

System for Monitoring the Financing of the Human Right to Education in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Why the system: Without a budget there are no rights

Education is a fundamental human right and States must guarantee its full realization. To do so, States must have a sufficient and adequate budget for public education. Without an adequate public budget, no human rights can be guaranteed. Civil society must be able to demand from the States to invest in an adequate and sufficient budget for public education based on update data and analysis of how the financing of education is given over time. To answer to this need, the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education, CLADE, launched the System for Monitoring the Financing of the Human Right to Education, HRE, in Latin America and the Caribbean, a tool aimed to facilitate access to data and comparative analysis of how public financing of education occurs throughout the time in each country and in the region. The main purpose of this system is to reinforce political advocacy from civil society to achieve the adequate and sufficient budget to finance the realization of the human right to education for all.

Scope and data for monitoring investment in education.

The system compiles information from 20 countries of the region in the period 1998-2015. It collects official data provided by the national governments and consolidated by international organizations as UNESCO Institute of Statistics, but it also considers information given by studies carried on by civil society organizations that might be better updated.

Dimensions of analysis and first findings.

The data is analysed in three dimensions: Public Financial Effort; Availability of Resources and Equity in School Access. We will briefly present the content and findings on these dimensions and an overall reflection about what we have learned from this effort until now.

a) **Public Financial Effort.** This dimension refers to the global resources allocated to education which can be measured by the percentage of GDP and the percentage of the State budget that go to finance public education. Governments of the region have agreed to invest at least 6% of its GDP and 20% of the State budget to implement SG4 and the 2030 Education Agenda. It is a national and international commitment. However, the data analysed by the system of monitoring allow us to inform that only **Costa Rica** and **Venezuela** allocate the minimum percentages referred to above.

With regard to the minimum percentage of GDP, **Bolivia**, **Brazil** and **Cuba** have gradually increased that percentage through the years: Bolivia since 2002, Brazil in the period 2004-2013, reaching 5.99% of GDP at the end of that period. For Cuba the data available is from 1998 to 2010. The minimum percentage of total State budget was reached by **Guatemala** (2006 to 2008, and from 2011 to 2015) and **Nicaragua**, although the data is available only in 2010, which is also the last year for which data is available.

More recent information provided by civil society organizations report a regrettable decrease in resources in some countries in the region, mainly Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador and Honduras. This is the reason for the constant demand for more resources for education

in teachers and students demonstrations and other activists who fight for the realization of the human right to education.

- b) **Availability of resources per capita.** In the second dimension, the focus is on observing the availability of the resources for each child or adolescent in school age. It is a per capita measure of the State budget available for each person, whether he or she is registered or not in the school system. The reference value for this dimension is approximately US\$ 7,221.6 per year, defined as the average investment for each person in school age by half of the lowest income countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD, in 2010. It is striking that none of the 20 countries analysed by the system comes near that reference, even though eight countries have significantly increased their availability of resources per capita since 1998 until now: Argentina, Brasil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, México, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Costa Rica ranks first in this dimension, allocating US\$3,860.11 for each person at school age per year in the period 2013-2015 but this is only half the reference value for the dimension. Two other countries show constant progress regarding the availability dimension, Colombia and Peru, but they did not reach a quarter of the minimum taken as a reference. The extreme case of low investment per person was found in Nicaragua, where only US\$ 371 is spent per person a year in education, data of period 2010-2012.

- c) **Equity in school access.** This dimension observes the difference in school attendance between the highest and lowest income quintiles of the population of each country. It tries to approach the historical discriminations and inequalities that are practically inherent in our public education systems, due, among other reasons, to an inadequate availability of resources that guarantee access to education under equal conditions to all the children and adolescents. The system analyses data of urban students 13 to 19 years of age.

The data analysed show that El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Uruguay present a marked inequality: the highest income quintile school attendance is higher by 15 percentage points or more than the quintile with the lowest income. In Uruguay, the difference between the levels of school attendance of the two quintiles exceeds 27 percentage points, and in Guatemala, less than half of the people with less income have access to education. The other countries in the region have a gap in access to education between 5 percentage points (Paraguay) and close to 10 percentage points (Colombia, Panama, Ecuador). Only countries present almost no difference between the two quintiles, Bolivia, Dominican Republic and Peru.

Recent worries and hopes.

Changes of governments in **Argentina and Brazil** have had a negative impact in the budget for education, according to research done by national coalitions for the right to education. In Argentina, the budget for education approved for 2017 was 7% lower than the one in 2016. The participation of public spending on education of the total State expenditure decreased from 7.8% in 2016 to 6.8% in 2017. In Brazil, in 2016 the government changed the Constitution to freeze public investments in education, health and social assistance for the next 20 years. This means that 2.8 million children and adolescents will be left out of school since the freeze impedes the fulfilment of the goals of the National Education Plan approved by law.

In Central America, with the exception of Costa Rica, **El Salvador** and **Honduras** also report reductions in the education budget but national coalitions are standing up with campaigns that demand compliance with the commitment to achieve 6% of GDP for education. The national coalition of **Dominican Republic** made a successful campaign claiming the 4% of the GDP (2010-

2012) and set some good examples of strategies that could be replicated. In South America, **Bolivia** outstands as an example of a sustained tendency to increase public education budget and reached 8,9% of the GDP in 2016.

Tax justice, a fair way to finance human rights

Specialized organizations in this issue have proved that high levels of tax evasion and elusion, the excessive and unjustified privileges that some social sectors enjoy plus a low use of valuation on property and capital have a dramatic impact in the reduction of public resources available for the financing the fulfilment of human rights policies and plans, as the right to education for all.

In 2013, ActionAid estimated that around 138,000 million dollars were “donated” to multinationals, worldwide, through tax exemptions, close to 3,000 million dollars per week. A fraction of that amount could help to close the global financial gap for basic education. In Peru, the cumulative losses estimated due to a poor collection of mining royalties from 1994 to 2006, could have paid more than three years of schooling for all boys and girls who were out of school during that period.

Final reflections

All governments in the region must double their efforts to fulfil their engagement with 2030 Education Agenda and their effort should seriously consider a critical view to tax regulations to avoid and eliminate the privileges that are an obstacle for better tax collection. The struggle to achieve free inclusive and quality education cannot succeed without tax justice.

No economic crisis should be attended considering the reduction of resources for the realization of human rights, keeping in mind that international human rights legal frameworks prohibit setbacks in the realization of human rights, which have to be met progressively.

It is fundamental to reform and encourage citizen participation in the definition of education policies and their accountability. In many countries of our region, spaces for the participation of civil society have been closed and sometimes there is a growing criminalization, particularly of students.