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**Outcome document**

## **Subregional consultations for Latin America and the Caribbean (April and July 2021)**

**Towards the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education**

This document summarizes the consultations held with countries of the Latin American and the Caribbean region, under the leadership of OREALC/UNESCO Santiago and in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), in order to contribute to the preparation of CONFINTEA VII. Its main references and sources are the reports developed from two subregional consultations: that of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in July 2021 and hosted by Argentina, and that of the English-speaking Caribbean in April 2021.

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## Introduction

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This document summarizes the information and consultations made with countries of the Latin American and the Caribbean region, under the leadership of OREALC/UNESCO Santiago and in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), in order to contribute to the preparation of CONFINTEA VII. Its main references and sources are the reports developed for two subregional consultations: that of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in July 2021 and hosted by Argentina, and that of the English-speaking Caribbean in April 2021. These two documents include contributions from countries, civil society organizations, international agencies and academic institutions in the region.

## Context and background

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Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) consists of 46 countries, dependent territories and overseas departments. Various cultures, languages and ethnicities come together in the region. The ethnic and cultural richness of LAC has a unique potential and singularity that contribute a specific feature to humanity. The states of the region officially recognize 826 indigenous peoples with 44.8 million members and 125 million individuals of African descent. The richness of this diversity, however, coexists with another structural characteristic that is considered dramatic and persistent: inequality.

One year prior to the pandemic, the OECD report for LAC (2019) found that income inequality remained high, and that labor informality had become a persistent problem. The development traps identified included low productivity associated with an economic structure centered on the primary and extractive sectors. One year after the pandemic began, the Regional Human Development Report “Trapped: High Inequality and Low Growth in Latin America and the Caribbean” (UNDP, 2021) confirmed this trend and identified LAC as one of the most unequal and slow growing regions in the world. Vulnerability is also growing in Caribbean island areas due to natural disasters accentuated by the global climate crisis (ECLAC, 2021).

Education inequality is one of the factors that underlies this “trap.” While progress has been made in providing education to the population over the past two decades, a comparison of income quintiles reveals drastic inequities in learning achievements and educational quality. The impact of the pandemic threatens to reverse the academic achievements of an entire generation (UNDP, 2021, p. 79). The data available for 2017 suggest that 35 million adults lacked basic reading and writing skills, that nearly 88 million had not completed elementary school and that many more had not completed secondary school (UIL-UNESCO, 2017). The closure of educational settings for youth and adult education (Y&AE) poses the risk of interrupting the educational pathways of many children, adolescents and adults. It is reasonable to think that current conditions will make policies and programs that guarantee the full right to education even more necessary.

## General situation

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Y&AE policies are unequal and differentiated. Progress on literacy, continuity of studies and labor training has differed according to country and the population's social condition. Literacy rates can be as high as 97% in Latin America and 88.1% in the English-speaking Caribbean; but those numbers drop sharply in rural areas and for women, older adults and members of indigenous communities.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the progress made throughout the region, the Belém Framework for Action mid-term report states that consultations show Y&AE is not a policy priority in LAC and that the lack of policies providing a framework for governance, financing, legality and institutional management is notorious in the English-speaking Caribbean. While increased state funding has been provided, its insufficiency consistently affects the participation in and quality of Y&AE programs. This overall lack of priority impacts the institutional consolidation that would make it possible to have high-quality, far-reaching targets and actions.

In terms of the subjects of Y&AE, we have observed progress in literacy, continuity of studies and labor training, the latter particularly in the English-speaking Caribbean. However, participation is insufficient in the region as a whole relative to potential demand, given the situation of poverty and the broken right to education.

Meanwhile, educators experience job instability and lack of training and are not valued at the social or institutional level. Connectivity and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) are unequal and precarious, reflecting the general trend of digital inequality.

In this context, two key aspects coexist: the absence of decisions regarding Y&AE in the English-speaking Caribbean; and the persistence of a remedial vision in LAC that fails to go beyond an understanding and recognition of the right to education and lifelong learning.

## Achievements and challenges

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The two sub-regional consultations identified achievements and challenges based on current conditions and the context of the pandemic, taking as reference the five key areas of the Belém Framework for Action.

