

# Country Profile: Argentina

## Equity in Education

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Education in Argentina is free at primary, secondary and university level. In 2014, the government adopted a law to make early childhood education compulsory from four years of age, as well as providing for universal education access from three years of age.<sup>1</sup> Despite free access to education for all school aged children, the government only dedicates a limited amount of GDP (estimated at 6%) to the education sector, as a result of which there are insufficient funds available to address the scale of challenges facing the provision of quality education to the poorest and most marginalised children living in a country characterised by significant wealth disparities and ongoing economic instability.<sup>2</sup>

National education statistics suggest that most children receive a basic education, with 97% of female students and 96% of male students completing primary school. However, children living in rural areas, children from indigenous communities and migrant children remain are least likely to receive a basic education.<sup>3</sup> Completion rates for lower and upper secondary school indicate a particularly marked disparity between socioeconomic groups: 89% of the children in the richest quintile complete lower secondary compared to 64% from the poorest quintile, dropping further to 83% and 47%, respectively, for upper secondary completion rates. The poorest male students are also less likely to complete upper secondary than their female counterparts (41% compared to 51%).<sup>4</sup>

Socioeconomic disparities in completion rates are

reflected in learning outcomes. The SERCE assessment suggests that almost all children in primary school learn basic reading, with a national average of 98% that falls marginally to 95% for children of both genders living in the poorest and/or rural communities. However, only 46% of secondary school children in school reach minimum literacy requirements specified by PISA. Male students from the poorest quintile living in rural locations are the least likely to achieve these learning outcomes (19%) with their female counterparts (poorest in rural locations) following close behind at 26%.<sup>5</sup>

A recent initiative to reduce the impact of poverty on quality and equity in education provision include an IDB sponsored programme to improve enrolment rates and teaching quality at schools within the poorest communities.<sup>6</sup> The programme will provide essential services, such as a school bus, to support students in attending school, as well as providing training opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of maths and science teaching for urban schools in deprived areas. Analysis of further policy initiatives and NGO activity targeting children in rural areas, and from indigenous or migrant communities, is presented below.

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## Rural Education

Children living in rural areas are more likely to repeat school years and less likely to transition from primary to secondary education. In some

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina_Annual_Report_2014.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2015/09/24/the-new-agenda-for-education-in-argentina-and-latin-america/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17383>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/argentina>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.iadb.org/en/news/news-releases/2015-05-08/argentina-to-improve-education-quality-and-equality,11152.html>

rural areas, access to all ten years of national education has only been established in the previous decade.<sup>7</sup>

In 2014, the Rural Education Improvement Project received a second wave of funding from the World Bank to tackle these issues by supporting enhanced teacher training and school management, investing in infrastructure and resources, and working closely with families to improve attendance rates.<sup>8</sup> The project aims to reduce repetition rates in primary school from 7% to 4% and increase secondary enrolment rates from 75% to 85%, as well as increasing the number of children transition from ninth to tenth grade.<sup>9</sup>

With high levels of digital connectivity, there are a number of key policy initiatives and NGO programmes that are harnessing the potential of ICT to improve educational opportunities, reduce the digital literacy gap, and ensure access to educational for all, most notably the national 'Connecting Equality' (*Conectar Igualdad*) programme.

Established in 2010 as a key policy of President Fernandez, the 'Connecting Equality' programme aims to reduce educational disparities for the poorest students (often those living in rural areas) by providing pupils, teachers and schools with netbooks. The programme focuses on improving digital literacy and ICT skills for all students, as well as training teachers in ICT skills to support successful delivery of the programme. As of 2015, an estimated 5 million netbooks<sup>10</sup> had been distributed, while more than 8,800 schools have benefited from the programme.<sup>11</sup>

Key strengths identified its programme partner,

Intel, include clear understanding of how the programme transforms educational opportunities, strong leadership and long-term funding pathways, and independent monitoring of the programme delivery.<sup>12</sup> Recent reports suggest, however, that the programme may be scaled back under the current administration.<sup>13</sup>

NGO activity in this area includes the recently expanded UNICEF ICT-education programme that provides 'virtual' secondary education for indigenous and other vulnerable students in rural areas.<sup>14</sup>

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## Migrant Children

Migrant children living in Argentina are significantly less likely to attend school and achieve basic learning outcomes compared to non-migrant children, and more likely to be engaged in child labour practices. A number of recent policy changes and NGO initiatives have sought address this issue in order to improve equitable access and education quality for migrant children.

Argentina has the largest migrant populations in South America, who constitute more than 4% of the total population. The influx of migrants is partly driven by the high demand for unskilled low-wage labour from neighbouring countries; principally, Paraguay, Bolivia and Chile.<sup>15</sup> Census data (2010) indicates that there are 1.8 million foreigners living in Argentina, of which 216,000 are school aged children.<sup>16</sup>

As of 2014, enrolment rates for migrant children were significantly lower than non-migrant children: for example, school attendance rates for five year

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2015/04/06/argentina-improves-its-rural-education-system>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P133195/argentina-second-rural-education-improvement-project-promer-ii?lang=en>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/12/02/wbg-argentina-rural-students-teachers-support-reduce-educational-inequality>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17383>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/c-m-rubin/the-global-search-for-edu\\_b\\_4074212.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/c-m-rubin/the-global-search-for-edu_b_4074212.html)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.intel.com/content/dam/doc/case-study/learning-series-pioneering-program-study.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.southernpulse.info/sp-pulses/budget-cuts-now-target-the-plan-conectar-igualdad>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina_Annual_Report_2014.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/argentina-new-era-migration-and-migration-policy>

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina_Annual_Report_2014.pdf)

old children is 77% for Bolivian migrant children compared to 92% for non-migrant children.<sup>17</sup> While Argentina was an early adopter of a specific policy that guaranteed access to education for migrant children,<sup>18</sup> the requirement to possess a National Identification Document (DNI) had been a barrier for some migrant children. A recent policy change to allow migrant children to enrol in school by presenting an alternative ID document, such as a passport from their originating country, appears to have had a positive impact. For example, enrolment rates for migrant children aged 12-14 increased from 93% in 2010 to 99% in 2014.<sup>19</sup>

Further policies aimed at improving access to education for migrant children include a National Plan for Education Inclusion 'All to Study' to tackle migrant child labour, and legally protecting the right

to access education for children of irregular or temporary migrants. The government has also introduced an Intercultural Bilingual Education Modality to support both migrant and indigenous children whose first language is other than Spanish.<sup>20</sup>

NGOs have also actively contributed to improving educational opportunities for migrant children. UNICEF, working as part of a multi-organisation programme, have advocated for improving access to the national 'cash transfers' programme for migrant children and integrating topics on migrants and diversity into the teachers' training curricula. A UNICEF-developed 'Kit for re-thinking migration' has been included in the national 'Conectar Igualdad' programme; which has provided laptops to 4.6 million secondary school students.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/wmr2013/en/Working-Paper\\_BuenosAires\\_final.pdf](https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/What-We-Do/wmr2013/en/Working-Paper_BuenosAires_final.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina_Annual_Report_2014.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://portal.oas.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=H00RnAXttlY%3D&tabid=1232>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2014.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Argentina_Annual_Report_2014.pdf)