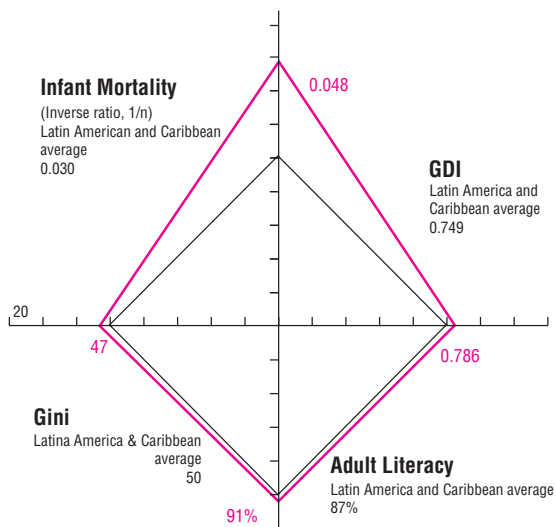


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EDUCATION FOR ALL¹



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

Since February 1999, the new government of the Republic of Venezuela has shifted direction significantly on education policy. It confirmed that the state is responsible for education and that public education should be free. It agreed to analyse various proposals for democratising access to university and ratified the right of children of Venezuelan and

foreign parents without papers to enrol at school. It consented to urgently needed repairs in the public schools' infrastructure and to the establishment of double-shift public schools.

UNIVERSALITY AND GENERALISATION

According to the the fourth Human Development Report, drawn up by the Central Office of Statistics and Computing (OCEI) with support from UNDP (1998), the highest enrolment rates in the country are found in the state of Merida, with 68.9% of the population aged 6–24 years formally enrolled in the public education system. The lowest rates are in Portuguesa with at 46.1% (United Nations. *Information Bulletin*. First Quarter of 1999).

The report of the IV Ministerial Meeting on Childhood and Social Policies shows that 65.7% of children reach fifth grade, which means that out of every 100 children who enter first grade, 34 do not go beyond fifth grade. The dropout rate is greater in public schools than in private schools. From 1989/90 to 1997/98, the public school dropout rate stood at 69.2%. Of 100 children entering first grade, 69 reach fifth, 52 seventh and just 31 reach ninth grade. The figures improve if overall enrolment—not just in public schools—is taken into account, but they still show that the school system is highly exclusionary.

One index that shows evidence of improvement is the repeat rate, which for the first time in ten years stands below 10%. For the first grade, however, the repeat rate continues to be of concern: it has remained unchanged above 20% since 1988/89, and for the 1997/98 school year, it stood at 23.2%.

¹ For the purposes of this study, we focus on aspects relating to Commitment 6. Our aim is to assess the measures, initiatives and results that the government of Venezuela has promoted with respect to education for the period 1994–1999. Our data is taken from the annual report drawn up by PROVEA on this subject, as well as assessments carried out by CEM–UCV and the CONG de Mujeres. In the period under study, Venezuela had two governments: the first headed by Rafael Caldera (February 1994–February 1999) and the second led by Commander Hugo Chavez (from February 1999).

Students abandon their studies for a variety of reasons: families with unsatisfied basic needs, repeated failure at school, homes that are located far from schools, unstimulating teaching methodologies and a curriculum that has little to do with the life experience of the student are among the factors mentioned as contributing to this complex situation. During the Caldera government (February 1994 – February 1999), a census was taken that located 117,891 children under age 14 who were not attending school. At present, 11,671 of these children are being taught by 511 teachers in 320 centres under the Attention for Children and Youngsters without Schooling Programme.

The Ministry for Education's Resolution No. 1762 of October 8th 1996, which was promoted by the women's movement, establishes the norms for enrolment and continued attendance of students in public and private schools at pre-school, primary, high school, vocational education and professional levels, and bans the expulsion of female students who become pregnant.

From sixth grade upwards more girls attend primary school than boys. This tendency is accentuated in vocational education. It is the result, not of positive measures, but of the greater exclusion of boys from the system.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

<i>Primary School attendance, by sex and level of studies (school year 1997/98)</i>		
<i>GRADE</i>	<i>FEMALE</i>	<i>MALE</i>
First	308,025	349,423
Second	290,519	318,423
Third	278,267	302,518
Fourth	263,051	275,719
Fifth	243,701	247,385
Sixth	225,986	218,840
Seventh	231,990	224,894
Eighth	175,736	146,112
Ninth	149,506	117,280

Source: Venezuelan Ministry for Education, *Memoria y Cuenta*.

