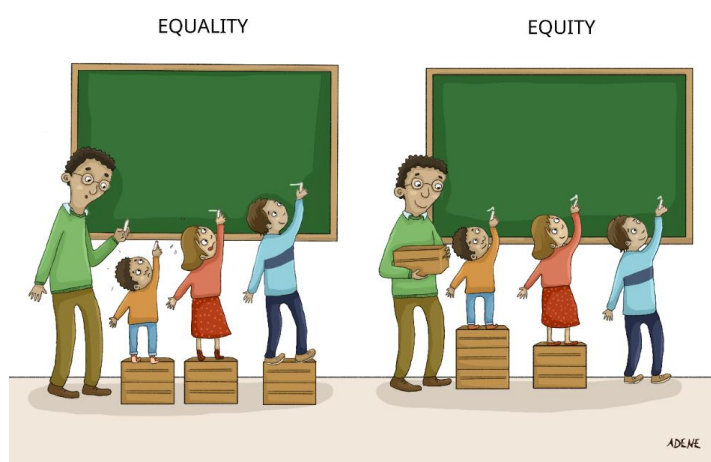


## Inclusion and education in the Caribbean

### A fact-sheet based on findings from the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report Latin America and the Caribbean - Inclusion and education: All means all

#### Key figures

- School systems mirror the highly unequal societies in which they are situated.** In Belize, 74% of the richest and 19% of the poorest completed secondary in 2016. In Saint Lucia, 96% of the richest and 62% of the poorest completed primary school in 2012.
- Identity, background and ability dictate education opportunities.** On average, 12- to 17-year-olds with disabilities were 10 percentage points less likely to attend school than those without disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago. In Suriname, they were 4 percentage points less likely to complete primary school.
- While some countries are transitioning towards inclusion, misperceptions and segregation are still common.** More education ministries in the Caribbean than in the rest of the world have issued laws on individual groups, for instance on disability (95%), but in the case of students with disabilities, laws make provisions for education in separate settings in 84% of countries and for inclusive education in only 5%; the rest opt for combinations of segregation and mainstreaming.
- Data on disability need to improve.** So far, relatively few countries have incorporated the Washington Group Short Set of Questions and the Child Functioning Module. In 6 Caribbean countries, education management information systems do not collect data on children with disabilities.
- Teachers need more support to encourage inclusion:** 70% of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean provide for teacher training on inclusion in laws or policies, in general or for at least one group, and 59% provide teacher training for special education needs in laws, policies or programmes.
- Learners with disabilities bear a disproportionate share of consequences from the COVID-19 pandemic.** Many learning platforms and a lot of digital content are not accessible to blind or deaf students, even those with access to assistive technology; for example, blind students struggle with information shared in images their software cannot read, as well as with frequent changes of online platforms.



