



Policy brief

How is educational resilience understood in **Latin American and Caribbean** countries?



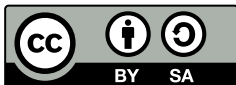
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Editor's note: In this publication, terms such as 'children,' 'parents,' 'children,' 'guardians,' and others referring to men and women are used inclusively.

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This brief presents key findings from the report “How is Educational Resilience Understood in Latin America and Caribbean Countries?”¹. The report and brief were produced by the project, AdaptED: Observatory for Educational Resilience in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), under the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX), a joint endeavor with Canada’s International Development Research Centre.

In the search of resilient educational systems: why should it be a priority in LAC?

The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of building education systems that can withstand and adapt to a wide range of disruptions known and unknown, putting special attention to vulnerable groups, who are disproportionately affected in times of crisis. Even prior to the pandemic, educational resilience had been identified and considered in LAC countries. In the Caribbean, in particular, it has been a central issue due to the region’s historical and growing exposure to disasters. Despite its growing prominence, there is still little consensus on what education system resilience means in theory and practice in the region. This presents significant obstacles for policymakers and practitioners seeking to implement meaningful resilient initiatives, amid escalating shocks and disruptions to education systems and learning processes. Compounding these challenges are structural inequalities and vulnerabilities within the region’s education systems, which amplify the uneven impact of disruptions, often occurring simultaneously. To address these knowledge gaps, the [AdaptED](#) project examines the meanings and practices of educational resilience and potential future disruptions to education systems in GPE partner countries in the LAC region: Belize, Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Methodology

The report is based on a content analysis of education laws, sector strategic plans, and curriculum documents for each of the eleven GPE countries. This analysis is complemented by a review of the literature, available data, and interviews with education stakeholders in selected countries. The project adopted a three-part approach to the content analysis:

- a. Reviewing documents for resilience-related terminology based on existing frameworks, including: resilience, response capacity, adaptation capacity, coping capacity, strengthen, anticipate, recover, prevent, and mitigate.
- b. Analyzing documents for references related to threats and challenges affecting education systems and to which they should demonstrate resilience, such as: climate change, disasters, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, droughts, migration, emergencies, epidemics, crises, violence, and crime.
- c. Examining whether and how documents address the needs of vulnerable groups in the context of shocks and disruptions.

For the purposes of the study, we adopted the following definition of education system resilience: the capacity of education systems to respond, adapt, and recover in the face of changes, challenges, or threats. We also differentiate between individual and system-level resilience.

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The report can be found on the AdaptED website: <https://adapted-lac.org/en/>

Key Findings

1. Educational resilience: a notion in development

The term “resilience” is largely absent from education laws and appears only occasionally in curriculum documents. In contrast, it is used more frequently in education strategic plans, particularly in Caribbean countries, where it is linked to four key dimensions of education systems: institutional infrastructure, technology and innovation, student capacities and well-being, and schools’ climate resilience. Across the reviewed documents, the focus tends to be on individual resilience rather than system resilience, emphasizing the development of students’ skills. GPE countries recognize that the world is changing and that disruptions, such as climate change, are increasingly affecting education.

- Dominica stands out in the region for its resilience-related efforts, using the term “resilience” most frequently in its education strategic plan and linking it with both structural processes and individual development. Its 2023–2030 Strategic Plan contains the highest number of references to the term. After Hurricane Maria, Dominica set out to become a resilient nation, and in 2018 it created the National Resilience Development Strategy, which focuses on strengthening infrastructure and establishing social protection systems against threats. It collaborates with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) to ensure schools meet safety and resilience standards against climate-related risks. It has a school-level information system called OpenSis that enables the collection of data on its education system.
- Across the region, other GPE countries also incorporate the term “resilience” in their strategic plans, although to a lesser extent. Grenada and Honduras address it from a pedagogical perspective; Guyana links resilience to digital transformation and support for vulnerable populations; Saint Lucia focuses on school climate resilience and the strengthening of psychosocial support; Belize prioritizes the development of resilient capacities among students; and Guatemala integrates it into its National Development Plan K’atun 2032. These references reflect important progress, but they do not yet amount to a systemic vision of educational resilience.

