



# Guatemala Human Rights Commission / USA

## Fact Sheet

### Education in Guatemala

The public education system in Guatemala is grossly inadequate, leaving the country with the highest illiteracy rate in Central America, and one of the highest in the world. Although Article 47 of the Constitution stipulates that students are required by law to attend school until the age of 15, an estimated two million children do not (USAID). Today's system fails to address gender disparities and socioeconomic constraints. Efforts have been made since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996; there is, however, great need for improvement to prepare Guatemala's future generations.

#### School Enrollment (2008):

- Literacy Rate: **70.6%**
  - Compared to 99% in the U.S. and 99.8% in Cuba
- Primary School
  - Enrollment: **95%**
  - Attendance: **78%**
  - Completion: **62%**
- Secondary School
  - Enrollment: **38%**
  - Attendance: **23%**
  - Completion: **10.1%**

#### The State and Education

According to the Law of National Education in Guatemala, education is:

- the inherent right of the individual
- an obligation of the state to provide
- a tool for the formation of a just and democratic society
- formed and defined by the multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural communities

#### Government Spending

- Article 89 of the National Education Law states that education will receive no less than **35%** of revenue of general government allocations
- Actual government budget for education: **17%** of general government allocations (2.6% of GDP, 2007)

#### Mi Familia Progres

Mi Familia Progres began in 2008 as a government initiative to help support families living in extreme poverty in Guatemala. To receive funds from the program, children must attend school and have monthly medical exams. If the families fulfill these responsibilities, they are given Q300 (US\$37) per child, per month. Though a controversial program, it has reached 591,570 families in 187 (56% of the total) municipalities.

#### *Sources:*

UNESCO Institute for Statistics  
UNICEF State of the World's Children Report 2010  
USAID, and Mi Familia Progres

#### USAID Programs

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provides funding for Guatemalan education to improve access and raise completion rates. In 2009, USAID's budget allocated **\$6 million** for basic education in Guatemala.

How US tax dollars were invested:

- Over 2,200 university scholarships in Guatemala given to indigenous youth
- Community integrated literacy model and materials developed in three languages and used by 25 NGOs

Also in 2009, the US government spent **\$8.4 million** of taxpayers' money on military and police aid in Guatemala.

*Source:* USAID, Just the Facts



#### Support for Children of Human Rights Defenders

While the Guatemalan Constitution requires free public education, the system continues to be riddled with fees for supplies, uniforms and other expenses, excluding many Guatemalan children. The problem becomes compounded in the tragic loss of one or both parents, leaving the children with elderly grandparents, relatives, or to fend for themselves.

GHRC supports the children of human rights defenders who are attacked or murdered. Through your generous donations, you can sponsor a child to continue with his/her education.

If you would like to donate to this new initiative or learn more, please contact GHRC at [ghrc-usa@ghrc-usa.org](mailto:ghrc-usa@ghrc-usa.org).

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#### Gender Disparities



Gender differences in education and literacy pose a big problem. Girls tend to leave pencils and books for weaving, tending animals, and preparation of food.

Sexism and poverty are major factors in the gender gap. On average boys attend school for 11 years and girls for 10. Educating girls is proven to be one of the most effective ways to fight poverty.

The gender gap in literacy:

- Female: 68.7% (2008)
- Male: 79.5% (2008)

Primary School Enrollment:

- Female: 93% (2008)
- Male: 97% (2008)

Secondary School Enrollment:

- Female: 37% (2008)
- Male: 40% (2008)

Although the recent census shows improvement in female enrollment, **it is still the lowest in all of Latin America.**

Sources:  
UNICEF  
CIA World Fact book  
USAID  
UNESCO

Founded in 1982, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, humanitarian organization that monitors, documents, and reports on the human rights situation in Guatemala, advocates for survivors of human rights abuses in Guatemala, and works toward positive, systemic change.

#### Rural & Indigenous Exclusion



While literacy and education levels are low at the national level, these statistics are even worse in rural and indigenous communities.

In Guatemala, more than half of the population is of indigenous descent, with at least 21 different Mayan groups, each with their own language. The majority of the indigenous populations live in rural areas with limited access to formal education.

Urban female literacy (2009)

- Non-Indigenous: **86%**
- Indigenous: **55%**

Rural female literacy (2009)

- Non-Indigenous: **62%**
- Indigenous: **35%**

Urban male literacy (2009)

- Non-Indigenous: **91%**
- Indigenous: **75%**

Rural male literacy (2009)

- Non-Indigenous: **70%**
- Indigenous: **58%**

The Peace Accords called for an expansion of bilingual-intercultural education, but in 2005, of the 7,832 schools in places with significant indigenous populations, only 1,869 provided bilingual education (23.9%).

76% of all rural, indigenous children who enter first grade drop out before completing primary school. This lack of education perpetuates the cycle of poverty and denies the opportunity of advancement for a group that is among the most marginalized in Guatemala.

Source: UNHCR

#### Success Stories



Thanks to the Cuban method "Yo, Sí Puedo," (Yes, I can), nine municipalities in Guatemala have been declared free of illiteracy.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) a community can be declared free of illiteracy if the rate is less than 4%.

The National Literacy Committee (CONALFA), in conjunction with the Cuban program, has collaborated with instructors to teach people how to read and write. The program uses a combination of books, manuals, videos and songs to make learning easier.

The program began in Guatemala in 2008 and is located in various municipalities.

“Yo, Sí Puedo” has succeeded in educating more than 3 million people worldwide. In Latin America, the program has a presence in México, Venezuela, Panamá, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay.

Source: Prensa Libre