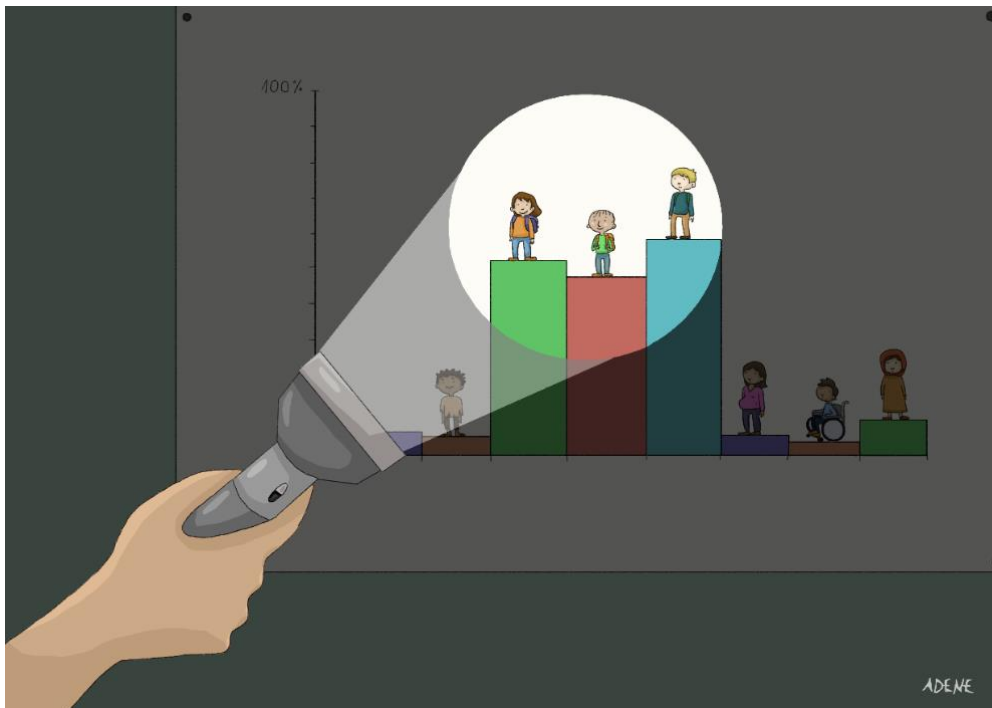
## Laws and policies

- The right to non-discrimination in education is enshrined in eight international conventions. Only four countries Caribbean (Aruba, Curaçao, Dominica and Saint Martin) have ratified all these conventions).
- Jamaica, the first signatory of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), approved its Disability Act in 2014, which states that no education institution shall deny enrolment to a person with disabilities.
- Most countries in the Caribbean regulate (82%) education provision for persons with disabilities in their education law or Act. In 14% of countries, the provision is regulated in a dedicated disability law. Governments sometimes equivocate on the extent to which inclusion laws commit them to include students with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- All countries in the Caribbean but one (95%) have a regulation under the Ministry of Education that promotes the inclusion in education of persons with disabilities. But only 64% of countries have laws that regulate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education by other ministries.
- Education ministries implement policies that target students with disabilities in about one-fourth of the countries in the Caribbean a smaller share than in Latin America or at the global level.
- Policies targeting students with disabilities are not necessarily inclusive. In Grenada, the Special Education Desk focuses on ‘pulling slow children out of the regular schools, giving them one-on-one attention, and then reincorporating them into the regular classroom.
- While some countries have transitioning towards inclusive education systems, most of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean continue to educate children with disabilities in multiple settings. Less than one in four countries’ laws and policies promote inclusive settings.
- Early identification is vital in meeting individual learning needs. In Belize, teachers advise head teachers to place students they consider as having ‘exceptional learning needs’ on a referral list for itinerant resource officer assessment. But as officers visit each school infrequently, many children wait months to be assessed. Officers help teachers develop individualized education plans adapted to learning needs and support school placement of children not in school.
- In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, under the 2005 Education Act, the education minister refers children whom the chief education officer identifies as having learning difficulties to medical, education and social services for treatment or assistance.
- Weak implementation of laws and policies hinders inclusion. Challenges include inadequate resources, late or insufficient identification of needs, inadequate teacher training, inaccessible infrastructure and lack of assistive technology.



## Data

- Greater efforts are needed to collect data on those that are left behind. Households surveys and learning assessments provide background information to disaggregate key education indicators.
- Surveys are key for disaggregating education indicators by individual characteristics but only 4 in 21 countries in the Caribbean have had a publicly available household survey since 2015: Belize (2015–16 MICS), the Dominican Republic (2018 National Continuous Labour Force Survey), Haiti (2017 Demographic and Health Survey) and Suriname (2018 MICS). Cuba and the Dominican Republic conducted surveys in 2019 and their data are being processed, while plans for surveys in Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago have been put on hold due to COVID-19.
- The Caribbean has not participated widely in recent large cross-national learning assessments. Only the Dominican Republic took part in PISA 2018. Aruba was included in the Fourth Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study, best known as ERCE 2019 after its Spanish acronym.
- Obtaining comparable data on disability has been a challenge, although some progress has been made recently. Suriname included in its MICS survey the Washington Group Short Set of Questions and the Child Functioning Module, which are consistent with a social rather than medical model of disability.
- Data on some vulnerable communities are difficult to put together. In 2020, governments in Latin America and the Caribbean reported 5.2 million Venezuelan migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Of those, about 80,000 are in the non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries of Aruba, Curaçao, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago. While this is a fraction of what other countries in the region have received, the number is huge in relative terms; for instance, the 17,000 migrants and refugees in Aruba represent 15% of the population. The true figures are likely higher, as many government sources account only for Venezuelans with regular status.