2. Resilience-related terms in national documents: Emphasis on system strengthening

Although the term “resilience” is not always explicitly mentioned in education laws, strategic plans, or curriculum documents, this does not mean resilience-related efforts are absent. When these documents are analyzed using resilience-related keywords, such terms appear far more frequently than “resilience” itself. Among them, “strengthen” is by far the most common across all countries reviewed, especially in strategic plans. The emphasis on strengthening typically relates to five areas: infrastructure improvement, educational management, teacher training, curriculum design, and, support for vulnerable populations. In contrast, terms such as “prevent,” “mitigate,” “recover,” and “anticipate” occur far less often and are mostly associated with infrastructure, school safety, health, and disaster response. This imbalance highlights the need to better connect system-strengthening efforts with strategies for prevention, mitigation, anticipation, and recovery during crises. Further, when the terms appear in the documents, they do so in narrow, isolated contexts rather than being integrated with other resilience-related capacities.

Table 1
Frequency of Terms Associated with Resilience in Strategic Plans by Country

Caribbean Countries						
	Resilience	Strengthen	Prevent	Anticipate	Recover	Mitigate
Dominica	102	86	1	0	0	2
Grenada	2	27	1	0	0	0
Guyana	2	20	0	0	0	0
Haiti	0	36	1	1	0	0
Saint Lucia	11	67	0	0	0	0
Saint Vincent	0	8	0	9	0	0
Countries in Central America						
	Resilience	Strengthen	Prevent	Anticipate	Recover	Mitigate
Belize	1	32	2	0	0	1
El Salvador	0	21	1	0	0	0
Guatemala	1	2	0	0	0	0
Honduras	1	27	0	0	0	0
Nicaragua	0	22	0	0	0	0
Countries in South America						
Guyana	2	20	0	0	0	0

- All GPE countries include at least one mention of the term “strengthen” in their strategic plans, making it the most developed and promoted capacity at the national level in the analysis. The frequency of this term may be due to the fact that system strengthening is an ongoing process that can continue regardless of whether a crisis or emergency is occurring.
- Among the dimensions related to strengthening are management and governance, where agility and adaptability are essential for responding to change and managing disruptions. For example, Saint Lucia aims to build a more agile and responsive education system by strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity, including actions such as promoting and maintaining safe working environments.
- The educational resilience approach seeks to articulate efforts and strategies aimed at anticipating, preventing, mitigating, and recovering from crises. Table 1 shows a limited presence of these terms in strategic plans. Moreover, when they do appear, they do it in very specific and isolated ways, rather than being interconnected with other resilience-related capacities. One example is the term “prevent,” which is often associated exclusively with disease prevention in school environments.

3. Disasters, climate change and migration: Key disruptions to education systems

Countries' efforts to make education systems more resilient and responsive to disruptions are also reflected in how they recognize and address the threats and challenges affecting those systems. The analysis shows that the most frequently referenced terms include disasters, hurricanes, crises, and emergencies. When looking at how many countries refer to these terms, two additional disruptions stand out: climate change and migration. These, along with disasters, appear in the strategic education plans of most countries. In contrast, in education laws and curriculum documents, these terms are referenced less frequently.

- The term “disasters” is the most frequently mentioned across the documents, underscoring its status as a priority challenge for education systems in the region, though responses vary by country. It is primarily referenced in relation to educational infrastructure, strategic planning, and prevention and awareness, with hurricanes being the most cited disaster. Some countries prioritize infrastructure, for example, Belize emphasizes compliance with construction standards, while Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines focus on temporary or permanent school closures. Overall, most countries treat disasters as a key priority in their strategic education plans. Dominica stands out once again by promoting disaster-resilient infrastructure in collaboration with the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI).
- Disasters are closely linked to climate change, and the reviewed documents address climate change primarily through awareness-raising, risk management, and adaptation. Some countries reference existing strategies, such as El Salvador's National Emergency and Contingency Plan and its Education Plan for Climate Change and Comprehensive Risk Management, Guatemala's Climate Change Framework, and Honduras' National Strategy against Climate Change. In other countries, the term appears without accompanying plans or laws but with the documents noting climate-related shocks and the implications of inadequate response.
- Migration can be understood as a multifactorial challenge in which the right to education must be fully guaranteed. In most GPE countries, references to migration focus on national diagnostics and the need for comprehensive policies to address its impacts. It is associated with violence, resource shortages, school dropout, and insufficient attention to rural areas and indigenous populations, among other factors. Migration is mentioned in strategic plans of Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, with Guatemala also including it in its curriculum.