Three studies carried out by the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and UNESCO draw disheartening conclusions. The first shows that in academic performance tests Venezuela holds the lowest position in the league tables of countries

in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The second report includes Venezuela among those Latin American countries that are considerably behind in comparison to other regions in the world, such as the Southeast Asian countries. Similarly, the third study, which covers Latin American third and fourth grade students, shows that—with the exception of Cuba—the average learning level of children on the continent is approximately 10 points (on a scale of 0 to 20) and that Venezuela is below average.

The quality of education is linked to the quality of teacher performance. A study entitled *Teaching in Venezuela, between commitment and disenchantment* concluded that «primary teachers' lack of satisfaction at work is linked to factors relating to their pay».² In November 1998, a newspaper report indicated that in the prior six months, 100 posts remained unfilled in the Central University of Venezuela because, in the words of the university's administrative vice rector, «the pay rates are not competitive». In the University of Zulia, the academic vice rector stated that «there is a serious exodus of university professors, who are taking early retirement or resigning because outside the university they can earn triple the income».³

In May 1999, the director of the University Sector Planning Office (OPSU) confirmed that «the basic salary for professors in the first three posts on the scale does not exceed the price of a basic goods basket».⁴ According to the United Nations, teachers' pay is an indicator of whether a state party to the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights respects the right to education.

On this issue, the current minister for education stated: «There is no reason why teachers should be the worst paid sector in society; this reveals how we see our children and what value we give them».⁵ For the moment, this statement has not been translated into a policy of wage increases for teachers or payment of debts owed to the education sector.

The 'Educating for Equality Programme' addresses gender-based discrimination. This programme was drawn up by 'Women and Education', an advisory committee of the Consejo Nacional de la Mujer (CONAMU, National Council of Women) in conjunction with the Ministry for Education (1994–98). CONAMU's 1999–2000 Work Plan states that the 'Educating for Equality Programme' will be implemented as a contribution to the national executive's goal of social equilibrium (CONAMU: Work Plan, 1999–2000). In line with the policy to include the poorest sectors of the population, 'Bolivarian Schools' have been set up, experimental technical diplomas created and farming schools restarted.

In September 1999, the Ministry for Education issued Resolution 180, which initiated the process of restructuring higher education services at private university-level colleges and institutes in the country. Prior to this, the ministry of education had not

² *El Nacional*, October 28th 1998.

³ *El Nacional*, November 23rd 1998.

⁴ *El Nacional*, May 23rd 1999.

⁵ *El Diario de Caracas*, June 22nd 1999.

exercised the necessary controls in twenty years, according to current government reports.

In early 1998/99, the then attorney general of the Republic urged the minister of education to «*implement maintenance and restoration programmes to improve school infrastructure*». When the new administration took office (February 1999), it began structural repairs to school buildings under what was called the 'Bolívar 2000 Plan'. Seventy educational establishments in Caracas and 150 in the rest of the country were included in this first stage. PROVEA monitored the extent of disrepair at educational centres as reported in the press. The main problems reported in 136 schools were: a) general infrastructure, 23.8%; b) no bathrooms or septic tanks, 15.2%; c) materials and equipment, 11.9%; d) classes in tents, beneath trees or in other structures, 9.8%; e) reduced timetable (2 or 3 hours a day), 7%.⁶

REFORM OF THE CURRICULUM

The minister for education of the previous administration claimed credit for the curriculum reform that was implemented, in its first and second stages, from October 1997 to October 1998. The third stage, planned for implementation in February 1999, consisted of a consultation process with teachers and principals. The actual results of the reform undermine the minister's optimism, however.

With the change in government, the curriculum appeared to become a low-profile issue and the third stage of the consultation process was suspended. In May 1999, **the defence ministry requested that pre-military instruction be included as a compulsory subject in high school, vocational and professional education, as a means of instilling patriotic values and a sense of national identity in students**. PROVEA maintains that compulsory pre-military education conflicts with the principles of Education for Peace promoted by UNESCO.

From September 1999, first and second year primary students will be assessed qualitatively, not quantitatively, and the so-called 'make-up' exams will be held in July, not September, after school ends. Both measures aim to improve the low levels of academic performance that exist at present. We take the view that, as is the case with so many reform initiatives, a reasonable period of time

must pass before they can be properly evaluated.

The dramatic catastrophe that hit the country recently will affect plans for the 1999–2000 school year, a fact that should be taken into account in future evaluations.

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⁶ Source: PROVEA press archive and its own calculations.