

Conference on Education for All in Europe and North America

6 to 8 February 2000, Warsaw, Poland



The state of education in Europe and North America: ambitious, difficult and sometimes disturbing

Over 300 participants from all over Europe and North America will converge in Warsaw, Poland from 6 to 8 February. They will be there to examine the state of education in the forty or so countries they represent. At the conference, ministers and other education specialists will take part in the assessment recommended by the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, exactly ten years ago. In Jomtien, in 1990, 155 countries, supported by some 150 international organizations committed themselves to provide their citizens with universal primary education and to massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade. The time has now come to review the findings. An exhaustive assessment, will be presented at six regional conferences, including Warsaw, as preliminaries to the World Education Forum to be held in Dakar, Senegal, next April.

In the rich countries, the public might assume that education for all is a well-established reality. This is not the case. Developing countries do not have a monopoly on exclusion from education. Europe and North America also have teachers who have not been paid for three years, refugee children attending school under the most precarious conditions, rural schools lacking even the most rudimentary equipment, inadequately trained teachers, immigrant children badly integrated into the school system. The failings of basic education are legion even in rich countries. We know, for instance, that some 25 per cent of the adult population in this part of the world have difficulties with reading and writing.

The Warsaw assessment is therefore ambitious, complex and sometimes disturbing. So many socio-political and technological upheavals have marked the decade. Promises remain unfulfilled. However, this record of success and failure is in itself illuminating, just as the quality or the mediocrity of statistics can be instructive. But the most important contributions at the Warsaw Conference will be the reports which situate findings in a regional perspective and identify trends and innovations upon which the school of tomorrow can be built. Accordingly, the assessment and roundtables will be followed by the adoption of a regional Framework for Action.

International
Consultative Forum
on Education for All
convened by UNDP,
UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF
and the World Bank

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The organizer of the Conference and the assessment, the International Consultative Forum on Education for All, is co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, along with a number of bilateral aid agencies. Directed by Svein Osttveit, it is based at UNESCO's Paris Headquarters.



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