Bites by SELA
A taste of regional economics

#06
NOV26

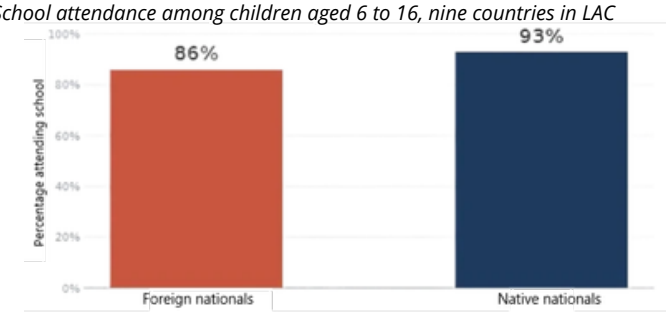
Education for inclusion: the challenges faced by migrant girls and women

When a family migrates, their education is often the first thing to be disrupted. For girls and women, the challenge can be even greater as the barriers associated with migration and gender are combined. What is lost is not just time spent in the classroom, but the gateway to other rights and opportunities. How much talent is the region losing along the way? Guaranteeing education is a legal obligation, but also an economic and protective measure for them.

The scale of the problem demands action. Between 2010 and 2020, the migrant population in Latin America and the Caribbean stood at 14.8 million people, 6.3 million of whom were under 18. In terms of education, 86% of foreign children aged 6 to 16 attend school, compared with 93% of local children.

Fewer migrant girls and boys are attending school

School attendance among children aged 6 to 16, nine countries in LAC



Source: IDB, "Qué sabemos de la educación de la población migrante en América Latina y el Caribe"

Compounding barriers

It is important to recognise the barriers that lie behind the figures. On the one hand, UNICEF Mexico reports that factors such as fear of discrimination, a lack of information, school fees and the requirement for documentation significantly hinder access to education. Added to this are gender norms that prioritise boys' education and place a greater burden of care on girls.

On the other hand, school also serves as a link to health services, social protection and community networks. When girls are excluded from the education system, they also lose access to this network of support and protection.

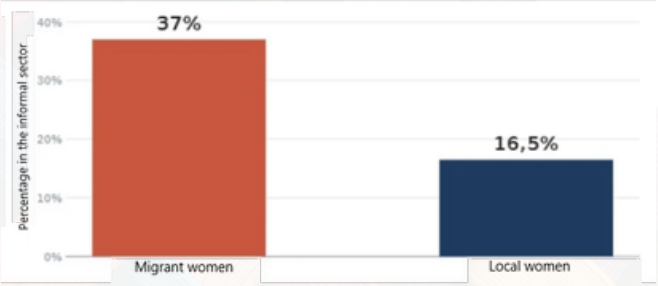
The cost of not educating

Every girl who does not complete 12 years of education represents an economic loss of talent and productive potential: the World Bank estimates that this cost ranges from USD 15 to 30 trillion.

In the region, migrant women are already in a vulnerable position: 37% of those in paid work are in the informal sector, 20.5 percentage points higher than among native-born women. Without complete or recognised educational qualifications, the risk of ending up in jobs without a contract or social protection increases. Furthermore, even if the educational gap were to be closed, women in LAC earn 23% less than men, indicating that without education, the gap only widens.

Migrant women, more vulnerable to the informal sector

Women in paid employment in the informal sector, LAC



Source: IDB, "Migración, género y xenofobia en América Latina y el Caribe"

What already works: invest today to avoid paying tomorrow

Excluding migrant girls and women from education entails a high human and economic cost in the long term. Globally, there are best-practice models: the Learning Passport, developed by UNICEF and Microsoft, is a digital platform that safeguards academic records and ensures the immediate recognition of qualifications, preventing school drop-out, while Turkey combines cash transfers conditional on school attendance with child protection measures, again preventing school drop-out.

Latin America and the Caribbean can build on these practices by driving their own progress, as in Chile with *Corporación La Matriz*, which seeks to foster community integration by teaching Spanish to the Haitian population through sport and culture.

What must be done to go further?

- Enrolment without bureaucratic barriers and the swift recognition of prior learning.
- Inclusive schools, with teachers trained in multicultural education, which improves the school environment and combats xenophobia.
- Data disaggregated by gender, age and immigration status, and regional cooperation to recognise educational pathways.

Sayed Durán
Luciana Contreras

A region that provides an education for all its girls, regardless of where they were born, is not merely fulfilling its duty: it is investing in their shared future.