

# Gender Equality and Education as Core Components of the 2030 Agenda

## *La igualdad de género y la educación como ejes transversales de la Agenda 2030*

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### **Abstract:**

The UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a challenge for the global community, setting as they do specific, cross-cutting goals on issues such as inequality, innovation, sustainability, the eradication of violence, justice and quality education. In this article, we will analyze and discuss SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 4 (quality education) as they relate to Mexico. We will then review international commitments, the close relationship between gender inequality and economic, social and labor inequality, synergies between these two SDGs and areas of opportunity for Mexico, concluding with some specific recommendations.

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### **Resumen:**

La Agenda 2030 de las Naciones Unidas y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) son un reto que involucra a la comunidad global: establecen metas específicas y transversales en temas como desigualdad, innovación, sostenibilidad, erradicación de la violencia, promoción de la justicia y educación de calidad. En este artículo, se analizarán, en relación con México, el ODS 5 (lograr la igualdad entre los géneros y empoderar a todas las mujeres) y el ODS 4 (educación de calidad); para ello, se revisarán los compromisos internacionales, se reflexionará sobre el vínculo entre la desigualdad de género y otros tipos de desigualdad (económica, social, laboral), las sinergias generadas entre ambos ODS, las áreas de oportunidad de México, y se harán recomendaciones puntuales.

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### **Key Words:**

SDG, gender equality, quality education, Mexico.

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### **Palabras clave:**

ODS, igualdad de género, educación, calidad, México.

# Gender Equality and Education as Core Components of the 2030 Agenda

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The 2030 Agenda is the result of the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, where the leaders of 150 countries agreed to cooperate on 17 goals aimed at creating a fairer, more sustainable world. The backbone of the Agenda are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which lend continuity to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and provide a cross-disciplinary guide that sets targets on issues relating to climate change, inequality, innovation, sustainability, the eradication of violence, the promotion of justice and quality education, among others.

In this article, we will be analyzing SDG 5 (gender equality and the empowerment of women) and SDG 4 (quality education), and how these have influenced gender-related public policies in Mexico. We will also be looking at the relationship between gender equality and other types of inequality (economic, social, labor), and synergies between the two aforementioned SDGs.

## **Quality Education and Gender Equality: International Commitments**

The most important premise of SDG 4 is understanding that education is a common good, capable of helping human beings realize their full potential and contributing to the creation of a peaceful world. By motivating and empowering human beings, education can help us devel-

op the skills we need to improve our quality of life, be it through work or entrepreneurship. SDG 4 seeks to guarantee inclusive education and promote learning opportunities for us all throughout our entire lives. To help achieve SDG 4, target 4.3 of the Agenda states that by 2030, everyone should be guaranteed access to quality technical, professional and higher education, including university education, under conditions of equality.<sup>1</sup> Target 4.5 speaks of the elimination of gender inequalities and of guaranteeing vulnerable populations access to education under conditions of equality, including indigenous peoples, which is especially relevant in Mexico's case, given that it is home to a large number of such communities.

As regards SDG 5, if we can make educational institutions safe places that promote a peaceful atmosphere and foster a culture of respect and diversity, we will be able to achieve target 5.1, which focuses on ending all forms of discrimination against women. In the field of higher education, we could implement projects that promote the full participation of women and give them access to the same leadership opportunities in all disciplines and areas of knowledge, and that ensure they have a say in decision-making processes, both locally and internationally, in political, economic and public spheres (target 5.5).

Mexico is also a signatory to the following international instruments:

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Under this convention, signed in 1981, the Mexican State committed to establishing public policies that promote equality among men and women and that address discrimination and violence against women and girls.

The Beijing Platform for Action. Adopted in 1995, this commitment obliges Mexico to guarantee *de jure* and *de facto* equality between men and women, both in the enjoyment of their human rights and the full exercising of their fundamental freedoms.

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<sup>1</sup> As we will explain further on, Mexico intends make this happen via its government agencies and organizations.

The platform acknowledges that respect for the rights of women and girls is the cornerstone of development, democracy and peace, reason why commitments were established in 12 spheres of special concern regarding the condition of women the world over. The goal is for all women of all ages to be able to exercise their freedoms, gain access to opportunities and resources and realize all their rights, including the right to live a life free of discrimination and violence.

The Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Currently the main discussion forum for the Regional Agenda on Gender Equality, at its center are the three basic autonomies, the rights of women and their interconnection with policies to foster development and combat poverty. For the last four decades, the region's States have met regularly to debate and make a political commitment to eradicating discrimination and violence toward women and girls and gender inequalities. The work carried out at this conference has resulted in the consensuses of Santiago (1997), Lima (2000), Mexico (2004), Quito (2007), Brasilia (2010) and Santo Domingo (2013), to mention those that have most benefited men and women in Mexico.

These Regional Consensuses, along with the Montevideo Strategy (2016), have made it very clear that equality between men and women is vital if a country is to guarantee the human rights of women, make real progress and achieve sustainable development. In this context, the production, integration, use and dissemination of statistics and indicators that incorporate a gender perspective has been of enormous utility, serving as a valuable tool in the drawing up of public policies, from their design right through to their assessment.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Inegi), *Mujeres y hombres en México 2018*, Aguascalientes/Mexico, Inegi/Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (Inmujeres), 2018, [v-vi], available at [http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/documentos\\_download/MHM\\_2018.pdf](http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/documentos_download/MHM_2018.pdf) (date of reference: May 20, 2020).

In its report entitled *Main concerns regarding the situation of women*, submitted by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) to the Committee that oversees the implementation of CEDAW on the occasion of the ninth periodic report of Mexico, the latter's ombuds-person expressed grave concern at the State's lack of effort to guarantee equality between men and women and to eradicate gender-based discrimination.<sup>3</sup>

## The Relationship between Education and Gender Equality

It should be underscored that certain factors, such as poverty and lack of access to basic services, increase the probability of violations of the human rights of women and, consequently, the search for equality. According to the National Occupation and Job Survey (ENOE),<sup>4</sup> in the first quarter of 2019, the country had an economically active population of 56 million (59.5% of the population aged 15 or older available to produce goods and services), compared to 54.6 million (59%) just one year previously. This increase of 1.4 million people can be attributed to a combination of demographic growth and the population's expectations of contributing to economic activity—or not. Likewise, while 77 of every 100 men are economically active, only 44 out of every 100 women are. Within the economically active population, the number of people who participated in the production of some economic good or the rendering of a service (the occupied population) stood at 54.1 million (33.2 million men and 20.9 million women) in the period, which is 1.3 million more than in the same period of 2018. It should be noted that this survey is designed to clearly identify the concepts of unemployment,

<sup>3</sup> National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), *Principales preocupaciones sobre la situación de las mujeres que presenta la Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos ante el Comité de la CEDAW derivadas del Noveno Informe Periódico de México (70th period of sessions, July 2-20, 2018)*, Mexico, CNDH, 2018, at <https://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/Informe-CEDAW-2018.pdf> (date of reference: May 20, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> The quarterly results of the ENOE can be consulted at <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/enoe/15ymas/>.

underemployment and informal employment, and to take into account and give a specific place to people who do not actively pressure the labor market because they themselves believe they have no chance of competing on it (women who have no work experience because they have been homemakers, people over 40 and senior citizens, among others).<sup>5</sup>

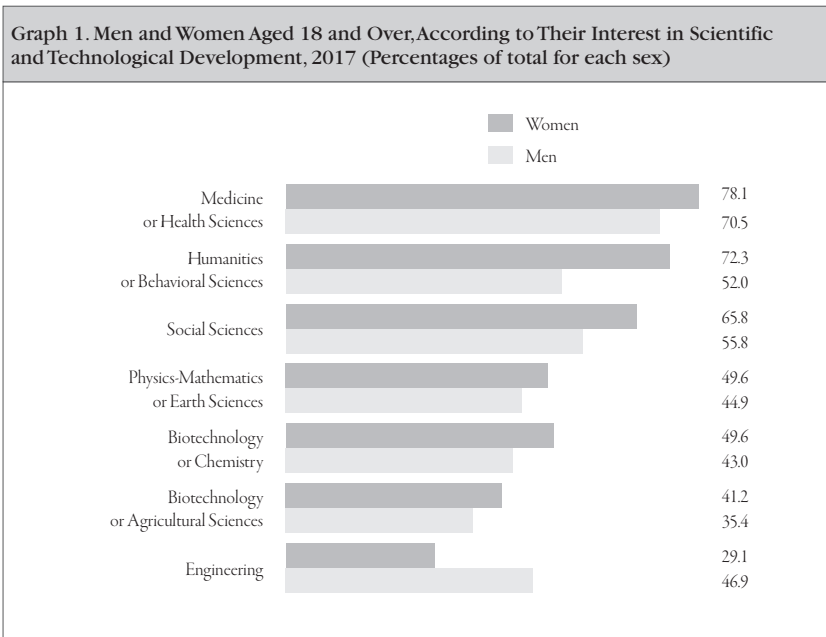
The CNDH has found marked differences in the working conditions of men and women that prevent the latter from accessing equal opportunities on the job market. According to the ENOE for the fourth quarter of 2019, for every seven men that earned more than five minimum wages per month, only three women earned the same, five minimum wages being the highest income bracket registered by the ENOE. As of year-end 2019, only 555 790 women were in this bracket, compared to 1 464 624 in the case of men.

