

Governments in the region consider digital literacy challenges to be "urgent"

São Paulo, October 25, 2023 — Education authorities and government representatives from South America agreed today that the region has "urgent challenges" in terms of digital literacy of students and improvements in infrastructure to expand connectivity, while the digital economy is booming and already accounts for almost 20% of the world's gross domestic product.

Representatives from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay and Brazil debated and shared experiences in the panel on contextualization and challenges of digital literacy of the V Congress of Escuela Plus, held at the headquarters of the Club Hebraica in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil, this week with teachers from each of these countries.

International speakers and representatives of multilateral organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Brazilian Innovation Center for Education (CIEB, by its acronym in Portuguese) joined the debate, announcing that the "Eduotec Guide", a tool for self-evaluation of teachers and public schools on digital literacy, will be expanded in 2024 from Brazil to Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia through the Escuela Plus program, providing possible solutions to overcome the challenges of digital exclusion.

"We must bring about a change in school culture and incorporate digital technologies, not to replace them, because teachers are irreplaceable, but to support, accelerate and improve student involvement in the current era of digitalization, which is key to the development of our countries," said Marcelo Pérez Alfaro, IDB Senior Education Specialist.

The authorities and teachers agreed that Latin America has made progress in literacy in recent decades, although, according to the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), in 2023 there are still 27.5 million people in the region who can neither read nor write. Digital literacy is an additional challenge.

According to the United Nations, inequality of access to and use of new technologies is evident in the region. In Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 200 million people do not have access to basic digital infrastructure, according to the organization. A similar number of people do have access, but to services of very poor quality or at rates that are not in line with their purchasing power.

"This is a challenge that requires public-private articulation, as in the case of Escuela Plus. We have to work on how devices are used to teach and learn in each school. In Córdoba, for example, digital culture does not go on a separate track but with the



school curriculum. This marks what we want to do for the future," said Pedro Marino, coordinator of the Interculturality Area of the province of Córdoba.

Katherine Rojas, Digital Citizenship Coordinator of the Innovation Center of the Chilean Ministry of Education, commented: "It is a constant challenge how new technologies and generative artificial intelligence are integrated into teaching and learning processes. The digital literacy process must take into account the characteristics of each place, of each context, since we cannot pretend that there is a uniform process for all. It is very important to take into account the particularities of each community so that we continue advancing in the digital literacy process".

Also participating in the debate were Pilar Riera, from the Office of Educational Innovation with the Use of New Technologies of Colombia; Jesús Quispe, Executive Director of the Commonwealth of the Andes, of Peru; Karina Jauregui, Director of the Department of Education for the Rural Environment of Uruguay; and Cristina Catão, Secretary of Education of Jaguariuna, Brazil. All of them agreed that the challenges to advance in digital literacy, in parallel to the expansion of connectivity, are "urgent".

This congress on education was held in parallel to the World Youth Meeting promoted by Scholas Ocurrentes, a movement created by Pope Francis, World ORT and the Leo Werthein Foundation, in addition to the support of Vrio Corp., the company that operates DIRECTV Latin America and SKY Brasil.

Scholas, World ORT, the Leo Werthein Foundation and Vrio Corp., through its sustainability program Escuela Plus, share a common goal, which is to make the world a better place through education, intercultural dialogue and promoting the meeting of differences. Both congresses converge at Hebraica São Paulo and a symbolic closing ceremony is scheduled for Thursday, during which Pope Francis will deliver a message to the youth of the world.