

# EXPANDING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Challenges and priorities in educational policy

## SUMMARY

June 2020



## About this report

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Graphics and layout by the KIX LAC team.



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This work has been supported by the Global Partnership for Knowledge Sharing and Innovation in Education, a joint effort with Canada's International Development Research Centre. 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).



## About KIX

The Knowledge & Innovation Exchange (KIX) initiative seeks to connect the expertise, innovation and knowledge of Global Partnership for Education (GPE) partners to help developing countries build stronger education systems. Through the sharing and funding of proven solutions and innovations, KIX will: (a) ensure that evidence-based solutions get in the hands of national policy makers and directly feed policy dialogue and planning processes; (b) build capacity to produce, integrate and scale knowledge and innovation in GPE partner countries.

In its early stage of implementation, KIX is building Regional Hubs in different regions, where partners come together to share information, innovation and best practices. KIX is also a funding mechanism that provides grants at the global and regional levels to invest in knowledge generation and innovation, and to scale proven approaches.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Canada is the grant agent for KIX.

Led by a consortium integrated by SUMMA and OECS, the KIX for the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) hub will work between April 2020 and December 2023 to support country partners' systems education development and to contribute to guarantee the right to education in Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines (country partners). For achieving its goal, the LAC KIX has defined three pillars: (I) policy agenda setting; (II) knowledge mobilization & exchange; and (III) regional and local capacity building.

## About SUMMA

It is the first Education Research and Innovation Laboratory 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.



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This document summarizes the results of the first stage of research on the main educational challenges in Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia and St. Vincent & the Grenadines.

For this initial phase, it was applied a qualitative-inductive methodology, through which 51 institutional documents (sectoral strategies, norms, educational plans) and databases were analyzed, and 16 interviews with representatives from the 8 countries were held. A draft version of this study was shared and discussed during the KIX LAC launch webinar, held in June 2020, counting on the participation of more than 50 people from the countries and partner organizations.

Between July and December 2020, it is expected to implement the study's second phase, through which we will develop a thorough understanding of each educational system's characteristics, challenges and strengths, with the aim of define the KIX agenda for the next years.



<sup>1</sup> | This document summarizes the main challenges identified in the Report: Educational Challenges in LAC, and it was elaborated by SUMMA and OECS to inform the KIX Regional Call that will be launched by IDRC and GPE in July. There are other two relevant challenges of the LAC countries that are not included in this summary for being considered out of the scope of the KIX Regional Call. These challenges relate to: a) the insufficiency of the systems' structural funding and b) the need for developing the upper secondary level and VET systems.



## Summary of results

In the next paragraphs, we summarize the most important challenges the region needs to address, according to the study's findings:

### 1. New demands generated by the impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 has generated a complex and extremely challenging scenario in Latin America and the Caribbean. As a result of COVID-19, it is estimated that in 2020 poverty in Latin America will increase by at least 4.4 percentage points over the previous year (ECLAC, 2020). At the global level, the pandemic has affected the education of more than 1.5 billion students worldwide, and according to UNESCO figures of 31 March 2020, 185 countries closed schools and universities throughout their territory, affecting 89.4% of the world's student population.<sup>2</sup>

This situation has placed enormous demands on school communities and educational authorities. In order to respond to the challenges posed during the pandemic, and projecting a post-pandemic scenario, governments must, on the one hand, strengthen teacher training programs focused on distance education and the pedagogical use of ICT technologies to work with students, whether it be with those who can connect to the Internet from home, or through alternative devices for disconnected populations, such as radio, television or even the distribution of school texts.

The moment of the reopening of centres and the return to face-to-face classes, on the other hand, will require action on two fronts: a) the adaptation of school infrastructure and protocols; and b) the design of educational plans for levelling and the adaptation and prioritisation of curricula. Knowing that the crisis has affected unequally those children and adolescents with higher socioeconomic levels than those belonging to vulnerable groups, it will be necessary to implement teaching and school inclusion programs that focus on the educational demands of the latter, as well as research that analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on education and its main actors (principals, teachers, students and families).

Finally, it will be essential for governments to have the capacity to foster synergy among all projects and initiatives financed by international organizations in this new scenario. It is pertinent to consider all the initiatives underway by various international organizations in order to systematize the principal obstacles that appear in this context, as well as the principal possible responses to confront them.<sup>3</sup>

2 | Global monitoring map on school closures, UNESCO: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

3 | 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) ; 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>



## Summary of results

### 2. Rurality and vulnerable groups

Ensuring access to education for school-age children and youth is a challenge in virtually all the countries studied, especially in rural and more vulnerable areas.

About 80% of schools in Nicaragua and Honduras are rural, which receive more than 50% of students. These schools have deficient infrastructure and service conditions, while at the same time there are higher percentages of students who engage 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 Guyana, there are differences in net enrolment rates between different regions of the country as well as in the distribution of trained teachers (specially comparing coastal zones with hinterland).<sup>4</sup>In Haiti, geographical and meteorological conditions accentuate the isolation of the rural world and make access to schools difficult, especially since they are used as shelters during the hurricane season. More than half of public and private schools in the country have fewer than 50 students, which is explained, among other factors, by the fact that schools operate in non-teaching premises (Cambridge Education, 2019).

In OECS member countries, there are inequalities linked to the socio-economic background of students, so that vulnerable students are less likely to attend school at the pre-school level (because of fees), have higher repetition rates, lower academic performance and are more likely to leave school before completing the secondary level (OECS, 2012).