This is relevant because labor results are directly related to education. According to the *Statistical Yearbook. School Population in Higher Education. Higher Technical Education and Bachelor's Courses. 2016-2017 Academic Cycle*,<sup>6</sup> more women than men were enrolled in Education, Health, Social Sciences, Law and Administration, the Arts and Humanities courses. Inversely, men outnumbered women in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Services, Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine, and Natural, Exact and Computer Sciences. In Education and Health, the number of women surpassed men by 47.6% and 32.8%, respectively, while men were more interested in careers in Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction and Services, outnumbering women by 44.6% and 34.6%, respectively. The yearbook reveals differences and similarities between men and women as regards the professions they tend to choose. Of the ten most popular careers, seven are in demand by both sexes (albeit to differing degrees): Business Administration, Law, Industrial Engineering and Process Quality Engineering, Accounting and Auditing, Medicine, Business and Commerce,

<sup>5</sup> Inegi, *Cómo se hace la ENOE. Métodos y procedimientos*, Aguascalientes, Inegi, 2020, at [http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/Productos/prod\\_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvneegi/productos/nueva\\_estruc/702825190613.pdf](http://internet.contenidos.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/Productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvneegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825190613.pdf) (date of reference: May 20, 2020).

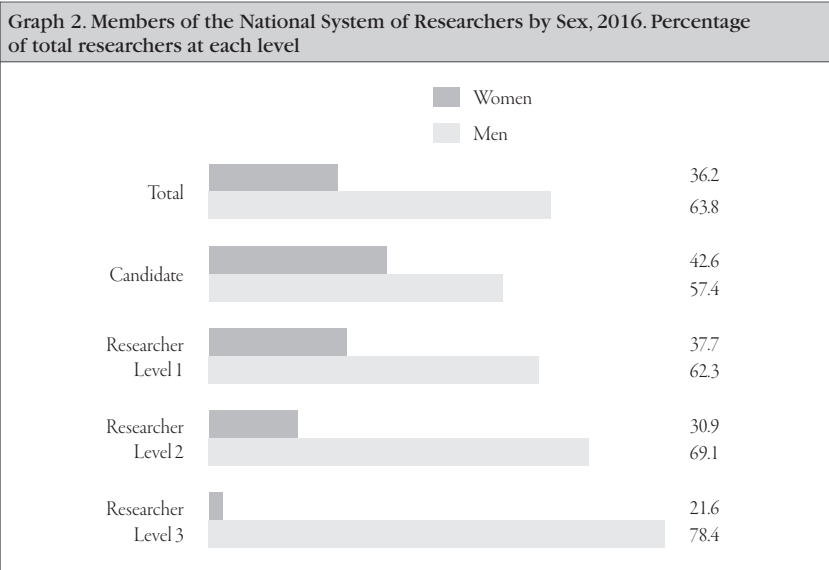
<sup>6</sup> National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutes, *Anuario estadístico. Población escolar en la educación superior. Técnico superior y licenciatura. Ciclo Escolar 2016-2017*, available at [http://www.anui.es.mx/gestor/data/personal/anui05/anuario/ANUARIO\\_EDUCACION\\_SUPE-RIOR-LICENCIATURA\\_2016-2017.zip](http://www.anui.es.mx/gestor/data/personal/anui05/anuario/ANUARIO_EDUCACION_SUPE-RIOR-LICENCIATURA_2016-2017.zip) (date of reference: May 20, 2020).

and Computer Systems. As can be seen in Graph 1, women tend to choose Psychology and Nursing, while men are more likely to opt for Computer Systems, Industrial and Process Quality Engineering, Construction and Civil Engineering, Mechatronics and Architecture and Urbanism, which are not the most popular among female students.



