

Public policies for educational equity in contemporary Mexico, in the face of the 2030 Agenda: Coordinates for inclusion?

Gabriela De la Cruz Flores

e-mail: gabydc@unam.mx

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. México

Israel Moreno Salto

e-mail: israel.moreno.salto@uabc.edu.mx

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. México

Brenda Imelda Boroel Cervantes

e-mail: brenda.boroel@uabc.edu.mx

Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. México

Abstract: For decades, Latin America has configured educational policies which placed equity at their core, with a view to reverse inequalities and move forward in building more just and inclusive societies. This article aims to trace an analytical path that allows us to reflect upon and problematize the linkages between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and educational equity policies in contemporary Mexico. Drawing upon documentary research of educational policies in Mexico during the presidential terms of Peña Nieto and López Obrador, this paper offers an answer to the following question: What are the focal points of the educational policies regarding equity in Mexico and what are their relationships to the 2030 Agenda? Research outcomes suggest a convergence of Mexican policies with the 2030 Agenda and to a certain continuity between the current and preceding presidential terms, yet there is an array of key issues that remain underdeveloped or underdiscussed, which, need to be addressed in more detail if greater equity is to be achieved.

Keywords: Educational policies, Equity, Inclusion, 2030 Agenda

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1. Introduction

Educational equity has become a priority for many Latin American countries. This concern is linked to the movement called *Education for All*, fostered by UNESCO

among other international organisms, whose origins go back to the 90s. This initiative is centered on achieving the universalization of elementary education and reducing illiteracy (Lerch & Buckner, 2017). The political and social motivation for this concern is based on the necessity to a) reduce social and educational gaps, b) generate social wellbeing and quality of life for all, c) guarantee universal elementary education, d) expand and improve support and education in early childhood, e) reduce illiteracy, f) promote equality of access to learning for youth and adults and g) build gender-responsive educational approaches and improve education quality, with measurable results (UNESCO, 2016). This is achieved by fleshing out the right to education, which equates to universal and free access to quality education, with opportune continuity and completion at the elementary and secondary levels, and where the school is a space for the full development of students (Cecchini, Villatoro & Mancero, 2019).

In the 21st century, Latin American countries continue to face enormous challenges in terms of educational equity. The public policy guidelines have focused primarily on increasing coverage; nevertheless, the options generated in order to respond to the sociocultural and schooling needs of the increasing student population are insufficient to guarantee their permanence and successful educational completion. Although education is a public asset, placed by nations in service of the citizens because of its relevant role in their training and retraining and to help them face the political, social and economic challenges of the knowledge society, it must also meet the requirements of equity, pertinence and quality (UNESCO, 2016; OCDE, 2015).

This reality forces us to rethink equity and inclusion policies from an alternative perspective. In this regard, one of the growing current political and social concerns of many countries regarding education is promoting educational processes for all, i.e., fostering successful education for all, in order to achieve quality learning (Sánchez-Santamaría & Manzanares-Moya, 2012 y 2014). Empirical evidence shows that educational quality acts as a frame of reference for teachers aspiring to promote the educational success of all their students, in which equity is an essential aspect, understood as *a pedagogical principle which, articulating inclusion and social justice, is characterized by generating a state of the educational process aimed at educational success for all* (Sánchez-Santamaría & Manzanares-Moya, 2017).

This paper aims to trace an analytical path that enables further discussions concerning the linkages between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and educational policies in contemporary Mexico. To this end, it stems on the methodological tradition namely Documentary Research, developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which, aims to provide an answer to the following question: What are the focal points of the educational policies regarding equity in Mexico and what are their relationships to the 2030 Agenda? In this regard, the rest of the article is structured as follows. Firstly, it begins with a description of the resources and the methodology utilized. Subsequently, it discusses a series of conceptual theoretical roots as epistemological aids, in order to account for the ways in which inclusion and equity are conceived. Next, it recounts the way in which educational policies are outlined in Mexico, and introduces the current and previous sectoral

educational programs. Afterwards, it analyzes and discusses a series of actions deriving from these plans, whose objective seems to be to address the dispositions of the international agendas. Lastly, it concludes with a discussion that sheds light on pending aspects, questions and topics in the face of federal policies in Mexico, in order to face the challenges of the 2030 Agenda.

2. Methodology

For this paper, we employed a form of Documentary Research developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). According to *Ibid.*, this methodological orientation involves the following four phases: a) data collection b) data reduction, c) data display, and d) drawing and verifying conclusions. Grounded on this approach, we searched and collected public policy documents issued by the current and preceding federal government in Mexico, with regard to education equity. Table 1 displays the documents that were ultimately analyzed:

Table 1. Formal Mexican policy documents.

