

UN report urges joint action to ensure all children in Latin America can finish schooling



According to a UNICEF/UNESCO report, 2.1 million children and teenagers in Latin America and the Caribbean region are not enrolled in school or are at grave risk of abandoning it. Photo: UNICEF TACRO/Gonzalo Bell/Panama

4 September 2012 – Over 22 million boys, girls and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean are not in school or are at serious risk of dropping out, [according](#) to a new United Nations report, which calls for a joint effort across sectors to ensure that all children can complete their education.

The report, *Finishing School. A Right for Children's Development: A Joint Effort*, says there are some 117 million boys, girls and adolescents in the preschool, primary and basic secondary education age groups in the region, 6.5 million of whom do not attend school.

The report, presented by the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), adds that 15.6 million of these young people attend school carrying the burden of failure and inequality expressed in either a lag of two years of more behind the normal age for their school grade or a record of grade repetition.

"In recent decades, the educational systems of Latin America and the Caribbean have extended to cover the vast majority of boys, girls and adolescents," the agencies stated in a joint news release issued on Friday.

"However, there are still many pockets of actual or potential exclusion: boys and girls who enter the educational system late, who repeatedly fail, who do not come across learning experiences that allow them to develop their capacities and who encounter discrimination," they added.

National and sub-national government bodies, funding and cooperation entities, teaching unions, the media, families, communities, universities and research centres must "come in from the fringes" and assume their responsibilities for the school system to fulfil its mission in the best possible way, according to the agencies.

"Education is the key to confronting the deep inequities in our region, and therefore we must work from all sectors so that all girls, boys and adolescents can complete their schooling" said UNICEF's Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Bernt Aasen.

"Efforts made in the education sector must be coordinated with those in the social protection, health and nutrition sectors, as well as with families and communities," he added. "UNICEF actively works to make this form of coordination reality."

UNESCO's Regional Director of Education, Jorge Sequeira, added that "the priority for improving educational quality for boys, girls and adolescents, equipping them with pertinent and relevant knowledge, giving them the possibility to develop with dignity and with a sense of belonging to their societies is an essential requirement of our educational system if we aspire to make completion of these levels of education a universal occurrence."

The report notes five "dimensions of exclusion," or factors that might evict a child from school and the school system from one day to the next. These include boys and girls of infant and primary school age not in infant or primary school, as well as boys, girls and adolescents in basic secondary school, but in serious risk of dropping out.

It also stresses that boys, girls and adolescents from indigenous, Afro-descendant or disabled groups, or those living in rural areas, are at greater risk of exclusion or grade repetition. The data showed that in some countries less than 50 per cent of the secondary school-age population in rural areas is attending school.

There is also a clear link between child labour and school attendance – students aged between 12 and 14 years who are at work, many of whom are receiving schooling, showed lower rates of attendance than those who do not work.

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