*Source:* National Science and Technology Board (Conacyt)-Inegi, “Población de 18 años y más por sexo y grupos de edad, según interés en desarrollos científicos y tecnológicos. Cuadro 8.1”, in *Encuesta sobre la Percepción Pública de la Ciencia y la Tecnología (ENPECyT) 2017*, available at <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/enpecyt/2017/default.html#Tabulados> (date of reference: May 20, 2020).

A relevant indicator in terms of SDGs 4 and 5 is the percentage of women who are members of the National System of Researchers (SNI), whose purpose is to promote the country’s scientific and technological development by granting support to experts. In 2016, more than 25 000 researchers were either registered with or were candidates to join the SNI, 36.2% of which were women. As Graph 2 illustrates, the higher the level, the lower the participation of women, which drops considerably to just 21.6 % at level 3.



Source: Conacyt, “Sistema Nacional de Investigadores. Lista de investigadores miembros. Vigencia enero-diciembre 2016”, available at [https://www.conacyt.gob.mx/images/conacyt/sni/beneficiarios\\_2016.xlsx](https://www.conacyt.gob.mx/images/conacyt/sni/beneficiarios_2016.xlsx) (date of reference: May 20, 2020).

A good indicator of the ground we have left to cover is the percentage of literacy and illiteracy in the population aged 15 or more, broken down by sex. Compiled by Inegi, this indicator shows that women account for a worrisome 61.5% of the illiterate population (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Estimated Percentage of the Population Aged 15 or More that is Literate or Illiterate, Broken Down by Sex**

Place	Population aged 15 or more			Literacy Condition (percentage)						N. E.
				Literate			Illiterate			
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	
Mexico	86 692 424	41 414 339	45 278 085	93.62	48.36	51.64	5.48	38.50	61.50	0.90

Source: Inegi, “Estimadores de la población de 15 años y más y su distribución porcentual según condición de alfabetismo y sexo por entidad federativa y grupos de edad”, October 24, 2016, available at [https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/tabulados/06\\_educacion.xls](https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/intercensal/2015/tabulados/06_educacion.xls) (date of reference: May 20, 2020).



Alan Knight speaks of the importance of acknowledging both the Mexico of regions and the Mexico of today that is the result of the phases it was built on. According to Knight, the projects that existed at some point during the revolutionary era for the design of a new national identity tended to fail. Aspirational and normative, these projects sought to mold a nation that often did not want to be molded and that had conflicting interests and identities. Consequently, Mexico's target national identity remained notably fragmented by region, city, religion, ideology, age, gender and ethnicity, concludes Knight. Each state has its own culture and traditions, habits, social and business structures; their inhabitants are marked by the weather, geography, the natural resources at their disposal or simply how close or how far they are from the United States. Each region necessarily responds to the demands of its own people, i.e. differences are not exclusively geographical, but extend to crucial issues such as the economy, security, education, democracy, justice and equality.<sup>7</sup>

## The Mexican Case

In light of the above, the question remains: what is the situation in Mexico? Where are we in terms of quality education, in terms of gender equality? What synergies have civil society and the public and private sectors created to guarantee gender equality in each and every one of the activities we engage in? Multiple stereotypes persist in Mexico and discrimination continues to be a variable that limits opportunities for women. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) brings us two indisputable statistics: women perform 75% of non-remunerated domestic work, which limits their options when they want to find a paid job and balance it with family life; and only 44.9% of women of working age have a job. This is one of the lowest employability indicators of all OECD countries, just behind Turkey and Greece (where the average is 60%). Conversely, men have

<sup>7</sup> Alan Knight, "El mito de la Revolución mexicana", in *Repensar la Revolución mexicana*, vol. 2, Mexico, El Colegio de México, 2013, 207-273.

a considerably higher employability rate (78.5%), which translates into one of the widest gender gaps in the OECD in terms of employment.<sup>8</sup>

Generally speaking, gender gaps tend to become more accentuated while raising families. Mexico does not have a sufficient childcare facilities to support women looking to take on paid jobs and grow professionally. Proof of this is:

