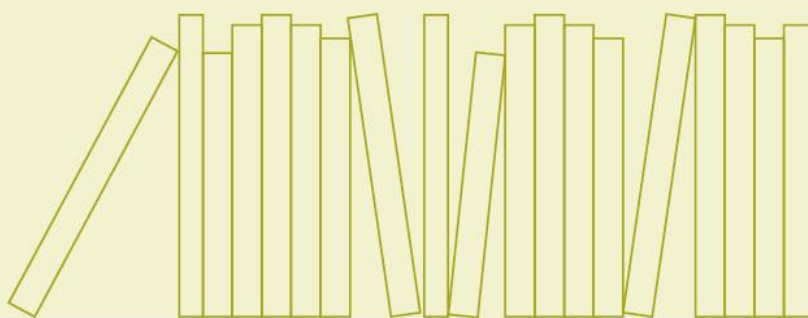


Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ECLAC SUBREGIONAL HEADQUARTERS FOR THE CARIBBEAN



Report of the expert group meeting on addressing gender disparities in education and employment in the Caribbean



UNITED NATIONS

E C L A C



Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

Expert group meeting on addressing gender disparities
in education and employment in the Caribbean

Virtual meeting, 20 December 2021

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**REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING
ON ADDRESSING GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION
AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN**

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A. MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Considering the critical role of gender equality in development and the specific promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, girls and boys should be provided with equal opportunities to achieve their potential as individuals and as drivers of development. Such opportunities are in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, “Quality Education”, and 5, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, and their related targets.
2. In the Caribbean, there is a disproportionately high level of unemployment among young women despite their higher participation and attainment rates in tertiary education. This suggests that their educational participation and attainment have not translated into increased labour force participation. Conversely, there are increasing calls for educators and policy makers to pay attention to the underperformance of boys at the primary and secondary school levels which has implications for their participation in tertiary education.
3. Noting that the United Nations has declared 2020–2030 the “Decade of Action” to deliver the SDGs, there is the need for Caribbean small island developing States (SIDS) to urgently address their human capital development even as the subregion deals with its multidimensional economic, social, and environmental challenges.
4. There is a critical need for access to microdata to analyse the education needs, access and progress of students, which should also include those students from marginalized and vulnerable groups. There should also be a further assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on possible changes in student enrolment and subject area selection.

B. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

1. Place and date of the meeting

5. The expert group meeting on addressing gender disparities in education and employment in the Caribbean was held virtually on Monday 20 December 2021.

2. Attendance¹

6. The meeting was attended by Caribbean gender experts and education sector professionals, including data specialists, from the member States of Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and the associate members of Bermuda, Montserrat and Sint Maarten.

3. Agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Overview and presentation of the study
3. Discussion
4. Conclusions

¹ See annex I for a full list of participants.

4. Documentation

7. The draft study entitled “Addressing gender disparities in education and employment: a necessary step in achieving sustainable development in the Caribbean” prepared by the ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean, was presented for review by the meeting participants and thus served as the background document for the meeting. The study analyses data on student enrolment and performance at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in the Caribbean, highlighting gender disparities in and providing policy recommendations for promoting gender equality in educational opportunities and attainment.

8. The study was based on information collected from secondary data sources. At the primary education level, gender disparity in access to education was examined using the World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI) database from 2010 to 2019. Data from 2012 to 2019 contained in the annual reports of the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) on registration for and performance on a variety of subjects in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) were analysed for trends in gender disparity in student performance. The Cave Hill, Mona, and St. Augustine campuses of The University of the West Indies (UWI) were used as proxies for tertiary institutions in the Caribbean. Data on student enrolment and degrees earned from UWI during 2012 to 2020 were analysed for trends in gender disparity.

C. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the meeting

9. In her welcoming remarks, the Director of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean, made reference to SDGs 4 and 5 on the quality of education and gender equality in the subregion and how these areas have impacted decent work. She noted that even though increased attention has been given to gender equality, inequalities still exist in access to quality education, educational attainment, and decent work. In such circumstances, girls and boys will ultimately be denied the opportunity to realize their full potential and the empowerment of women and girls will likely suffer a setback. This scenario influenced the ECLAC decision to conduct the study entitled “Addressing gender disparities in education and employment: a necessary step in achieving sustainable development in the Caribbean”. The study addresses both quality education and gender equality, two important goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