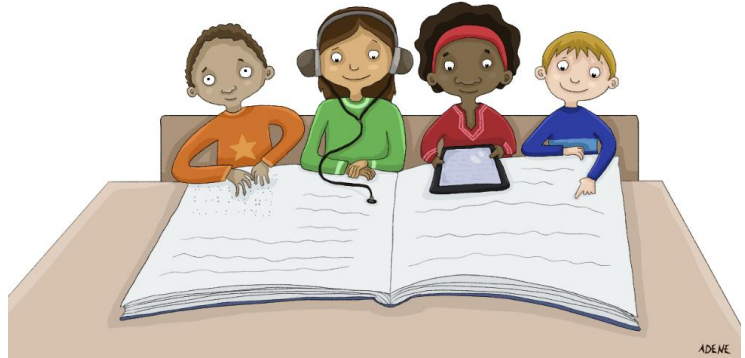
## Governance and financing

- Latin America and the Caribbean has prioritized spending in education. Education expenditure as a percentage of GDP in the region increased from 3.9% in 2000 to 5.6% in 2017, the highest for all regions. The share of education in public expenditure rose from 13.1% in 2002 to 16.5% in 2017. Belize and Monserrat spend at least 7% of GDP on education and featured among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of this benchmark.
- Equity and inclusion require targeting resources to disadvantaged schools, regions and students in need, including their families. In many cases, however, at-risk students do not receive the resources they need. In Suriname, public schools charge annual fees of US\$4 per student. Religious schools previously charged the same rate, but they introduced a US\$35 fee per student in 2018. Indigenous and Afro-descendant parents from the interior, where schools are few in number, could face a disproportionate burden depending on the kind of school available in their community.
- Financing disability-inclusive education presents policymakers with a challenge. A twin-track approach to financing may be needed, that addresses exclusion from general programmes, while introducing targeted programmes.
- Several countries offer financial support to help mainstream students with disabilities.
  - In Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Education Student Support Service coordinates a programme that assigns specialized aides to primary schools within each education district and offers financial support for students with disabilities enrolled in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary schools.
  - In Cuba, a transition plan is designed for each student going from a special to a mainstream school, with tasks for schools, families and communities.
- Coordination and collaboration help build inclusive education systems. Cooperation and coordination are essential, whether within the education system (from early childhood to adult education), across sectors (for example, between education, health and social protection entities), across government levels (from central to local) or between government and non-state institutions (such as civil society and the private sector).
- In Jamaica, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information deployed one Regional Special Needs Coordinator to each of the seven regions to help schools cater for students with disabilities.



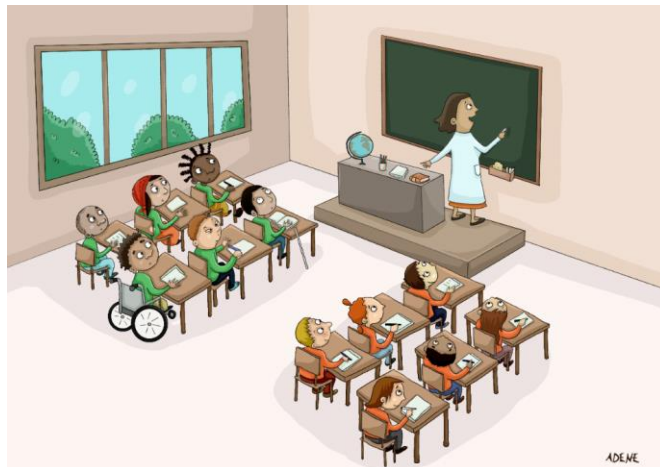
## Curriculum and textbooks

- In Latin America and the Caribbean, several countries have made curriculum accessibility a priority in their efforts to achieve inclusion.
- People of any identity should be able to recognize themselves endowed with value in curricula and textbooks.
- Gender norms can lead to detrimental education outcomes. In the Caribbean, boys' dropout is a major concern. A study conducted in eastern Caribbean countries revealed that boys dropped out of school at a rate (32%) twice that of girls (15%) between grades 7 and 11.
- In 2016, Jamaica combined the extension of secondary education from five to seven years with a new approach called Alternative Pathways to Secondary Education. Based on their results at the end of primary school in grade 6, students are assigned into three pathways. The second pathway is a two-year transition programme supporting students, often boys, with additional tailored instruction, offering them an opportunity to move to the first pathway at the end of grade 8. However, top-ranked schools do not receive students who are in the second or third pathways.
- In some countries, adaptation to children's first language has been insufficient. In Anguilla, initiatives for the growing Spanish-speaking community support English as a second language in primary but not secondary school. In Suriname, the latest curriculum reintroduces multilingualism, incorporating 10 languages, of which 2 belong to Afrodescendant communities and 4 to indigenous peoples. Translations of key words, simple sentences, songs and poems are provided in a teacher guide that also includes audio recordings to support the right pronunciation. But Dutch continues to be the language of instruction, while special 'multilingual lessons' of half an hour per week are devoted to learning short sentences and songs in the languages represented in the classroom.
- In 2017, Jamaica launched a special needs curriculum, with the support of UNICEF, focused on students with moderate to profound intellectual learning disabilities. It includes an assessment component and developmental guidelines to help teachers provide education services tailored to every student's needs.