Inequalities also affect students from indigenous peoples, who commonly have higher illiteracy rates (\*\*\*) and learning achievements that are consistently lower in the different countries studied (OREALC/UNESCO, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

Finally, students who speak Creole languages in countries such as Dominica, Haiti, and Saint Lucia present additional challenges, especially when school systems do not use these popular languages (as is the case in Haiti), presenting all learning manuals and teaching-learning processes for reading in a language other than the home language.

It is necessary to develop support programs for these students and for schools that make it possible to confront the additional deficiencies and difficulties of the environment. Programs are needed that consider aspects such as infrastructure, transportation, food, promotion and access to technological tools; pre-service and in-service training for teachers, and availability of teaching resources for students. Thus, it is essential to explore innovative financing mechanisms that prioritize resources for these groups, complementing compensatory policies aimed at schools with conditional cash transfers to students and their families.

4 | Unpublished document.

5 | Unpublished document.





## Summary of results

### 3. Quality of education and learning outcomes

#### 3.1 Developing, updating and adapting the curriculum

Countries need to ensure holistic education pathways for all their students, within validated assessment and teaching frameworks. 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 this regard, the concerns of countries revolve around strengthening the construction of citizenship and the development of interpersonal skills that allow young people to interact and collaborate in a context of great cultural diversity. In the case of Honduras, it was mentioned 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. The incorporation of the gender perspective and the need to develop curricular proposals relevant to children and adolescents -in line with the competencies of the 21st century- are issues that have appeared in the dialogues with key informants.

#### 3.2 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. In Central America, Honduras has its own system and has also participated in international assessments such as PISA for Development and ERCE. Nicaragua also participates in ERCE and is in the process of developing a national evaluation system.

National assessments differ among OECS countries. While Saint Lucia and Dominica apply the Common Entrance to grade 6, Grenada and St. Vincent & the Grenadines apply the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA).

Some of the challenges faced by the region in this regard are the development, alignment and use of assessment instruments; the further study of the conditions necessary for carrying out international comparative studies; and the development of research that analyzes the influence of associated factors on national and international learning outcomes.



## Summary of results

### 3.3 Strengthening teacher professional development

A challenge observed in the countries, related to the two previous points, is the low level of training required to teach, especially at the primary level. For example, according to TERCE data (OREALC/ UNESCO, 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 in St. Vincent & the Grenadines there are high turnover rates due to poor salary structures and incentives (Department of Education, 2018).

The challenge in structuring teaching careers and in the quality of pre-service and in-service training they receive affects the entire region. The themes that have emerged in the interviews include the use of technologies for pedagogical purposes, the suspension of corporal punishment as an option for school discipline, and the deepening of knowledge of learning processes among young people.

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

Studying the viability and impact of alternative training programs and of new content in pre-service and in-service teacher training can generate valuable information for improving the quality of possible reforms in the countries analyzed. Similarly, encouraging experimentation with the implementation of assessments at the teacher and managerial levels for training purposes can be a new line of work for countries in the region.

### 4. Institutional and technical capacity building

Another challenge identified by countries is related to the lack of availability of professionals and officials at different levels of school systems, as well as the need to strengthen their technical capacities.

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, which 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 have to face challenges related to this issue. In Grenada, for example, they are working to strengthen leadership in the middle levels of the education system, seeking 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.





## Summary of results

These shortcomings have an impact on such important aspects as the regulation and oversight of private education provision, an especially critical issue in Haiti, where most education provision is private (almost 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 lucrative or not nature of the establishment, or the mode of leadership and management.

In the OECS countries studied, preschool education is provided mainly by private institutions, with the Catholic Church playing a predominant role (OECS, 2012). However, there are no formal assessment methods or a regulatory framework to govern provision. In Guyana, the challenge of monitoring private provision is shared, as is the collection of data in the sector.

Other dimensions that are affected by this challenge are linked to the absence or scarcity of pedagogical support structures for schools, planning and statistical systems, administration, finances, research and evaluation.

Based on these challenges, it will be important initiatives aimed at developing institutions and strengthening leadership at the national, intermediate, and local levels, the technical capacities of ministerial teams in aspects related to the design, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of education policies, and the use of evidence in policy formulation and decision-making.

### 5. Gender disparities and threats to sexual and gender identity diversity

The above four themes should be explored from a gender perspective, through research that examines curriculum frameworks for students and teachers, teaching and learning practices, dynamics among students and within the broader school community, and the development of professional capacities in ministries and at intermediate levels.

In Latin America, gender inequality affecting women within the classroom has been studied and is often reinforced by curriculum, 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% of women who were victims of sexual violence did not attend school as a result of this violence (National Council of Education, 2019).



## Summary of results

Finally, in several Latin American countries there are reports on the human rights situation, which, despite not focusing on schools, show situations of homo/transphobia that sometimes occur in the educational context. These reports have the limitation of referring to homophobic bullying towards gays and lesbians in the school context, but not to the inclusion of LGBT+ children in school spaces. Despite the above, it can be observed that the most prevalent form of violence is verbal, followed by physical violence carried out by peers and educational personnel in schools. In this context, it is necessary to explore the relationship between the education system and the social, cultural and productive dynamics that are involved in the construction of gender and identities in the countries. Likewise, studies that make visible phenomena that could be hidden in statistics but that in practice contribute to reproducing injustices and gender inequalities in the region will be valuable.



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