

## ABOUT ECLAC and the CDCC

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established in 1948 to support Latin American governments in the economic and social development of that region. Subsequently, in 1966, the Commission (ECLA, at that time) established the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean in Port of Spain to serve all countries of the insular Caribbean, as well as Belize, Guyana and Suriname, making it the largest United Nations body in the subregion.

At its sixteenth session in 1975, the Commission agreed to create the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) as a permanent subsidiary body, which would function within the ECLA structure to promote development cooperation among Caribbean countries. Secretariat services to the CDCC would be provided by the subregional headquarters for the Caribbean. Nine years later, the Commission's widened role was officially acknowledged when the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) modified its title to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

### Key Areas of Activity

The ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean (ECLAC/CDCC secretariat) functions as a subregional think-tank and facilitates increased contact and cooperation among its membership. Complementing the ECLAC/CDCC work programme framework, are the broader directives issued by the United Nations General Assembly when in session, which constitute the Organisation's mandate. At present, the overarching articulation of this mandate is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Towards meeting these objectives, the Secretariat conducts research; provides technical advice to governments upon request; organizes intergovernmental and expert group meetings; helps to formulate and articulate a regional perspective within global forums; and introduces global concerns at the regional and subregional levels.

Areas of specialization include trade, statistics, social development, science and technology, and sustainable development, while actual operational activities extend to economic and development planning, demography, economic surveys, assessment of the socio-economic impacts of natural disasters, climate change, data collection and analysis, training, and assistance with the management of national economies.

The ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean also functions as the Secretariat for coordinating the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The scope of ECLAC/CDCC activities is documented in the wide range of publications produced by the subregional headquarters in Port of Spain.

### MEMBER COUNTRIES

Antigua and Barbuda	Haiti
The Bahamas	Jamaica
Barbados	Saint Kitts and Nevis
Belize	Saint Lucia
Cuba	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Dominica	Suriname
Dominican Republic	Trinidad and Tobago
Grenada	
Guyana	

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Anguilla
Aruba
Bermuda
British Virgin Islands
Cayman Islands
Curaçao
Guadeloupe
Martinique
Montserrat
Puerto Rico
Sint Maarten
Turks and Caicos Islands
United States Virgin Islands

# CONTENTS

## Director's Desk:

Educating the future workforce	3
Deficiencies in education hinder labour productivity in the Caribbean	6
Assessing the Main Barriers to Student Success in the Caribbean	8
Analyzing Gender Disparities in education: A necessary step for achieving sustainable development in the Caribbean	12
Policy imperatives for education reforms in the Caribbean	16

## Regular Features

Recent and upcoming meetings	19
List of Recent ECLAC Documents and Publications	19

**FOCUS: ECLAC in the Caribbean** is a publication of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) subregional headquarters for the Caribbean/Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC).

### EDITORIAL TEAM:

Director	Diane Quarless, ECLAC
Editor	Jabari Fraser, ECLAC
Coordinator	Abdullahi Abdulkadri, ECLAC
Proof Reader	Veera Deokiesingh-Fraser, ECLAC
Design and Layout	Liseanne Martin-Subero, ECLAC

### Produced by ECLAC

### CONTACT INFORMATION

ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean  
PO Box 1113, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago  
Tel: (868) 224-8000  
E-mail: [spou-pos@eclac.org](mailto:spou-pos@eclac.org) Website: [www.eclac.org/portofspain](http://www.eclac.org/portofspain)



## EDUCATING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Education is a cornerstone for sustainable development and achieving quality education and lifelong learning (SDG 4). Quality education directly contributes to economic growth (SDG 8), as a well-educated workforce with the requisite skills to effectively contribute to the economy is crucial for driving productivity. In the Caribbean, this relationship is especially vital. Given the smallness of Caribbean economies and their heavy reliance on the global market, the sustainable economic development of the subregion hinges on equipping its citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a competitive global market.