Federal Administration 2012-2018	Federal Administration 2018-2024
1) National Development Plan 2012-2018	1) National Development Plan 2019-2024
2) Education Sector plan 2013-2018	1) Education Sector Plan 2020-2024
3) 2016 Education Model	2) Third Article of the Constitution
4) Strategy for equity and inclusion in basic education: for students with disabilities, outstanding abilities, and severe learning, behavioral or communication difficulties.	3) General Law of Education
	4) Program for Inclusion and Equality

Source: own construction based on policy documents

For the data collection phase of our study, we carried out a dual strategy. First, we developed an online search for the main education policy documents issued by each federal administration respectively, namely National Development Plan and Education Sector Plan. Subsequently, we explored the Secretariat of Education’s website for additional policy publications that addressed education equity. In what refers to document selection criteria, we established the following three: 1) documents had to be issued by the current or previous federal government; 2) documents had to be published between 2013 and 2021; and 3) documents had to explicitly mention education equity policies. Selected documents were analyzed from October to December 2021, using a policy content analysis approach (Cardno, 2018), with a focus on the identification of existing policies and their links to SDG 4, rather than their purpose, construction, or implementation. This, in line, with our aim to establish an analytical route for further analysis concerning this intersection.

In the second phase -data reduction- we identified all sections from the above documents that explicitly mentioned or made reference to education equity policies;

notably, sections that addressed other policies were disregarded. Concerning the third step, data display, as mentioned above, we developed links and relationships between the content from these sections and SDG Goal 4; this involved, mapping the structure of the texts on the one hand, and on the other reflecting and making sense of discourses ingrained in the policy content. Finally, conclusions were drawn concerning how SDG goal 4 had been domesticated within these national policies.

3. Equity in learning, toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Not leaving anyone behind: equality. This is the most robust principle of the 2030 Agenda, which underpins a sustainable model to ensure the human rights of all individuals. In the educational sphere, this commitment is undertaken by guaranteeing learning conditions focused on equity from the beginning and all throughout the educational process.

Promoting universality and boosting inclusion, from the perspective of education, involves collective efforts to educate individuals to become aware of their surroundings, in order to co-produce and collaborate when solving global problems from an integral, interdependent and environmental perspective. With this intention in mind, it is considered necessary to implement trustworthy assessment mechanisms within educational systems, in order to obtain quantifiable results in terms of educational achievement. Particularly, the concepts of inclusion and equity are placed as foundation of a systemic focus of educational quality, which lays the groundwork for a transformation of the living conditions of people and communities, from a transformative and humanistic vision of education.

In order to take on the challenges of implementing the goals of the 2030 Agenda, Mexico has developed the National Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Presidencia de la Republica, 2018); this document highlights seven specific targets: a) attain the universalization of elementary and secondary education, b) provide quality access and services for the support and development of technical, upper secondary and higher education; c) increase the skills of youth and adults for employment or enterprising purposes; d) eliminate gender disparities and promote equality and equity in mandatory education; e) improve literacy indicators and basic academic skills; and f) promote sustainable education at all educational levels.

The success of implementing global objectives in the national context relies on overcoming the reductionist view on education, which requires the involvement of state and municipal governments, on the basis of a solid collaboration between educational centers, teachers, students, parents and community. The challenge resides in generating spaces for reflection and participation of the actors involved, and with it, enhancing innovative alliances with non-state agents, in order to intensify the decision-making process and to guarantee the legitimacy of quality learning in the more under-served, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Quality learning, from the perspective of inclusion and equity, is defined by the ability to incentivize relevant and sustainable learning, which makes education more

effective as a common asset, as a right to education and learning (Tawil, 2012; UNESCO, 2015).

Both concepts - inclusion and equity - are complementary, while inclusion deals with actualizing personalized opportunities for learning experiences, in real scenarios of diversity and societal and student expectations and needs, responding opportunely to context inequalities (UNESCO, 2016). On the other hand, equity guarantees that the educational conditions, inputs and processes have equal purpose and results for all students (Operti, 2016).

In that sense, the greatest challenge is to understand inclusive education as the spirit and matter of the educational systems (Ainscow & Messiou, 2014; Operti, 2016; UNESCO, 2017), which enables the right of each student to experience a real educational opportunity and to achieve successful learning. Inclusion gives birth to policies and programs transversal to the educational system, such as access, permanence, graduation and results. It involves associating the originality of learning and the uniqueness of the educational response to each student, under the premise that personalizing curricular and pedagogical responses is the counterpart to understanding and building upon the respect for student diversity and taking on context impact (Operti, Bueno y Arsendeau, 2020).