That on December 28, 2018, the federal expenditure budget for the 2019 fiscal year published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* establishes, in Appendix 13, which corresponds to Category 20, a budget for the Childcare Facilities Program that is 50% lower than that allocated the immediately preceding year. The program was later canceled completely, which is a violation of the human rights of the children who use the program in question, their mothers, fathers and/or guardians, the people in charge of and employees of these facilities.<sup>9</sup>

According to the CNDH, the main concerns as regards the situation of women are violence perpetrated against them in public and private spheres and irregular access to legal processes for the serving of justice.<sup>10</sup> That said, some important measures have been taken under the educational programs implemented: the granting of scholarships to high school students, investment in childcare facilities and crèches and the promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics among girls and young women (under the *Niñas STEM Pueden* program launched by Mexico's Secretariat of Public Education in conjunction with the OECD).

<sup>8</sup> OECD, *Building an Inclusive Mexico: Policies and Good Governance for Gender Equality*, OECD, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> CNDH, "Recomendación no. 29/2019. Sobre el caso de la violación a los derechos humanos de las personas usuarias y beneficiarias del Programa de estancias infantiles para apoyar a madres trabajadoras", May 31, 2019, 10, at [https://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Recomendaciones/2019/Rec\\_2019\\_029.pdf](https://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Recomendaciones/2019/Rec_2019_029.pdf) (date of reference: August 5, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> CNDH, *Principales preocupaciones sobre la situación de las mujeres...*, pp. 10-11 and 19-24.

## Conclusions

Mexico is a country of contrasts; a country where the latest technological trends and the world's most successful multinationals coexist with poverty, inequality and mistrust in its institutions. The population is growing exponentially and we need to be able to guarantee equal opportunities regardless of gender, social condition or cultural identity. "Mexico has made significant progress in the achievement of women's rights and gender equality, especially in key areas at federal level: strengthening of national laws to ensure women and men equality; strong gender institutionalism and increased public resources earmarked for gender equality."<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, wage differences, the low participation of women in the workforce, their low productivity and gender violence remain cause for concern. We need to make progress in the following areas:<sup>12</sup> create structures that facilitate the transition from school to the workplace via training programs and the teaching of life skills; make it easier for women to access productive resources via processes, programs and institutions; guarantee women access to land and other physical assets, and ensure they have economic opportunities; and make sure both the public and private sectors honor their social commitment to broadening access to quality, affordable childcare services, and full-time curricular and extracurricular programs. Likewise, the government needs to promote gender-neutral parental permission policies and flexible labor agreements, create the legal frameworks needed to address a "continuum" of gender violence that ranges from discrimination to domestic violence and femicide, based on a multi-policy approach that combines social and situational prevention with the effective application of criminal justice and, the most elementary of all, guarantee access to effective and efficient legal systems.

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<sup>11</sup> UN-Women, "Mexico", at <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/mexico> (date of reference: August 5, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> As stated in the World Bank, *Mexico Gender Assessment*, Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2019, pp. 84-86.

If we really want to close the gender gap using education as the factor of social change and aligning our mission with the SDGs, we need to ensure that schools and universities are accessible, even in the most remote rural communities of Mexico (which is especially important considering women can be subjected to sexual violence on long journeys). By the same token, teachers on all levels need to be trained to eliminate tendentious gender and empowerment patterns, so they are equipped to respond and act when inequalities emerge in the classroom; study plans need to be designed independently of gender and used to combat gender stereotypes, with even professors being capable of breaking with patterns of discrimination associated with certain career choices or subjects; specialized mentorship programs and extracurricular activities need to be created to help reduce the dropout rate among women and girls and campaigns implemented to raise awareness as to the professional, economic and social advantages of having an education. More importantly, we need to help bring about a change of mentality, a real change of culture, beginning with our schools, institutes and universities. This can only be done by uprooting cultural traditions and habits that, in Mexico, are constantly undermining the search for gender equality: teenage pregnancies, scant sex education for young people, and the inculcation of outdated “male” and “female” stereotypes from an early age, which merely serve to perpetuate erroneous ideas about what is correct and what is incorrect. As a nation, Mexico needs to commit to a project whose fundamental premise is to educate in equality, foster the empowerment of each and every one of its citizens, reduce and eliminate episodes of gender violence, and strengthen and cultivate the commitment of civil society.