school texts.

On the other hand, the moment of the reopening of the centers and the return to face to face classes, on the other hand, will force to act in two fronts: a) in the adaptation of the school infrastructure, not only better connectivity, but also in the distance and disposition of the furniture, as well as in the engineering of the use of the common spaces and in the establishment of rigorous protocols of health care. And (b) as soon as possible, the design of educational leveling plans should begin. Knowing that the crisis has affected unequally those children and adolescents of higher socioeconomic levels than those belonging to vulnerable groups, it will be necessary to implement educational and school inclusion programs that focus on the educational demands of the latter.

Finally, it is pertinent to consider the ongoing initiatives that various international organizations are carrying out, with the aim of systematizing the main obstacles that appear in this context, as well as the main possible responses to address them. Thus, the analysis of different initiatives, actions and also concrete educational resources that offer alternatives and frameworks of response to the countries have been made available to the education systems, to be analyzed, taken and/or adapted to the different contexts and situations¹⁴.

¹⁴ For reference, see (links from June 14, 2020):

Global Education Innovation Initiative – Harvard Graduate School of Education:

[https://globaled.gse.harvard.edu/files/geii/files/un_marco_para_guiar_una_respuesta_educativa_a_la_pandemia_del_2020_del_covid-19 .pdf](https://globaled.gse.harvard.edu/files/geii/files/un_marco_para_guiar_una_respuesta_educativa_a_la_pandemia_del_2020_del_covid-19.pdf)

2. Increasing access, coverage and retention in the school system

Experience shows that the supply of education at the initial level is key to the economic development of countries, inasmuch as it facilitates the labor market insertion of women, who are usually the caretakers of children in the home.

At the same time, educational research has shown that low quality educational provision at the level of education can be counterproductive to the development of children, in that fundamental processes of neuronal, cognitive and affective development are affected. For this reason, early childhood provision must consider adequate spaces and, above all, the availability of professionals and specialists to guide the development of infants. The challenges at this level should not be met with day-care centres and sporadic programmes.

With regard to enrolment and retention at the secondary level, this challenge is structural in the region and is related to various elements, such as the compulsory nature of the level, the educational offer, and a series of social aspects, such as child labour and teenage pregnancy, among others. It also refers to the system's capacity to offer its students alternatives that are attractive in order to ensure desirable educational paths, while at the same time responding to the interests of the student body.

In this regard, it is important to strengthen the link between the primary and secondary levels, and to this end it is interesting to look at the experience of programmes such as Uruguay's Plan de Tránsito entre Ciclos Educativos (PTCE). According to the report "Recommendations for educational policies in Latin America based on the TERCE" (2016), this plan seeks to support the most vulnerable students in the transition to secondary education, and to this end it provides psychosocial support to students, generates activities to link them to school during the vacation period at the end of primary school, and provides pedagogical support during the first semester of the first year of secondary school.

GPE: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/gpe-and-covid-19-pandemic?location=initial-view>

Inter-Agency / Network for Education in Emergencies: <https://inee.org/covid-19/resources>

OECD: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/education-responses-to-covid-19-embracing-digital-learning-and-online-collaboration-d75eb0e8/>

UNESCO: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/support>

3. Improving the quality of education and student learning outcomes

The fourth Sustainable Development Goal of Agenda 2030 seeks to "Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". This goal involves instilling the knowledge, attitudes and skills that are the basis of responsible global citizenship: creativity, innovation and commitment to peace, human rights and sustainable development.

Likewise, according to the Incheon Declaration (2015), among the agreed goals for education are the development of the necessary skills for the world of work, gender parity and ensuring that students have the necessary knowledge to promote sustainable development.

In this context, quality education is an objective that goes far beyond the results of summative assessments, and refers to a complex, multifactorial process that is linked to various aspects of student development.

However, achieving essential learning in such relevant areas as reading comprehension and numerical literacy is a necessary step to achieving the objectives described above. In this regard, there is educational research that shows the different stages of development of an educational establishment on the road to successful learning outcomes (Bellei, Contreras, Valenzuela and Vanni, 2014). Therefore, it is relevant to know the reality of educational communities, so that resources and pedagogical support are focused on the different needs linked to those stages.

In this sense, it is important to have programs that can be oriented to different tasks within the school, whether these are the normalization of the institution, the restructuring of processes, work in relation to school culture, or institutional capacities. An interesting case is the implementation of the "National Pact of Literacy at the Right Age" in Ceará (Brazil), from which the students of the municipality began to improve in the areas of Portuguese and Mathematics (Oliveiro-Costa & Carnoy, 2015).