10. She stated that while youth unemployment in the Caribbean was high, unemployment among girls was particularly high. However, she noted that even though women dominated the student population across the university campuses throughout the Caribbean and were outperforming young men, they faced higher unemployment rates. In essence, the educational attainment of girls and women has not translated to equal economic opportunities and decent work. The Director stated that while this situation has traditionally been attributed to the choice of academic discipline that girls pursue, the data from the ECLAC study revealed that not only were girls studying and excelling in subjects like additional mathematics, agricultural science, and physics deemed to be traditionally “boys’ turf,” they were also studying and excelling in newer subjects such as information technology; courses that drive innovation and competition in the modern economy. Therefore, there is urgent need for policies to address the imbalance that exists in the labour market through legislation and enforcement as well as in facilitating the full and effective participation of women and girls in all spheres of life through measures that allow women to pursue and thrive in their chosen career without having to choose between family and work.

11. The study also confirmed trends observed that boys and young men are falling behind in school; both in enrolment levels and in academic performance. The reasons behind these worrisome trends in the Caribbean are deserving of closer interrogation. The Director urged the meeting to reflect on the fact that, even as we celebrate the high performance of girls, we need to pay closer attention to what is happening to boys in the system, if they are not to be left behind. In a world increasingly knowledge-based, attaining a paper qualification will very soon no longer be enough for you to get or keep a job. She noted the relevance of functional skills to attaining decent work and earning liveable wages. She then welcomed the experts to share their comments and feedback with the hope that the discourse will contribute to raising the future workforce of the Caribbean and the promise to leave no one behind in the achievement of the Global Goals.

2. Overview and presentation of the study

12. The Coordinator, Statistics and Social Development Unit of ECLAC introduced the study “Addressing gender disparities in education: a necessary step in achieving sustainable development in the Caribbean”. He referred to the traditional importance the Caribbean placed in quality education and the strides that the subregion has made in producing tertiary-level professionals such as teachers and medical professional that are in high demand in Canada, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America. He noted that in more recent times, however, the competency and skills of the current workforce are under scrutiny. Caribbean economies have recorded low growth and became less competitive due to what is considered a mismatch between the demand and supply of labour and low levels of skills. Overall, these concerns tend to exhibit a gender disparity and call for a thorough analysis that will help inform the development of programmes and policies to address it.

13. He characterized the youth unemployment situation, particularly among young women, as a major social challenge in the Caribbean. Subregional data showed that the average unemployment rate of youth aged 15 to 24 years was 33.4 per cent for females and 20.6 per cent for males in 2016, which were in stark contrast to the average unemployment rate of 7.4 per cent for the general population with a tradition of quality education. The data also showed that more girls attended secondary education and more women attained tertiary level education. However, based on their high unemployment rates, their educational participation and attainment have not translated to employment opportunities and they continue to be underrepresented in the labour market. While there was enough evidence to assume that gender disparity existed in Caribbean labour markets, the study tried to ascertain whether women were studying subjects that did not enhance their skills and by default were not as competitive in the labour market.

14. On the other hand, the study investigated the underperformance of boys in the education system. In several member States this issue has become a matter of concern for national development. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in their National Economic and Social Development Plan 2013–2025, gender issues were highlighted as impediments to national development and flagged as a challenge, based on the unequal performances of boys and girls in the English language and mathematics examinations at the CSEC level. Antigua and Barbuda went further in its Medium-Term Development Strategy to single out the performance of males within society. Already there is a widely held view that young men were marginalized and generally underachieving both in the workplace and academically. The Coordinator underscored the fact that regardless of their underperformance in education, young men still had an edge over young women in the labour market.

15. He stressed that considering the critical role of gender equality in sustainable development, girls and boys should be provided with equal opportunities to realize their potential, and women and girls should be empowered to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development suggests that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the goals and targets (SDG 5, the main goal that speaks directly to gender equality, underpins the notion that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a

necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world). Target 4.3 of the SDGs: “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university;” Target 4.4: “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship;” and Target 5.5: “Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life;” all recognize that gender equality is inextricably linked to efforts to promote the right to education and ensure that girls and boys, women and men are equally empowered in and through education. Meanwhile, the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 provides a regional platform for implementation and follow up of political commitments for the eradication of discrimination against women and girls, and the promotion of gender equality and advancement towards the guarantee of full enjoyment of women’s and girls’ autonomy and human rights.

