
UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning

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Regional Literacy and CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference in Latin America and the Caribbean

UNESCO is organizing a joint Regional Literacy and CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference in Latin America and the Caribbean, which will take place in Mexico City from 10 to 13 September 2008. It is hosted by the Government of Mexico and organized in cooperation with the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA). The Conference will be attended by Ministers of Education and other decision-makers, representatives of governments and of multi-lateral partners, regional NGOs, experts and stakeholders from the private sector, universities and the media.

Entitled "From Literacy to Lifelong Learning: Towards the Challenges of the 21st Century", the Conference will merge two major UNESCO initiatives. It will be one of five regional UNESCO conferences in preparation of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), which will take place in Brazil in May 2009. At the same time, the Conference will close the series of regional Conferences in Support of Global Literacy which have been organized by UNESCO in 2007 and 2008 in Doha (Qatar), Beijing (China), Bamako (Mali), New Delhi (India) and Baku (Azerbaijan).

Although literacy rates have increased, the region is still marked by striking disparities. The EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2008 indicates that, while the adult literacy rate for Latin America is 90 per cent, it is 71 per cent in the Caribbean. In fact, nearly 35 million adults in the region do not possess the necessary reading and writing skills to equip them for meeting the demands of daily life and work, and for facilitating their continuous learning in today's knowledge societies. Moreover, it is estimated that some 110 million young people do not complete primary school and consequently do not have sufficient literacy skills to participate fully in their societies. The risk is also high that several countries in the region will not achieve the Education for All goals pertaining to youth and adult learning. In general, governments have mainly responded to the learning needs of young people and adults by expanding formal secondary and tertiary education, and have neglected alternative non-formal routes for the poor and the marginalized.

Against this background, the joint Conference in Mexico will review the situation and issues in the region pertaining to youth and adult literacy and to adult learning and education, from basic literacy to comprehensive lifelong learning. In doing so, it will take into consideration the new challenges, rising demands, constant changes and growing complexity in the emerging knowledge societies while equally paying attention to issues of poverty eradication, peace and democracy, sustainable development, food security and the need for justice, social cohesion and inclusion.

Concretely, the overall objective of the conference is to generate a regional perspective on the key issues and challenges and to propose forward-looking strategies and recommendations to renew policies and action in youth and adult literacy and in adult learning and education. This is the mandatory regional preparatory task leading to CONFINTEA VI.

Upon the request of UNESCO, twenty countries out of thirty-three have submitted a national report on the situation and development of youth and adult education. A regional synthesis report, prepared beforehand on the basis of these national reports and other sources, will be discussed and validated during the Conference. This consolidated regional perspective will be presented at the global CONFINTEA VI Conference in Brazil in May 2009.

The Conference will feature four roundtables on key issues of the region: Policies, Strategies, Financing, Monitoring and Evaluation of Literacy and Youth and Adult Education; The Costs of Illiteracy; Assessment and Measurement of Literacy and Youth and Adult Education; and Literacy and Youth and Adult Education in Multi-Cultural and Multi-Lingual Contexts. It will also serve as a forum to present and disseminate good practices and relevant innovations.

The following countries will be covered by the Regional Literacy and CONFINTEA VI Preparatory Conference: Antigua y Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay, plus the Associated Members in the Region: Aruba, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, and the Netherlands Antilles.

For further information on the conference:
www.unesco.org/confintea6

Contact: Bettina Bochynek (b.bochynek@unesco.org) or Ulrike Hanemann (u.hanemann@unesco.org)

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Maren Elfert, Public Relations
Feldbrunnenstr. 58, D-20148 Hamburg, Tel.: +49-40-448041-17, Fax: +49-40-4107723, E-mail: m.elfert@unesco.org

www.unesco.org/uil