## Teachers

- Inclusive education involves ensuring that all teachers are prepared to teach students of varied backgrounds, abilities and identities. Many teachers lack adequate initial education and are not well prepared for inclusive teaching.
- In the Caribbean, teacher training tends not to be in the framework of inclusive education. In the Bahamas, the disability law requires special education to become compulsory in the teacher training curriculum.
- Teachers tend to have positive attitudes towards inclusion but also doubts about its feasibility. In Grenada and in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, some teachers look down on low-performing students in secondary education because access used to be restricted to academically inclined students.
- In Belize, where English is the official language of instruction, some teachers hold negative views of northern Belizean Spanish, but most multilingual teachers of Spanish tend to show positive attitudes towards language mixing. Many consider codeswitching a potential instructional resource.
- Indifference to teaching students with disabilities can come from teachers feeling ill-equipped to meet their needs. Teachers in Trinidad and Tobago have ambivalent attitudes towards teaching children with disabilities, possibly as a result of a lack of resources in schools.
- Training is needed to address gender and diversity. In Grenada and in Saint Kitts and Nevis, teachers are ill equipped to intervene to stop bullying related to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, especially since laws criminalize same-sex sexual relations.
- Isolation and challenging living conditions affect rural teacher turnover. In Suriname, despite a 50% salary increase, few teachers are willing to work in remote interior areas, although novice teachers are expected to take up such positions for at least three to five years before they can work in the capital.



## Schools

- School culture often falls short of inclusive ideas. Students viewed as different from the majority are more likely to be bullied by their peers or by teachers. Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, Guyana, Saint Lucia and Suriname still practice corporal punishment.
- Caribbean countries have taken steps to remove physical barriers in education but facilities remain inadequate in many places. In Jamaica, for example, a survey of 41 primary and 43 secondary schools, representing 10% of schools in the country, concluded that 24% had ramps and only 11% had accessible bathrooms.
- Not all who need it have access to assistive technology. The share of those with hearing impairments who have access to assistive technology is less than 10% in Haiti. In Antigua and Barbuda the gap in internet use by disability status is over 40 percentage points.



## Communities, parents and students

- Students, parents and communities can drive, but also, resist inclusive education. In English-speaking Caribbean countries, where boys lag behind, while some countries enhance segregation by setting up single-sex classrooms, others develop gender-based literacy manuals for primary school.
- Parents and communities may hold discriminatory beliefs about disability. In Jamaica, some parents of children with disabilities support their education even if it involves personal and economic sacrifices, but others may obstruct their children's progress, hiding them from the public eye because of doubts about whether they can function in society.
- Positive peer attitudes are important for the success of inclusive education. In Barbados, where less than half of students reported having a friend with a disability, those with either a personal friend or a friend at school with a disability had more positive attitudes.
- Community support helps include people on the move. In Guyana, non-government partners, in collaboration with local education authorities, mobilized volunteers to run a community-based initiative teaching English as a second language to Venezuelan children. In Trinidad and Tobago, where access to school for refugee and migrant children is not guaranteed, non-government organizations provide accredited education through online and in-person support.
- Disabled people's organizations (DPOs) and civil society organizations have played a central role in overcoming barriers to inclusion. In Suriname, faith-based organizations carry out in-service training during holidays for teachers working in the interior, taking advantage of teachers' return to coastal cities so as to avoid high transport and accommodation costs.



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## Covid-19 and inclusion in education

- Latin America and the Caribbean has the highest overall potential student population reach in distance learning (91%), well above global average (69%). Radio, television, social networks and learning platforms have been used widely to ensure learning continuity.
  - In Belize, several radio stations have broadcast education content.
  - Guyana has three types of radio programmes, including interactive instruction in mathematics for grades 1 to 3.
- The Caribbean Examinations Council's CXC e-Learning Hub provides resources adapted to different student learning styles along with technology to create virtual classrooms.
- Governments have made efforts to target interventions to disadvantaged learners while others have tried to ensure universal access to devices. In the Cayman Islands, a partnership between the government and a non-profit organization has supported provision of laptops to all public-school students.
- Some teachers had never taught remotely before the pandemic and require learning on how to use technology. In Haiti, as part of a US\$7 million Global Partnership for Education grant, training for 15,000 teachers is being provided to support remote learning.

