



Education in the Legal Amazon

Assessment and Critical Factors

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About Amazon 2030

The **Amazon 2030** project is a Brazilian research initiative with the purpose of developing an action plan for the Brazilian Amazon. Our objective is to achieve conditions for a higher standard of economical and human development in the region, and to achieve a sustainable use of natural resources by 2030.

Contact

Media Contact

O Mundo que Queremos

amazonia2030@omundoquequeremos.com.br

Amazon 2030 Contact

contato@amazonia2030.org.br

Research Contact

Tássia Cruz

tassia.cruz@fgv.br



Authors

Tássia Cruz

Executive Manager, FGV CEIPE

Juliana Portella

Researcher, FGV EBAPE

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Keywords

Legal Amazon; educational public policies; basic education; professional education; integrated high school; education and labor market.

Executive Summary

Whilst Brazil has largely overcome the challenge of poor provision of elementary education - with numbers close to the total number of children enrolled in primary education and increasing enrollment rates in early childhood education and secondary education -, the Legal Amazon still faces difficulties in access to education, particularly in early childhood and secondary education.

Currently, there is a decline in basic education enrollment numbers across the country, with increases in dropout rates as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic (UNICEF 2021b). This drop in enrollment was higher, on average, in the states that make up the Legal Amazon (1.8%) than in the rest of the country (1.5%). Although at first glance the percentages may seem small, they represent the absence of 169 thousand students, in the case of the Amazon region, and 427 thousand students in other states (INEP, 2019 and 2020), which reinforces the importance of analyzing the provision of education in the Legal Amazon in order to take greater action in reducing inequalities in access to quality education. With this need in mind, this document seeks to describe and critically analyze basic and higher education in the Amazon region, considering the geographic and population distribution, as well as the economic needs of the states that comprise it.

Access to quality early childhood education is a fundamental strategy to combat poverty and social inequality and should be a priority of educational policies in the region. However, gross enrollment rates indicate that this phase, particularly with regard to day care centers, is under-supplied in the Legal Amazon compared to other Brazilian states. This rate is 51.0% for early childhood education in the states of the Legal Amazon (compared to 66.4% in the rest of Brazil) and 25.6% specifically in day care centers (compared to 44.8% in the rest of the country). Unlike pre-school, day care is not mandatory according to the Law on National Education Guidelines, but Brazil has a goal that 50% of children under 3 years and 11 months of age are supported at this stage (PNE 2014). Research indicates that the low supply of vacancies in day care centers in rural regions is an important factor for the low school enrollment rate at this stage.

A similar pattern is observed in secondary education, whose average gross enrollment rate corresponds to 72.6% in the Amazon region, 10 percentage points below the average of other Brazilian states. This stage still faces a situation of high age-grade distortion: in the Legal Amazon, 31.2% of students are older than expected for the year in which they are enrolled, with failings and school dropout being two explanations for such a discrepancy. High failing rates also reduce the Ideb [national indicator to monitor the quality of education] of secondary

education, which is below the target established by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP) approximately ten years ago. The Legal Amazon is also characterized by high school dropout rates, which are around 10% in the states of the region, indicating that many young people enter the job market without even having completed elementary education. Although the available data do not yet fully capture this effect, there are strong indications that high dropout rates will be accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Only approximately one third of the students who dropped out of high school continue their studies in the Youth and Adult Education (YAE). However, the gross enrollment rate in this modality (4.7%) is higher than the average for other Brazilian states (3.9%). Although higher YEA schooling indicates that a larger share of the population is interested in qualifying for the job market, it reflects a population that has not completed elementary education at the correct age. This is corroborated by the fact that 66% of students enrolled in this modality attend YAE elementary school.

The most striking scenario, however, occurs in professional education: the gross schooling rate in the Legal Amazon (2.4%) is practically half that of the rest of the country (4.7%), with the schooling rate in the Brazilian vocational education already low when compared to other countries – 11% of Brazilian students enrolled in secondary education also attend vocational education, while the average for the countries in the group reaches 42% (OECD 2020). This situation is associated with the lack of momentum in the labor market, which has generated an unfavorable scenario for the inclusion of young workers. The data also suggest that there is difficulty in accessing rural areas, representing both supply and demand problems for professional education.

We highlight in this report that the Legal Amazon is experiencing a demographic bonus phase that, if well used, will represent an important – and perhaps unique – development opportunity for the region. However, the benefits of the demographic bonus fundamentally depend on the provision of accessible and quality education, which is capable of qualifying the working-age population to participate in the productive sectors of the Amazon economy. In this sense, the rates and indicators presented throughout this document should not be analyzed in isolation, requiring a look at how the provision of education can improve the population's living conditions. Our analysis therefore emphasizes the importance of the modality of professional education, considered an important tool for accessing the labor market, especially in the case of vulnerable groups.

Finally, the Legal Amazon also has low enrollment rates in higher education (31.7%), which represents yet another way in which the educational journey of young people is shortened, especially when compared to the rest of the country (where the gross enrollment rate is 40.3%). In addition to the low tendency to attend this stage, young people in the region have a low probability of graduating.

In short, it appears that, in practically the entire educational journey, the scenario in the region is characterized by obstacles in both the supply and demand for slots. There is evidence that these obstacles are in part linked to the difficulty of penetrating networks in rural areas, and that they can have serious consequences for youth and adults to access the skilled labor market. As a result, the region contains a large number of neither-nor youth and adults, people who do not work and do not study, and that are discouraged.

This situation risks wasting the demographic bonus that the region has, which would represent an opportunity to develop the economy and increase the region's social well-being. We conclude, therefore, that it is necessary to increase and improve the offer of vacancies throughout the school journey, particularly in professional education, in order to improve access to the labor market and, consequently, the quality of life of the most vulnerable families in the Amazon region.

Possible paths to be explored include public policies that invest directly or encourage the provision of institutions that offer professional education in rural areas of the Amazon. The apparent lack of interest of youth, on the other hand, requires a closer look at the job market. In this sense, it is essential that professional education courses work in an integrated manner with the productive sector, and this requires that students have practical work experiences that are considered useful for the market (Schwartzman 2005). It is also necessary to look at the structural challenges of the labor market, which has as attributes the short duration of employment contracts, long working hours, low wages, and the precariousness of hiring (DIEESE 2018). These possibilities, as well as examples of existing public policy related to vocational

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