4. Innovate in mechanisms to focus education spending on vulnerable and excluded students.

The education of the most vulnerable students requires greater resources to compensate for the shortcomings linked to the lower cultural capital of the household. In this regard, it is appropriate to consider innovative policies, such as the Preferential School Subsidy (SEP), a policy implemented in Chile that provides additional resources to those schools that serve vulnerable students, as soon as they commit to spending plans and programs linked to central aspects of the teaching/learning process (Mizala and Torche, 2013; Valenzuela, Villarroel and Villalobos, 2013; Valenzuela, 2015). This type of financing mechanism has

proven to be highly effective in increasing the quality of education (Carrasco, Farías and González, 2020).

In addition, as countries recognize, there is a need to develop multidimensional policies and innovative financing mechanisms to address different contexts of vulnerability.

5. Strengthen teacher professional development

Confirmation that teacher quality is the variable within the school that has the greatest effect on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Steven Glazerman et al., 2010; Hanushek et al, 2005; Hattie, 2009; OECD, 2005) has led, in recent decades, to studies on, on the one hand, what skills, dispositions and knowledge are characteristic of an effective teacher and, on the other, to what extent initial teacher training explains the quality of that teacher (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Bruns & Luque, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002)

In this sense, UNESCO's report on teacher policies in Latin America and the Caribbean (2013) identifies four fundamental criteria for strengthening initial teacher training. These are:

- 1) Promote the admission to pedagogical programs of students who have excellent academic records and/or belong to the best performance percentage in their educational establishments.
- 2) To regulate, review and evaluate training programs and the teachers who graduate from them.
- 3) Strengthen the quality of these programs by emphasizing discipline management, training strategies and learning assessment.
- 4) Strengthen the quality of training focused on teaching disadvantaged social groups.

On these points, it is interesting to consider the experience of programs such as the "Beca Vocación de Profesor" in Chile, the establishment of standards and assessment criteria for the accreditation of teacher training institutions in Peru, and the "noncompulsory practices" in Brazil, an initiative that seeks to bring student teachers closer to the reality of public schools, through tutoring students with greater learning difficulties (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016).

On continuing education processes, the same report recommends ensuring that teachers are entitled to relevant and pertinent continuing education, which should be addressed in a way that impacts on teaching practices and student development. It also proposes designing teacher professional development systems that are linked to continuing education, distinguishing the support provided to teachers according to the stage of their working life. Finally, it is necessary to promote collaborative learning among teachers, based on learning communities and networks.

6. Improving education for rural people

The higher vulnerability indices observed in rural schools require measures that coordinate and complement compensatory policies aimed at schools with conditional cash transfers to students and their families. Likewise, innovative programmes should be promoted to strengthen the supply in rural sectors, through compensatory policies that differentiate with respect to the intensity of rurality and address the main difficulties of work in this sector (OREALC/UNESCO, 2016).

In this regard, during the last decade several countries in the region have developed programs that seek to empower rural establishments. In Brazil, the National Rural Education Program (Pronacampo) (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016) has been underway since 2013. It includes the construction of schools, digital training, and monetary support for schools; work with young people and adults through programs that promote and provide access to technological tools; initial and in-service training for teachers; and the availability of specific texts for students.

In Colombia, the Rural Education Project (PER) has focused on students living in rural areas, developing flexible pedagogical and educational strategies that allow their incorporation into the school system. To this end, the project considers support for school transport, uniforms, food, psychosocial care, family tutoring and school retention plans, among other actions (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016).

Notwithstanding the above, in recent years reports of learning assessments have shown that students in rural primary schools in some Latin American countries obtained comparatively better results than their peers in urban state schools, once the effect of the context was removed (Treviño et al., 2010, 2016).

Among the factors that would help explain the better performance in the rural area, the better school climate and the type of school organization - multigrade format - have been identified. In this regard, the evidence on the positive impact of a good school climate on student learning is extensive and documented for the region (Treviño and others, 2010, 2016).

However, the studies that prove the effectiveness of multigrade over the traditional graded format are mixed. Some research on the implementation of multigrade at the primary level shows positive effects (Gutierrez & Slavin, 1992; Ong et al, 2000). Methodologically very rigorous studies have found no statistically significant differences (Pawluk, 1992; Little, 2004; Gerard, 2005; Linehan, 2012). Some also argue that their impact is negative (Mason & Burns, 1996). Finally, others present inconclusive evidence (McEwan, 2008).

In summary, it is essential to develop strategies that reverse the social and economic inequalities observed in rural schools.