## Recommendations

- 1. Widen the understanding of inclusive education: It should include all learners, regardless of identity, background or ability.** Although 60% of countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean have a definition of inclusive education, only 64% of those definitions cover multiple marginalized groups. Inclusive education is not about setting up a department of inclusive education. Rather, it is about not discriminating against anyone, not rejecting anyone, making all reasonable accommodations to cater for diverse needs.
- 2. Target financing to those left behind. There is no inclusion while millions lack access to education.** Governments need to further refine their general education funding allocations to compensate for the disadvantage some regions and schools are facing.
- 3. Share expertise and resources. This is the only way to sustain a transition to inclusion.** Several countries are trying to make scarce resources more widely available. Such efforts need to be institutionalized.
- 4. Engage in meaningful consultation with communities, parents and students: Inclusion cannot be enforced from above.** A key barrier to inclusion in education is lack of belief that it is possible and desirable.
- 5. Ensure cooperation across government departments, sectors and tiers: Inclusion in education is but a subset of social inclusion.** Education ministries must work with other ministries to share information on the needs of disadvantaged children and their families as early as possible. Education ministries also need to ensure that when local governments have a mandate to provide services for inclusion, they are fully funded, and local officials' capacity is developed.
- 6. Make space for non-government actors to challenge and fill gaps: Ensure they work towards the same inclusion goal.** Governments should create conditions enabling non-government and civil society organizations to monitor fulfilment of government commitments and stand up for those excluded from education. Governments must maintain dialogue with organizations providing education to ensure that standards are met and actions align with national policy – and to enable valuable non-state practices to be adopted in national policy, where relevant
- 7. Apply universal design: Ensure that inclusive systems fulfil every learner's potential.** Ensure that buildings are accessible for learners with disabilities and use approaches that minimize barriers to learning for students with disabilities through flexible learning environments. All students should learn from the same flexible, relevant and accessible curricula, which recognize diversity and respond to various learners' needs.
- 8. Prepare, empower and motivate the education workforce: All teachers should be prepared to teach all students.** Many teachers say they need to develop skills to teach students with special education needs.
- 9. Collect data on and for inclusion with attention and respect: Avoid labelling that stigmatizes.** use of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions and the Child Functioning Module, which are based on a social rather than a medical model, should be prioritized. So far, relatively few countries have



incorporated them. Administrative systems should collect data not only on categories of students for inclusive education planning, budgeting and service provision, but also on the experience of inclusion. However, the desire for detailed or robust data should not take priority over ensuring that no learner is harmed.

- 10. Learn from peers: A shift to inclusion is not easy.** Non-government cross-national networks and education networks promote knowledge-sharing on aspects of inclusive education. To contribute to this peer learning process, the Global Education Monitoring Report provides country descriptions of approaches to inclusion in education as part of its new Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER) website. Countries in the region must work together, using such resources as a basis and taking advantage of multiple opportunities for policy dialogue, to steer their societies to appreciate diversity as something to celebrate, not a problem to rectify.



## Key resources

The information contained in this factsheet was extracted from the [2020 Global Education Monitoring Report Latin America and the Caribbean- Inclusion and education: All means all](#) prepared with SUMMA and OREALC/UNESCO Santiago.

[29 background papers](#) were commissioned for the preparation of the report on 8 dimensions of exclusion.

- **Adolescents deprived of liberty** ([Regional overview](#), [Chile](#), [El Salvador](#), [Uruguay](#))
- **Disability** ([Cuba](#), [Jamaica](#), [Nicaragua](#), [Paraguay](#))
- **Ethnicity and language** ([Regional overview Latin America](#), [Argentina](#), [Bolivia](#), [Ecuador](#))
- **Gender** ([Regional overview Caribbean](#), [Guatemala and Mexico](#), [Peru](#))
- **Migration and displacement** ([Colombia](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Dominican Republic](#))
- **Poverty** ([Argentina](#), [Dominican Republic](#), [Honduras](#))
- **Rurality and remoteness** ([Brazil](#), [Panama](#), [Peru](#), [Suriname](#))
- **Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression** ([Regional overview](#), [Brazil](#), [Chile](#), [Mexico](#))

Another key resource launched together with the GEM Report 2020 are the [GEM Report Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews website \(PEER\)](#), which describe all countries' laws and policies on key themes in education so as to improve the evidence base on the implementation of national education strategies.

Lastly, the GEM Report launched a fact-sheet with the key findings on disability from the 2020 GEM Report Latin America and the Caribbean-Inclusion and education: All means all. The fact-sheet is available in [Spanish](#) and [English](#).