4. International policy on inclusion and equity in education

From the start, it is important to mention that, in order to legislate student diversity, policies have been the basis for equal opportunities based on international agreements. In that sense, since the 40s, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) stipulates in article 26 that «higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit» (ONU, 1948, p. 20 as cited by Tenorio & Ramírez, 2016). With regard to higher education, article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights that «States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning» (UNESCO, 2006, p.19).

Years later, specifically in the year 2000, the Millennium Development Goals were adopted, as part of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); these deal with access to education for the global population (Del Río-Lugo, 2015).

On the other hand, the OECD has been more preoccupied with promoting strategies for other countries to consider within their educational policies, in order to attain inclusive education. Table 2 describes certain strategies spearheaded by UNESCO and the OECD, which have provided guidelines for the definition of international educational policies.

Table 2. *International strategies to promote inclusion and equity*

Organization	Strategy	Highlights
UNESCO	United Nations Development Programme	Has helped reduce poverty, inequality and exclusion. Supports countries to develop policies, leadership skills, association skills and to consolidate their institutions, aside from creating resilience with the aim of obtaining concrete results in terms of development (ONU, 2021).
	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy	Aims to create an institutional framework for the application of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ONU, n.d.).
OECD	Strategies to engage educational equity Ten steps to equity in education	Policies to examine how to increase equity in education in three strategic fields: design of educational systems, practice inside and outside the campus and resource provision. It proposes ten measures that would help reduce academic failure and dropout percentages, would make society more just and would contribute to avoiding the substantial social costs of marginalized adults with few basic skills (OCDE, n.d.).
	Equity, Excellence and Inclusiveness in Education. Policy Lessons around the world	Both equity and inclusion mean guaranteeing that all students attain at least a minimum basic skill level (OCDE, 2014).

Source: ONU (2021); OECD (2014, 2015)

With regard to the role played by both international organisms, they offer a global discourse that national governments should consider within their policies and see through. Nevertheless, both agencies, from their respective discourses, identify the problems, configure them in indicators and organize them in order to propose political and social guidelines in the matter of inclusion in education (Martínez-Usaralde, 2021).

5. Coordinates / Educational policies and the 2030 Agenda: equity and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups

This section presents a review of the contents of the Sectoral education programs and other normative documents generated in the presidential terms of Enrique Peña Nieto (2013-2018) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2019-2024), to identify the connections with the Sustainable Development Goal no. 4 - Quality education», expressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2015). Particularly, the focus will be on educational policies related to equity and inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

As the reader may notice, the Agenda in question runs through two federal governances, albeit differently. While in the period led by Peña Nieto the Agenda was incorporated into ongoing policies, López Obrador's term starts off with the commitment to incorporate it from the very beginning of his governance. In Peña Nieto's term, it was only in 2016 that the document called «2016 educational model» (SEP, 2016) was published; in 2017 the «Educational model for mandatory education» (SEP, 2017) comes to light, and in 2018 the «Strategy for equity and inclusion in elementary education» (SEP, 2018) is announced. In these documents, it is possible to trace important connections to the Agenda in question. However, it is notable that the 2030 Agenda is only cited in the «Strategy for equity and inclusion in elementary education» (SEP, 2018).

On the other hand, during López Obrador's term, in 2019, substantial changes were made to Constitutional Article no. 3 and to the General law on education. Additionally, that same year, the «Program for educational inclusion and equity» is published, as well as the «National strategy for inclusive education». That is how the definition of educational policies in Mexico - at least in these last two presidential terms - has not followed a single route; in both cases the definition of educational policies becomes palpable once the Federal Government is in office. This situation makes sense in a country such as Mexico, where very frequently, every governmental administration distance itself from its predecessor, a situation which upturns and breaks educational policies, weakening their implementation and results over time.

In order to identify meeting points of educational policies in the last two presidential administrations in Mexico with the 2030 Agenda, we will begin with an analysis of educational policies during Peña Nieto's term, highlighting a few points regarding their implementation. Subsequently, we will examine certain connections of said Agenda during president López Obrador's term. Particularly, the analysis will focus on the policies relating to educational equity and inclusion, core principles of the SDG 4.