7. Reduce gender disparities, and address sexual and gender identity diversity.

Some studies in the Caribbean area point to the need to integrate gender into all policies and plans for the education sector; provide gender awareness training for teachers, parents, principals, support staff, school boards and community members; and address the issue of "hyper-masculinity" (***)).

On the latter, children need to be shown that doing well in school, including reading, is a male attribute, and for this it is important to use social networks and other institutions of socialization.

In relation to the expression of children's and adolescents' sexual and gender identities, the inclusion of LGBT+ children and adolescents requires a response based on a human rights perspective that is inclusive and learner-centred. This should include relevant curriculum and learning materials, training and support for teachers, and the families of students and their families, as well as information to society and evaluation of its impact.

Initiatives such as "Brazil without Homophobia", Uruguay's "National Programme for Education on Sexuality" and Argentina's "Law on Comprehensive Sex Education"¹⁵ are examples of these responses (***)).

¹⁵ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/esi>

8. Strengthen the public education system

The privatization of education in Latin America and the Caribbean has generated two negative consequences. On the one hand, and in particular in countries where practically the entire education supply is private at least at some level (as in Haiti and the OECD member countries studied), it reduces access for the most vulnerable sectors, who cannot pay a monthly fee.

On the other hand, higher levels of privatization are associated with higher levels of social segregation, which implies that middle and upper sectors tend to attend private establishments and lower sectors tend to attend public establishments. In this way, the traditional function of the school as a space for cohesion, for meeting with a different one and for secondary socialization is reduced to the circles that are already common to the original one.

Ensuring a quality public education system is a necessary condition not only to ensure that all children have opportunities to be educated but also to encourage encounter between different social groups and to promote peaceful, empathetic and healthy coexistence.

9. Moving towards an inclusive intercultural education

The analysis of the educational situation of indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples and of policies implemented by some countries allows us to identify some lines of action that should be followed in this area. All of these should include -from their design- representatives of the communities involved.

It is necessary to generate policies for the initial and ongoing training of teachers from an intercultural perspective, while at the same time requiring pedagogical training for indigenous and Afro-descendant teachers. It is also necessary to design and produce educational materials with the participation of the communities, guaranteeing the provision of intercultural and bilingual material to schools: the school must be used as a resource to strengthen native languages. Finally, culturally relevant assessment systems must be developed, those that contain differential quality measurement scales for these groups.

Some interesting experiences in this sense are the projects "Escuela Viva Hekokatúva" from Paraguay and "Territorios Narrados" from Colombia. The first one sought to strengthen the processes of bilingual education (Spanish-Guarani), working with students and teachers at the pre-school and primary levels. Its preliminary results showed significant progress by students in oral and written expression and comprehension, as well as reading comprehension, in both languages. For its part, "Territorios Narrados" has sought to foster the communication skills of children and young people from ethnic groups through the

production of bilingual texts; training processes for ethno-educational communities through pedagogical and audiovisual accompaniment workshops; and forming networks in language, culture and education (OREALC-UNESCO, 2016).

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G. Annexes

Annex 1: Dimensions and selected educational variables, with data by country.

		NICARAGUA	HONDURAS	HAITI	GUYANA	DOMINICA	GRENADA	SAINT VICENT	SAINT LUCIA
Gini Index		46,2	52,1	41,1	44,6	---	---	---	51,2
Poverty rate, on the basis of national povert (% of population)		24,9	48,3	58,5	---	---	---	---	25
GDP, current USD (mill)		13.063	24.024	9.658	3.878	550	1.185	811	1.921
GDP per capita, PPP (current international USD)		5.833	5.810	1.810	9.539	11.814	17.234	12.770	13.960
Public expenditure in education (% of GDP)		4,3	6,1	2,8	5,9	3,4	3,2	5,7	3,7
Per student expenditure (% of per capita GDP)	Primary	11,3	21,4	---	7,8	14,6	8,2	17,5	14,7
	Secondary	7,4	20,3	---	9,3	18,8	10,9	20,1	22,7
	Tertiary	---	40,9	---	13,7	---	5,2	---	0
Initial government funding per student (constant PPP\$)		---	715,13	---	---	310,53	---	367,94	435,84
Compulsory education		7 years Age: 5 to 11	12 years Age: 5 to 16	6 years Age: 6 to 11	6 years Age: 6 to 11	12 years Age: 5 to 16	12 years Age: 5 to 16	12 years Age: 5 to 16	10 years Age: 5 to 14
Number of schools	Pre-primary	8.100	10.945	9.704	471			125	94
	Primary	9.489	13.075	15.130	436			68	74
	Secondary	1.518	2.161	3.613	242			27	22
Number of students	Pre-primary	399.228	592.153	754.949	44.435	1.709	3.680	3.304	4.409
	Primary	784.035	1.207.110	1.469.035	85.191	6.121	12.533	11.570	15.335
	Secondary	619.484	1.038.988	1.619.282	74.974	4.812	7.628	8.978	12.679
	Tertiary	606.520	1.020.126	1.059.062	82.414	7.490	8.856	9.432	15.903
Net enrolment rate (%)	Pre-primary	55,6	36,8	---	81,9	55,7	85,3	71,9	72,9
	Women	56,4	37,3	---	80,3	56,8	86,7	72,7	76,7
	Men	54,7	36,3	---	83,4	54,5	84,1	71,0	69,3
	Primary	94,8	80,0	---	93,1	95,4	95,9	93,6	95,4
	Women	95,9	80,9	---	---	---	---	---	96,1
	Men	93,8	79,3	---	---	---	---	---	94,7
	Secondary	48,4	43,8	---	82,3	87,7	87,7	89,5	81,3
	Women	52,4	46,7	---	84,4	91,2	82,8	91,6	81,7

