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# Regional Forum of Educational Policy 2018:

*Challenges for secondary education in Latin America in view of the ED 2030 Agenda*

Buenos Aires, 20 to 21 September 2018



In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets out 17 goals with 169 targets of an integrated and indivisible nature, covering the spheres of the economy, society and environment. These 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were elaborated during more than two years of public consultations, interaction with civil society and negotiations among the Member States. Success in achieving these goals depends to a large extent on educational outcomes. The 17 SDGs reflect the important role of education in a distinct goal (SDG 4). Furthermore, the SDGs include education-related targets in other goals, relating to health, economic growth and employment, consumption and sustainable production, and climate change. The first target set out in SDG 4 calls to ensure that, by 2030, everyone is enabled to complete both primary and secondary education, which must be free, equitable and of quality and must produce relevant learning outcomes.

This global commitment was ratified by the Latin American and Caribbean countries in the Buenos Aires Declaration of January 2017, which addresses the main socio-economic and educational challenges of the region, describes the guiding principles and the strategic objectives for achieving SDG 4 and the Education 2030 (ED 2030) Agenda, and provides an action oriented guide to Member States and the educational community.

Within this framework, each country is in the process of defining its own national goals, based on the SDGs, and is developing a strategy for their implementation. In the case of education, this redefinition of national agendas presents a unique opportunity to take stock of the advances that have been consolidated in the last decades, to identify the hard core of the educational agenda, and to review the set of educational policy tools that states can use to fully enforce the right to education.

In addition to the efforts by different agencies of the United Nations system to strengthen Member States in their capacity to meet their commitments, UNESCO IIEP Buenos Aires aims to contribute to this balancing and re-elaborating of national educational agendas by providing a space for dialogue, consultation, and peer learning to ministerial authorities of Latin American countries, representatives of civil society, and experts from international organizations and the academic world. The Regional Forum of Educational Policy will serve as a central and defining activity and will focus the debate on the challenges that the adoption of the ED 2030 Agenda presents for educational planning.

The aim of guaranteeing secondary education for all under SDG 4 reaches Latin America at a time when most of its countries are already making great efforts in this regard. In 13 of the 19 countries in the region, the entire cycle of secondary education is compulsory, while lower secondary is mandatory in another 5. These efforts have resulted in a substantive increase in school enrolment in the region, but significant challenges remain. In spite of a net enrolment rate of over 90% in half of the countries of the region, the other half experiences rates that range between 60% and 90%, and the proportion of young people who graduate from high school remains low. Only in two countries is the proportion of graduating students greater than two thirds, and in seven countries more than half of the students fail to complete the secondary level.

In Latin America secondary education was originally conceived as an educational level dedicated to guide students to different segments of social and productive life. In practice, this selection process results in a system of segmentation and social exclusion. Bottlenecks exist at several stages of secondary education, leading to the maintenance of a status quo that is determined by social segmentation and that limits the opportunities of the most vulnerable social groups.

A first bottleneck prevents all children who finish primary school from having access to secondary education. Those who do not manage to enter secondary school are relegated to low-skilled and low-paid jobs. A second barrier prevents all of those who enter the middle level from having access to educational content that will enable them to enter university. Those who do not succeed in enrolling in schools that emphasize academic learning take trajectories focused on practical content that lead to technical professions. Typically, only those who pass these two barriers manage to continue their studies at university and access the most socially prestigious and best paid careers.

These discriminatory practices are recognized as unacceptable now that secondary school has ceased to be understood as an institution designed for social segmentation, and has instead become accepted as the final level of general and compulsory education for all that is part of a project of social inclusion and a guarantor of the right to education.

In line with this recognition, many of the countries in the region have officially changed the purpose of secondary education, making it more than a prerequisite for post-secondary studies. The region's current regulatory frameworks conceived the secondary school as having three educational goals. Firstly, it is meant to offer the possibility of full personal development, and of realizing life projects that are in accordance with one's expectations and needs. Secondly, it is meant as a school of civic education that enables active participation in public life and is committed to the principles of democracy and peaceful coexistence. Thirdly, secondary school is now conceived as a place where young people acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that are essential for an insertion into the world of work, the support of their economic well-being and the development of society as a whole.

The fundamental challenge facing the countries of Latin America today is how to move from a secondary education that, despite the new legal frameworks, remains tied to practices of premature selection and discrimination, towards secondary schooling that guarantees solid and meaningful learning for all young people, and that thus allows them to take their own decisions about their lives.

In view of this complex challenge faced by the Ministries of Education of the countries of the region, IIEP Buenos Aires proposes to contribute to the debate on secondary education policies in Latin America, within the framework of the commitments to the Education 2030 Agenda. The Regional Forum on Education Policy will provide a space for dialogue and reflection on the implications of incorporating secondary education as part of the compulsory cycle, and as a project of social and educational inclusiveness that is framed within a human rights perspective.

The meeting will be organized in three thematic panels. The first panel will offer a mapping of the state of secondary education in Latin America, proposing two complementary perspectives: a quantitative view, with statistical information to understand the coverage trends, and a qualitative view, with a description of the different structures of secondary education systems in Latin American countries.

The second panel will provide reflections on youth in Latin American, on their educational needs, and on how these should inform the transformation of secondary education. This process of transformation should include a dialogue with young people, a recognition of their identities, and of the state's obligation to guarantee the principles of non-discrimination and their right to participate and to be heard in decisions that affect them.

The third panel will analyse policy initiatives that the countries of the region are developing to guarantee access to, retention in, and graduation from secondary education as well as the achievement of substantive and relevant learning outcomes for all young people. Among these, those initiatives aimed at retaining or reinserting students from societal segments that have historically been left out of secondary school will be highlighted. Following the critical analysis of such mitigating measures, the panel will seek to reflect on the need to achieve a comprehensive transformation of secondary education in Latin America in its more structural aspects, focusing on aspects such as the structure of the curriculum, the institutional format, the teaching strategies, and the characteristics of the school trajectories, among others.

## Objectives

- 1.** To create a space for policy debate and reflection, focusing on the policy implications of the ED 2030 Agenda and effective strategies for its implementation.
- 2.** To create a network of education policy makers, planners and managers in the region, aimed at establishing a permanent space for consultation, cooperation, and exchange of experiences in order to strengthen the capacities of Member States in education policy and planning.

# Institutional framework

The Regional Forum of Educational Policy is framed within UNESCO's efforts to support Member States in the implementation of ED 2030 targets and commitments. Consequently, the Forum is organized jointly with UNESCO's Section of Partnerships, Cooperation and Research in the Division for Education 2030 Support and Coordination, the UNESCO Santiago Regional Office for Education (OREALC), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), and UNESCO's International Bureau of Education.

## Participants

The **Regional Education Policy Forum** will be a closed meeting with activities to produce a space for dialogue among educational policy-makers of the region. The meeting will be open to:

- Education policy-makers of the 19 Latin American States.
- Members of the regional agencies of the United Nations system and other international organizations, particularly those who participated in the Region's Summits of Education Ministers that took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Cochabamba, Bolivia
- Experts and academics that specialize in educational policy.
- Representatives of regional civil society organizations.
- Regional representative bodies.

## Event dynamics

The **Regional Forum of Educational Policy** will be held over two and a half days, and it will have the following features:

- Emphasis will be placed on creating a space for dialogue among educational authorities, and other invited participants from United Nations agencies and other relevant social sectors.
- Sessions will be structured around key topics to allow the discussion of the main challenges of implementing the ED 2030 Agenda, with presentations that will be followed by ample space for discussion.
- Different formats of discussion will be used, such as workshops, round tables, etc.
- There will not be simultaneous transmission in order to ensure a space of discretion, trust, dialogue and thoughtfulness.

# Preliminary Schedule

## Day 1

08:30-09:00	<b>Registration</b>
09:00-09:30	<b>Opening statements</b>
09:30-10:15	<b>Keynote speech</b>
10:15-10:45	<i>Coffee break</i>
10:45-13:15	<b>Panel 1</b> <i>The state of secondary education in Latin America</i>
13:15-14:45	<i>Lunch</i>
14:45-16:15	<b>Panel 2</b> <i>Youth and secondary education</i>
16:15-16:45	<i>Coffee break</i>
16:45-18:15	<b>Panel 3</b> <i>Secondary education policies: Challenges and perspectives</i>
20:00-22:00	<i>Dinner (place to be determined)</i>

## Day 2

08:45-09:00	<b>Introduction to the day</b>
09:00-11:00	<b>Workshop</b> <i>Rethinking secondary education policy in Latin America (part 1)</i>
11:00-11:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:30-13:30	<b>Workshop</b> <i>Rethinking secondary education policy in Latin America (part 2)</i>
13:30-14:00	<b>Presentation</b> <i>Follow up: Online platform of the Regional Forum</i>
14:00-15:30	<i>Lunch - closure</i>