5.1. Educational policies in contemporary Mexico: starting balance in the face of SDG 4.

In Mexico one can recognize the experience and systematic effort to define educational policies with equity as guiding principle (Martínez, 2001; Torres & Tenti, 2001), which is crucial to the SDG 4, while inclusion policies have been implemented only relatively recently. Nevertheless, the design of policies relating to educational equity is in contrast with the conditions and results of education, specifically that which is a product of schooling. According to Aguilar (2019), it is in the 90s, during the 20th century, when the concept of educational equity gains importance in Mexico, at the same time that social and educational inequalities increase dramatically in the region, partially due to neo-liberal economic policies, which erode the shortcomings of the disadvantaged social sectors. In said decade, an endless number of compensatory programs were implemented, aimed at the groups with the most economic disadvantages, using positive discrimination mechanisms, for the purpose of *equalizing opportunities*, which would facilitate their transit into the educational

system. At the end of the 90s, policies that place diversification and contextualization of the educational offer at their core were born, in response to the specificities of various groups. This twist opened spaces for recognizing and creating educational policies adjusted to the contexts and needs of individuals; however, it also displayed various limitations, given that in most cases, the recognition actions, increased inequalities instead of decreasing them and placed them in closed circuits, with little margin for action to guarantee equality in the social fulfillment of the individuals.

On the other hand, a study conducted by the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education, in collaboration with the International Institute for Educational Planning of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Technology (INEE-IIEP UNESCO, 2018), identified the fact that educational policies have repeatedly been condensed into four intervention hotspots: a) curriculum and management models; b) infrastructure, equipment and technology; c) teachers and d) educational equity. It is worth mentioning that, following the analysis carried out by said organizations, the educational policies that had equity at their core were centered on the social groups and sectors with the largest educational deficit, on providing them with access, transit, and permanence in the mandatory educational system and with the appropriation of essential knowledge according to the school curriculum. That is to say, educational equity in Mexico was focused on guaranteeing equality of access and permanence opportunities by means of compensatory and positive discrimination programs, in order to eliminate barriers in the exercise of the right to education. Additionally, there have also been specific programs, aimed at consolidating the homes of those who have less, in order to address factors that have an indirect impact on learning. The operationalization of educational equity was maintained in educational policies, as can be seen in the following sections.

5.2. *Educational policies in Enrique Peña Nieto's term and the 2030 Agenda: contributions to equity and inclusion*

The 2013-2018 Sectoral Education Program (DOF, 2013) includes a diagnosis of inclusion and equity. This diagnosis expresses that the National Development Program - *from which the Sectoral Education Program is derived* - indicates that «in order to guarantee inclusion and equity in the educational system, one must expand the opportunities of access, permanence and advancement in the educational programs to all regions and sectors of the population» (DOF, 2013, p. 29), i.e., inclusion and equity are directly proportional to the capacity of the educational system to support the educational paths of everyone and in all regions and sectors. Said diagnosis also highlights the need to «increase the focus on disadvantaged or vulnerable children and teens» (DOF, 2013, p. 29), including the low-income population, and with it, to reduce the gaps in access to education. As for inclusion, the diagnosis warns about the urgency to eradicate «all forms of exclusion due to physical, social, ethnic, gender, religious beliefs or sexual orientation conditions» (DOF, 2013, p. 29). With regard to disadvantaged or vulnerable children or teens, the diagnosis emphasizes indigenous and rural communities, as well as children and teens with disabilities and outstanding abilities. The focus regarding vulnerable groups is on eliminating barriers to their access and permanence in education. According to the diagnosis,

«this requires mechanisms for the timely identification of populations that have been excluded from the educational system, or which are at higher risk of school dropout, and the allocation of scholarships and other educational support tools» (DOF, 2013, p. 31). On the other hand, another challenge is supporting the illiterate population 15 years old or older, who have not completed their elementary education, in order to decrease educational gaps. In summary, in the diagnosis of the 2013-2018 Sectoral Education Program, equity and inclusion are associated with the opportunities to support the educational paths of the population, especially of the more vulnerable and disadvantaged sectors, for the purpose of decreasing barriers and addressing painful problems such as school dropout and educational deficit.