4. Addressing vulnerable populations through an inclusive and equity-focused approach

Vulnerable groups are often the most affected during educational disruptions. The review indicates that when these groups are mentioned, most frequently in strategic plans, the focus is typically on ensuring access to education, reducing inequalities, and protecting them from increasing risks and disruptions. While countries acknowledge the challenges experienced by vulnerable groups and the need to address them, they do not always outline specific approaches or strategies.

- Gender inequalities remain a structural challenge for many education systems in the region. In several Central American countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua), persistent gaps primarily affect women, particularly in access, retention, and completion of studies. In contrast, in the Caribbean (Saint Lucia and Guyana), challenges are more evident in boys' academic performance and school participation. Furthermore, while legal frameworks and strategies on disability exist, their implementation remains weak, and in some cases, students with severe disabilities are excluded from mainstream education.

- The dynamics associated with ethnicity, rurality, poverty, and migration show that vulnerabilities overlap and affect educational trajectories in complex ways. Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Belize, Guyana, and Dominica incorporate approaches or strategies related to ethnic diversity, specifically to Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations. While the approaches vary, they primarily focus on the recognition of diversity and the implementation of Intercultural Bilingual Education.
- GPE partner countries recognize migration as a challenge for the capacity of their education systems, particularly in the case of returned or migrant children. Some measures that are mentioned in the documents include teaching in the mother tongue of the Venezuelan population in Guyana and reintegrating deported children and adolescents in schools and communities in Honduras.

Policy Recommendations:

I. Integrating resilience as a multidimensional and interconnected approach

Although educational resilience appears in official documents, it is often framed from a student-centered perspective rather than a system-level one. The approach needs to be expanded to include families, communities, schools, and other actors, recognizing that a resilient system is one that can adapt and recover in ways that ensure the continuity of educational services. Further, there is a strong need for a clearer and more articulated integration of resilience at the system level. This requires having contextualized and agreed-upon definitions and strategies that encompass not only strengthening, but also anticipation, prevention, mitigation, and recovery.

II. Identifying structural vulnerabilities to prevent unequal impacts

Educational systems in the region operate in contexts marked by structural vulnerabilities and inequalities that amplify the effects of threats, especially for vulnerable groups. It is therefore essential to identify risks through the interaction of the following factors: threats, vulnerability, and exposure, as this helps anticipate differentiated impacts. Doing so requires capacities and coordination mechanisms across actors and levels of the system. Also, achieving inclusive systems requires an intersectional analysis that considers how these dimensions interact and ensures that all students can complete their education on time with the expected learning outcomes.

III. Strengthening education systems through coordinated and adaptive governance

Building resilient education systems requires governance arrangements that promote coordination, agility, and sustained institutional learning across actors and levels. Dominica's experience after Hurricane Maria in 2017 illustrates the value of this approach: integrating a resilience lens across sector documents, developing instruments such as the NRDS and school emergency plans, and working jointly with CDEMA and the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI), with support from UNDRR, has enabled the country to respond in a more organized and coherent way to disruptions.

IV. Promoting community-based and inclusive strategies for effective education response

Advancing toward resilient education systems requires a community-based and inclusive perspective that places special emphasis on vulnerable populations. This involves engaging communities and local groups in decision-making and developing key capacities to better face future changes and disruptions. Capacity strengthening must also be linked to an understanding of how poverty, rurality, disabilities, and migration shape educational trajectories, as observed across GPE countries. To achieve this, information systems that support decision-making are essential, as exemplified by the OpenSIS system in Dominica.

Final reflection:

From a general perspective, the content analysis indicates an uneven presence of educational resilience terms in official documents in countries in the region, with stronger representation in strategic plans than in education laws or curriculum documents. Caribbean countries, which are highly vulnerable to disasters, stand out for their education-related resilience efforts within the LAC region. However, across all countries, the concept of “education system resilience” is not yet fully embedded in education system structures and processes. Further work is needed to integrate strategies for strengthening the education system with those focusing on mitigation, anticipation, prevention, and recovery from shocks and disruptions.