### Achievements

The majority of Latin American countries are gradually incorporating Y&AE into policy and regulatory frameworks. However, this is still an incipient process in some English-speaking countries.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO statistics downloaded August 15, 2021 from <http://uis.unesco.org/>

Financing for Education and Training for Work (ETW) has been gaining support in various English-speaking Caribbean countries from the private sector.

Some progress has been made in regard to the inclusion of detained persons or the progressive introduction of flexible modes and digital educational proposals. The English-speaking Caribbean reports an increase in ETW programs and national training agencies, as well as systems that favor mobility in the sub-region by recognizing degrees earned abroad.

Both consultations noted efforts to make curricula, educational materials and methodologies more flexible and diverse, as well as progress in the creation of qualifications systems. Some experiences point to the design of teaching models for specific populations. They also reflect progress in the incorporation or intensification of the use of ICTs. The English-speaking Caribbean mentions the participation of community colleges in ETW training and certification through standardized procedures.

In regard to the training of teachers and professionals in Y&AE, participants reported experiences and projects with different areas of emphasis, scope and alliances. In several countries, this includes educators who work with different ethnic groups and/or in detention contexts.

## Challenges

Challenges remain in regard to institutional structure, coverage, gender parity, ethnicity, quality and participation. These were exacerbated by the pandemic. In addition, consultation participants from the English-speaking Caribbean noted the urgent need to adopt a consensual definition that favors the understanding, visibility and institutionalization of Y&AE.

The following priority challenges were identified in both consultations:

- Recognition of Y&AE as a right that enables other rights and as a catalyst for the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in order to position it among the public policy priorities with an intersectoral vision.
- Participants also noted the need for fair funding of Y&AE in national budgets, with mechanisms for mobilization, management and transparency that prevent inequities and dispersion and include access to connectivity and technological resources in all modes.
- The creation of policies for recognizing and including the diverse subjects of Y&AE based on their contexts and conditions was also mentioned, along with the need for flexible, relevant and pertinent curricula, systems for accrediting knowledge and developing ongoing training processes and the improvement of labor conditions for educators.
- The importance of producing timely and systematized information on Y&AE that is created, updated and made available for decision-making and the development of strategies and programs. Participants also mentioned the need for a collaborative creation of knowledge.

## Changes to Y&AE due to the pandemic

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Participants in the consultations stated that the responses provided throughout the region were insufficient to guarantee an effective continuity in educational processes.

### Positive

Both consultations expressed concerns and also highlighted the initiatives designed to provide continuity to Y&AE actions, although with different conditions, timeframes and results.

Specifically, Latin America saw changes in governance, as education became linked to sectors such as healthcare and to other agencies in the region. This change was strengthened by civil society and community action, as well as the contribution of digital devices from the private sphere in some countries.

A fundamental change was education's fast-paced transition from in-person to virtual with the support of ICTs within conditions of inequality. Positive feedback was given on teaching and learning, the skills acquired by both support staff and educators, training on the use of ICTs, the development of online and print materials, and the creation, expansion and strengthening of educational platforms.

Furthermore, participants stated that promoting traditional media, such as radio and TV, was important for continuity. Participants from the English-speaking Caribbean recognized budgetary savings in the area of transportation, both for ministries and individuals, generated by the use of ICTs.

Changes in the participation of educators, pedagogical heuristics through the creation of materials, government training and community support were key elements for educational continuity.

### Negatives

Suspension of activities and uncertainty regarding continuity, as a result of government practices prior to and during the pandemic, was mentioned by consultation participants.

There were limited digital educational offers specifically for Y&AE. English-speaking Caribbean participants report that they were impacted by a decreased duration in provided sessions, which affected vocational training and participation for both trainers and students.

Given economic conditions, the pandemic forced people to prioritize paid activities and pause their studies, which resulted in lower participation.

Educators were limited in carrying out their work, due to lack of training on the use of ICTs, precarious work conditions, the public health risk and the lack of timely and sufficient support. They often had to compensate using their own resources.