**U**nfortunately, the Caribbean faces significant human capital challenges that include high youth unemployment and a pervasive mismatch of skills demanded in the world of work and those possessed by job seekers. This situation results in low economic returns to private and public investment in education as graduates and school leavers remain largely unemployed or underemployed, making many young people unable to contribute optimally to economic growth.

Addressing these gaps through targeted education reforms can significantly enhance labour productivity and economic resilience. Emphasizing the attainment of functional skills as a learning outcome is imperative for a modern educational curriculum. Greater access also needs to be provided to technical and vocational training (TVET). TVET programs provide students with practical skills directly applicable to various industries.

By aligning educational outcomes with market needs, education policy can reduce unemployment and ensure graduates are job-ready and capable of driving innovation within their fields. Furthermore, enhancing digital literacy across all levels of education is essential. As the global economy becomes increasingly digital, proficiency in information and communication technologies (ICT) is vital for competitiveness. Integrating digital skills training into curricula and ensuring teachers are well-equipped to deliver these lessons can prepare the Caribbean workforce for future challenges and opportunities.

Moreover, education promotes gender equality (SDG 5) by providing equal social and economic opportunities for both men and women. In many Caribbean countries, women enrol in higher secondary and tertiary education in greater proportion than men. However, translating this educational achievement into

economic participation remains a challenge due to persistent gender biases and occupational stereotypes. Educational policies that focus on empowering women and dismantling these barriers are crucial. Initiatives such as encouraging women to pursue careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and leadership roles can foster gender parity in the workforce.

In this edition of the FOCUS Magazine, we emphasize the many challenges faced by the education systems of the Caribbean and point to possible ways to make education a catalyst for advancing the SDG agenda in the subregion. The first article highlights how deficiencies in the education system, such as poor educational attainment—despite relatively high schooling rates—and skills mismatches, adversely impact labour productivity in the Caribbean. Deficiencies in education result in low-quality output and reduced human capital in the subregion,



impacting labour productivity and the achievement of several SDGs. From 2015 to 2020, 11 of 14 Caribbean countries saw stagnant or decreased labour productivity levels.

Improving education quality and aligning skills with market demands are crucial for enhancing labour productivity and reversing brain drain trends that further diminish human capital in the Caribbean.

The second article delves into the factors generating deficiencies in education across the Caribbean, such as a shortage of qualified teachers, underinvestment in education, and cultural norms affecting learning. Exacerbated by migration, teacher shortages lead to larger classes and less individualized attention. Inadequate funding results in poor infrastructure, outdated resources, and a lack of modern technology, further hindering student performance. Cultural norms, particularly gender stereotypes, limit students' academic and career

aspirations. These challenges collectively lower education quality and threaten the achievement of SDG 4, which aims for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy interventions and targeted investments.

The third article expands on the critical discussion of gender disparities in education and employment in the Caribbean. Women and girls have greater participation in secondary and tertiary education and excel academically but face higher unemployment. Policies must address these gender imbalances to ensure sustainable growth and workforce productivity. These imbalances contribute to high youth unemployment and skill mismatches. Quality education and gender equality, intended to empower women and girls and improve education access, is therefore central to the SDG agenda.

The fourth article makes a case for three key aspects of education reform in the Caribbean to bridge gaps in the skills of the workforce and those in demand in the labour market. These reforms include updating outdated curricula to align with industry needs, expanding TVET programmes and internship opportunities, and integrating digital competencies essential for the modern economy in educational learning outcomes.

Additionally, efforts to ensure gender-responsive policies and strategies are crucial to avoid reinforcing traditional gender roles in education that put women and girls at a disadvantage in their career. By adopting competency-based education, enhancing industry engagement, and mainstreaming digital literacy, the Caribbean can improve educational outcomes, aligning them with contemporary economic demands for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.



I trust that you will enjoy reading these articles and that you will find them informative. We count on you as education stakeholders to support the reform of the education sector to build productive human capital, achieve meaningful gender parity, and ready the workforce for the demands of the modern economy— nationally, sub-regionally, and globally.

Yours in focus,

Dinne Quarless