

## **UNESCO conference to review literacy and adult education challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Paris, 2 September – Literacy and adult education in Latin America and the Caribbean are the focus of a UNESCO conference that will take place in Mexico City from 10 to 13 September, 2008. Hosted by the Government of Mexico and organized with the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA), the conference will bring together ministers of education and other representatives of governments and multilateral 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, it will be the last in the series of regional **Conferences in Support of Global Literacy** 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 **91 per cent, it is 74 per cent** in the Caribbean. This means that nearly **39 million** adults in the region lack the reading and writing skills necessary to meet the demands of daily life and work, and to facilitate continuous learning in today’s knowledge societies.

Moreover, an estimated 110 million young people do not complete primary school and consequently do not have sufficient literacy skills to participate fully in their communities. The statistics indicate that several countries in the region may not achieve the Education for All goals pertaining to youth and adult learning by the target date of 2015.

In general, governments have responded to the learning needs of young people and adults mainly by expanding formal secondary and tertiary education, neglecting alternative non-formal routes for the poor and the marginalized.

The Mexico conference will undertake a comprehensive review of the situation and issues related to youth and adult literacy and to adult learning and education, from basic literacy to comprehensive lifelong learning. It will consider the new challenges, rising demands, constant changes and growing complexity in emerging knowledge societies while paying equal attention to poverty eradication, peace and democracy, sustainable development, food security and the need for justice, social cohesion and inclusion.

The meeting aims to establish 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

Twenty of the 33 countries in the region have submitted a national report on the situation and development of youth and adult education. A regional report, prepared 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.

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