	Men	44,6	41,0	---	80,4	84,4	92,5	87,5	80,9
Private participation	Pre-primary								100%
	Primary							11,21%	
	Secondary							28,27%	
Completion rate	Primary	74,4	86,9	53,1	97,5	---	---	---	99,6
	Women	84,3	90,0	57,9	99,1	---	---	---	100,0
	Men	66,0	84,0	48,4	95,9	---	---	---	99,2
	Lower Secondary	50,0	53,3	34,5	84,1	---	---	---	93,6
	Women	54,5	55,9	37,6	89,3	---	---	---	98,1
	Men	45,0	50,7	31,4	79,1	---	---	---	89,1
	Upper Secondary	40,9	37,8	16,6	56,2	---	---	---	82,7
	Women	48,2	42,9	16,2	63,9	---	---	---	90,9
	Men	33,6	32,5	17,0	48,5	---	---	---	73,1
Illiterate +15 years	Total	743.547	837.525	2.740.639	76.782	---	1.179	---	---
	Women	51,2	50,3	56	52,6	---	49,4	---	---
Teacher population	Pre-primary	11.836	11.001	16.989	1.870			451	357
	Primary	40.809	51.051	84.568	3.885	540		917	1.004
	Secondary	18.481	26.701	*	3.682	516		707	1.006
Students per Teacher	Primary	30	26	33	23	13	16	14	15
	Secondary	31	17	---	20	11	12	14	11

Annex 2: Guiding Questions for Interviews

Context of the Country and relevant aspects of the education system

1. What is the political and socio-economic context of the country and how does it influence the education system?
2. Where are the critical issues in the organization and administration of the system? How is central power balanced with regional or sub-national governments?
3. What is the role of the private sector in the system? What is the regulation of the sector and how is it supervised? What are its differentiating characteristics in relation to public education?
4. What are the main policies that the country is implementing in education? What measures have been adopted that have shown good results?

Educational provision, access to the system and associated factors

5. In terms of access to the school system, what are the most excluded groups of children and young people, and how do these figures relate to the country's poverty and inequality indices?
6. What are the characteristics of the educational offer for early childhood? What is the educational offer like before the age of 3?
7. What factors explain the low coverage rates and high drop-out rates at the secondary level?
8. In terms of access and permanence, men have worse indicators than women, especially at the secondary level. What factors explain this situation? Are there other types of gender differences in the school system?
9. How does the transition to higher education take place? What is the structure of the level and what are the specific challenges of tertiary education?
10. What is the situation of rural education in the country?

Teaching work, pedagogical resources and learning evaluation

11. What are the characteristics of the teaching population? What are the country's requirements for teaching and what is the training required at each level? What is the employment status of teachers (remuneration, teaching career)?
12. What is the status of leadership management teams? Are there special requirements and/or a specific career path for these professionals?

13. The country shows great challenges in terms of the availability of educational resources, be they physical (such as textbooks) or digital. How has the country addressed this situation?

14. What instruments does the country use to assess the quality of education? What happens with this information? What are the main programmes for students with learning difficulties?

Country challenges and KIX tasks

15. Based on the above, what do you consider to be the main challenges facing the country's education system? What are the Government's priorities in this area?

16. In what areas does the country require more research and data availability in order to develop better policies?

To close, a general question about education reforms at 3 moments (a) Important reforms of the last decade and impact on the system; b) Recent and current reforms and indications of results/impact; c) Relevant reform projects to respond to current challenges).

To conclude, in summary, what are the principal education reforms of recent times in the country and those currently in place? Are there pending reforms for the mid-term?