16. Based on the data, the study found that school enrolment at the primary education level remained high in the Caribbean with no gender disparity. According to the World Bank (World Development Indicators 2010–2019), even though the percentage of girls and boys attending primary school fell slightly in 2019, compared to the other years, it remained above 95 per cent. Secondary education enrolment levels showed gender parity at the lower secondary level but disparity in favour of girls at the upper secondary level. This suggested that girls were staying longer in school or returning to school for remedial studies at a rate higher than boys. Along these lines, 2016 data showed that enrolment in tertiary level education by men across the Caribbean, accounted for 17 per cent which was noticeably lower than that of women (30 per cent). On average, close to twice as many women compared to men enrolled at UWI across all three campuses (Cave Hill, Mona, and St. Augustine). The Faculty of Medical Sciences, which offers science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programmes, was dominated by females across campuses and the Faculty of Food and Agriculture at the St. Augustine campus and the Faculty of Social Science at Mona both achieved and continued to maintain gender parity in enrolment since 2017. However, while enrolment was lower for males across campuses, the gender parity indices revealed that there were male biases towards STEM-related fields like science and technology, engineering and sports.

17. The study also focused on academic performance in secondary education which showed that boys performed better than girls in CSEC Mathematics, while girls outperformed boys in CSEC English Language and in CAPE Pure Mathematics, and Literatures in English Unit 1. The general trends showed that girls dominated in secondary education and outperformed boys in science, technology and engineering subjects, as well as social sciences and humanities subjects. CAPE Chemistry was the only subject in which boys performed better than girls. Academic performance in tertiary education indicators showed that women dominated men in receiving First and Second-Class Honours (Upper Division) degrees across the Engineering, Law, Medical Sciences and Social Sciences faculties at the Mona Campus, while Science and Technology was the only faculty where men outperformed women in the First-Class Honours category.

18. The Coordinator concluded that Caribbean countries continued to perform well in providing boys and girls equal access to primary and secondary education. However, it was important to note that when students schooling at their age-appropriate level was not factored in, the data showed that girls were accessing upper secondary education at much higher rates than boys. Additionally, while boys have equally accessed education at the primary and lower secondary levels, men were still lagging behind in seeking tertiary education. He urged the urgent adoption and strengthening of sound policies and enforceable legislation to deal with the inherent inconsistency in the academic attainment and performance of girls and young women, and their opportunities in the job market. There should also be the promotion of “leaving no boy behind” as fewer boys are pursuing education beyond the lower secondary education level and when they do, they are academically underperforming. This has implications for future labour productivity and the sustainable growth and competitiveness of Caribbean economies.

3. Discussion

19. Participants agreed that the ECLAC study provided substantial insight into how the Caribbean education system was set up and the policy directions that member States should embark on to deal with gender disparities in academic attainment and performance of students. It was suggested that the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) at UWI can have a prominent role at the tertiary level in bringing about more awareness and discourse on gender equality as well as encourage behavioural change to lessen these gender disparities.

20. In addressing students with disabilities and any disparities in enrolment and educational continuity compared to their counterparts without disabilities, reference was made to a recent ECLAC study, “Education during the COVID-19 pandemic: access, inclusion and psychosocial support”, which assessed the impact of COVID-19 on the Caribbean school system focusing particularly on psychosocial impacts on students and teachers, and issues of access and barriers to education for children from vulnerable and marginalized groups. The study showed that the transition to online learning increased opportunities for participation and inclusion among students with disabilities. This increased participation however was not quantifiable as no official data was yet available.

21. The discussion highlighted the need for access to microdata to analyse the needs, access and progression of students, including those with disabilities. It also points to the need for further assessment on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on possible changes in student enrolment and subject area selection.

22. A call was made to promote and encourage responses to an online survey being conducted by ECLAC and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), which will consider the impact of COVID-19 on the social sectors including education.

4. Conclusions

23. In her closing remarks, the Director of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean observed that over the last 18 months, there had been much focus on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary and secondary education which has been an opportunity for emotional, psychological and pedagogic development. She expressed satisfaction with the study’s attention to tertiary level education and how it contributed to preparing young people for the world of work, which she hoped would further inspire policy change to address gender disparities. She emphasized that attention must be given to education from the primary level all the way to tertiary level and encouraged the continued involvement of key gender and education stakeholders to address the challenges which affect the productivity of the countries and economies of the Caribbean subregion.

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Annex II**PROGRAMME**

10.00 – 10.10 a.m.	Opening of the meeting Welcome remarks Diane Quarless, Director ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
10.10 – 10.40 a.m.	Overview and presentation of the study Abdullahi Abdulkadri, Coordinator, Statistics and Social Development Unit ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean
10.40 – 11.10 a.m.	Discussion
11.10 – 11.15 a.m.	Conclusions Diane Quarless, Director ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean

