



Fifth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development

San José, 7-9 March 2022

Concept note

Panel 5

Education and gender equality: human rights central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

**Wednesday, 9 March, 8.30–10 a.m.
(Crowne Plaza San José Corobicí, Costa Rica time, GMT-6)**

The medium-term consequences of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on local, national and global economies are still uncertain, but the pandemic has clearly exacerbated gender inequality and reinforced the structural challenges on which it rests. In addition, the crisis has deepened the inequalities that characterize the region's educational systems, which have been reflected in gaps in access to quality alternatives for the continuation of studies.

Loss of income, increased job insecurity and time poverty are phenomena that are affecting women most and have worsened during the crisis, resulting in unprecedented setbacks for the autonomy of women. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a silent but devastating impact on children, adolescents and young people. In education, the suspension of face-to-face classes has had harmful and unequal short- and long-term effects on the development of skills. Although such suspensions were initially needed to control the spread of the virus, they have been particularly drawn-out in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is the region of the world with the longest period of recorded partial or full closure of educational institutions (56 weeks on average by September 2021, more than a full academic year).¹

Education is a human right and a core dimension of the 2030 Agenda because of its interdependence with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its positive impact on the prospects for attaining them, and particularly those relating to gender equality. To invest in education is to invest in human capabilities; in other words, in the most important asset that countries have to reduce inequality and achieve higher levels of development. The pandemic has revealed large inequalities in the availability of resources and spaces suitable for non-face-to-face learning, the main risks of which include a loss of learning and rises in school dropout.

This crisis offers an opportunity to reform education systems to make them more resilient and inclusive. In the near term, urgent measures are required to safely reopen education institutions and care facilities, and to adequately assess and respond to these risks, because the pandemic will have a long-term social and economic impact, through its imprint on the education and careers of an entire generation. Added to this are the structural challenges of inclusion, quality and relevance already faced by education systems, which

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2021* (LC/PUB.2021/17-P), Santiago, 2021.

have been exacerbated by a context of rapid technological change. In view of this, there is a need to increase investment in education and reorganize the institutional conditions of schooling to improve inclusion, as well as to support teachers in the introduction of digital skills and innovative teaching tools that enhance the resilience and effectiveness of education systems. How the emergence from the crisis is dealt with will mark the destiny of a generation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant an unprecedented setback for the economic, physical and decision-making autonomy of women in the region, reflected in rising time and income poverty, an excessive burden of care tasks and an unfair distribution of power. The signs of recovery in activity confirm that the production structure of Latin America and the Caribbean is based on a sexual division of paid and unpaid work that reproduces patterns of inequality. The fastest-growing sectors are those with the highest male participation; they are also the most highly valued and, therefore, the best-paying. Without changes to the current development model, growth will not necessarily result in improved living conditions for women.

Women also hold most of the jobs that are key to the response to COVID-19 and to care in general, putting them on the front line in health, education and social services.² It is a historic time to pursue a transformative recovery with gender equality and sustainability. This requires transformative recovery plans that foster comprehensive care systems, decent work and the full and effective participation of women, putting an end to the pandemic in the shadows of gender violence and to harmful practices such as child marriage and early unions. Women's autonomy, empowerment of women and girls, and gender equality are, together, a prerequisite, a pathway and a catalyst for sustainable development. It is essential to move towards a care society in which the interdependence between people is recognized; and the interdependence between production processes and society; with the sustainability of human life and of the planet at its heart.

Questions

Education: impacts, challenges and lessons learned from the pandemic

1. In what way and to what extent has the pandemic and its repercussions undermined existing progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all) and the prospects of achieving the Goal?³
2. What were the main measures adopted in the educational field in response to the pandemic and its economic and social repercussions? Based on the unique experience of the ongoing crisis, what lessons and priorities can be learned to reform educational systems and guarantee inclusive, equitable and quality education?

Gender equality in the context of the crisis and the challenges of sustainable recovery

1. Can gender equality contribute to a way out of the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic? How does society as a whole benefit when gender gaps are reduced?
2. How can we synergistically pursue all the SDGs while ensuring the economic, physical and decision-making autonomy of all women and girls?

Synergies between education and gender equality and prioritization in public agendas

1. There are significant synergies between inclusive, equitable and quality education and progress towards substantive equality and gender equality in full enjoyment of rights in all areas. To what extent has the pandemic and its repercussions created additional challenges in relation to the excessive burden of care work performed primarily by women and women's education?

² ECLAC, *Women's autonomy in changing economic scenarios* (LC/CRM.14/3), Santiago, 2019, pp. 58, 79, 106, 198.

³ The main targets of SDG 4 can be viewed through the following link [online] <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>.

2. In the context of a prolonged economic and social crisis, how can education and gender equality be positioned as key elements for an economic and social recovery in the region, with equality and human rights at the centre?

Panel

Moderator: Alberto Arenas, Chief of the Social Development Division of ECLAC

See the full preliminary programme at [online] <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2022/en/programme>

Closing remarks: Ana Güzmes, Chief of the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC

Panel format

This multi-stakeholder panel will bring together experts and representatives of governments, civil society and the United Nations system in the region.

The moderator will invite the panellists to provide reflections on education and gender equality as human rights that are central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through an initial seven-minute statement.

Once all the panellists have made their initial statements, the moderator will open the floor for statements on the subject of the panel from the members of the delegations of participating countries, for up to three minutes each. Once all the delegation members have made their statements, the floor will again be given to the panellists for three-minute closing statements.

Ana Güzmes, Chief of the Division for Gender Affairs of ECLAC, has been invited to make seven-minute closing remarks at the end of the panel.