There was a differential impact on people, programs and territories, affecting literacy, rural areas, women, indigenous people and detainees, because they were unable to continue studying or had limited opportunities to do so because of restricted access and use of devices.

## Key topics and priorities related to Y&AE policy and practice

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To a great extent, key topics have remained unchanged over the past years. The progress that has been made is recognized, but key issues have yet to be addressed.

- Y&AE should be recognized and taken up as a fundamental lifelong human right. The right to education is enabling and relational, because it enhances the exercise of other rights.
- Positioning Y&AE requires that it be incorporated into countries' development agendas and regional frameworks, through explicit national policies that incorporate an intersectorial perspective to promote strategies capable of coordinating the participation of various stakeholders in their territories.
- The institutional and financial consolidation of Y&AE are conditions for its sustainability and projection. Education ministries and other government entities should provide sufficient budgets, generate technical capacities and establish alliances, in order to implement flexible offers and accreditation mechanisms, which facilitate the recognition of knowledge and participation from an inclusive perspective that incorporates comprehensive training.
- A renewed Y&AE framework should understand learning as a continuum over the course of one's life, and offer diverse training trajectories that include in-office training, technical training and continuity in higher education. Reinforcing civic education and the development of critical thinking, as well as valuing community experiences based on solidarity and sustainability are also key.
- Y&AE educators play a critical role. Their initial training, professional development, work conditions and spaces for collaborative exchange are key for guaranteeing the right to quality education. Related to this, access to ICTs and virtual connections are conditions for all Y&AE learners.
- Participants in both consultations unanimously pointed to a lack of valid, reliable, transparent and accessible information systems that would allow experts to identify training needs and monitor the implementation of policies and programs.
- The conceptualization and scope of ALE are imprecise. This situation was noted in the English-speaking Caribbean consultation in particular; the difficulty in creating a consensual analytical framework conditions the production of statistics and systematic data and obstructs knowledge generation and socialization about Y&AE.

## Recommendations and the path forward

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Recommendations were made in both consultations to contribute to the new CONFINTEA VII Framework for Action, based on the Belém Framework for Action.

- States must make a commitment to public, free Y&AE and to the right to education of young people and adults, particularly those in vulnerable situations.
- Governments must create and/or strengthen national legislation and policy frameworks based on consensual definitions of Y&AE that enable flexible management systems and establish permanent education offers, including literacy, ETW and community programs.
- Governance must be based on intersectorial work, strengthening institutional structure, coordinating practices and monitoring the fulfillment of national commitments.
- Budgetary increase goals must be defined with a multi-sectorial and multi-ministerial approach that generates funding through collaboration on shared projects, taxation, public-private and public-community partnerships, international cooperation and social mobilization.
- Progress must be made on flexible and relevant curriculum policies, plans and designs that contribute to strengthening training for global citizenship with a participatory, inclusive, intercultural, inter-generational and gender perspective. Ensure that certification and recognition programs and systems address local forms of knowledge and needs, territorial productive potentials and community fabrics.
- Define Y&AE as a lifelong process that goes beyond school-focused, assistentialist and remedial visions and practices and recognize the transformative potential of youth and adult education in the lives of people, communities and societies, assigning value to social communication actions that promote public dialogue and recognition of Y&AE.
- Ensure that training programs address a form of continuing education that develops basic skills and capacities such as listening, reading, analyzing, discerning, communicating and writing.
- Implement policies and strategies for initial training, professionalization and dignification of educators' work, recognizing them as subjects of rights and promoting their key contribution to quality education. A condition is to guarantee connectivity and free internet access to all Y&AE subjects for training in digital citizenship from a critical perspective.
- Promote reliable, valid, transparent and accessible information and monitoring systems to encourage the creation of knowledge through government and non-governmental institutions, academia and civil society. Create the *Latin American and Caribbean Observatory of Practices and Experiences in Youth and Adult Education*.



- Make explicit in the Framework for Action the need to urgently address the closing of gaps and respond to the effects of the pandemic, and make the CONFINTEA framework a roadmap and commitment on the part of states to guarantee the human right to Y&AE.

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