The 2013-2018 Sectoral Education Program integrates six important goals, with their respective strategies and courses of action. For the purpose of this section, we will only focus on Goal no. 3, which refers to: «Ensuring greater educational coverage, inclusion and equity among all population groups, in order to build a more just society.» As mentioned, before the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015), Mexico was already showing an explicit interest in the design and implementation of educational policies centered on equity. Analyzing Goal no. 3 of the 2013-2018 Sectoral Education Program in detail, we can see it endorses the State's obligation to guarantee the right to education, which should include all population groups, and which would «allow the democratization of productivity and the creation of a more just society» (DOF, 2013, p. 54). It is worth noting the purpose of education aligned with productivity, which coincides with the economic model which underpinned the Federal Government itself. On the other hand, the details of this goal state that it is the educational institutions who must safeguard the support of the population groups which need it most, among others the indigenous and rural communities, the population with disabilities etc., and, in general, who must reduce «the barriers that prevent the access and permanence in education of women and other vulnerable groups» (DOF, 2013, p. 54). Additionally, it emphasizes the role of scholarships and financial support for low-income populations and for those with higher school dropout risk. It highlights the role of elementary education, and values its transcendence in consolidating the bases for equity, gender equality and inclusion. Also, on the other hand, it highlights the importance to consolidate the education of adults with educational deficits.

In order to achieve Goal no. 3, seven strategies were defined, which together, incorporated 65 courses of action. It is worth noting that these strategies and courses of action weigh different vulnerable groups, supporting various criteria. For example, by *educational level*, they favor the target population for elementary, secondary and higher education (strategy 3.3). By *sociocultural condition*, they stress: a) support for indigenous and rural population (strategy 3.4); b) population with disabilities and outstanding abilities (strategy 3.5); c) excluded populations, or those at higher dropout risk, such as youth in high-crime areas, children of immigrant agricultural day laborers, repatriated children who come from the United States to Mexico, Afro-descendants and immigrants (strategy 3.6). Another criterion used is the *educational gap* in the adult population (strategy 3.7). In sum, at least 3 criteria are identified in the definition of vulnerable groups: by educational level, by sociocultural condition and by educational gap.

What we have presented so far is part of the preamble to the 2030 Agenda in terms of educational policies in Mexico during the term of Peña Nieto. In 2016, during the current Agenda, the 2016 Educational Model was published, which included an item on inclusion and equity. This item emphasizes that the principle of equity:

Requires that the access and permanence within the educational system of individuals with an educational deficit or disadvantage should be a priority for the educational authorities of different orders of the government, [*therefore*] it is necessary to redouble efforts to allocate more educational resources to vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, [*and with it*] to eliminate the barriers that limit the access to education, learning and participation» (SEP, 2016, pp. 65-66).

In terms of inclusion, it underlines the need to create «conditions to guarantee effective access to quality education and to recognize different student abilities, rhythms and styles of learning» (SEP, 2016, p. 66). In the 2016 Educational Model, inclusion transcends special education or the enrollment of vulnerable children and teens in school, and places itself at eliminating barriers that could curb learning for all students and promoting education in and for human rights. In order to promote these principles, the Model appealed to institutional, normative, management, curricular and pedagogical changes, in collaboration with the federal entities and school communities.

In 2017, the Educational Model for Mandatory Education (SEP, 2017) is published, as a consequence of the 2016 Educational Model. A highly valuable contribution of the Educational Model for Mandatory Education in terms of equity and inclusion was recognizing both elements as transversal axes «of the educational models and of all the elements that comprise it, at the same time that high impact, focused measures are taken to break the main inequality clusters and to support the most vulnerable populations» (SEP, 2017, p. 152). For that purpose, a series of basic pillars were specified:

- a. An *inclusive curricular approach*, highlighting flexibility, recognition of cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity and eliminating all kinds of discrimination. Additionally, «inclusion should be conceived as a benefit not only for vulnerable individuals and for traditionally excluded groups, but for all actors participating in the educational process» (SEP, 2017, p. 154). The aforementioned, without detriment to supporting schools located in vulnerable contexts, or which serve traditionally excluded populations (indigenous people, children of agricultural day laborers and immigrants, students with disabilities), for whom access to pertinent educational materials in different forms (adaptability) should be prioritized.
- b. *Fair conditions for schools*, in terms of campus infrastructure and equipment, management, participation of families, supervision, technical and pedagogical support. Additionally, promotion of the autonomy of school centers, and specific support for communities serving vulnerable population.

- c. *Support for indigenous children and teens, and for children of immigrant agricultural day laborers.* To that end, focused efforts were proposed, aimed at consolidating schools and collaboration with families by means of School Councils for Social Participation.
- d. *Transition from special education to inclusive education.* In this regard: «Efforts must be redoubled to consolidate an inclusive education, by means of actions to promote participation of students with disabilities and outstanding abilities in the regular educational system, for the benefit of the entire educational community (SEP, 2017, pp. 160-161). This point highlights eliminating barriers to student access, learning, participation and graduation.
- e. *Gender equality in the educational system,* in order to promote «actions aimed at equality between men and women» (SEP, 2017, p. 161) on all educational levels and fields of knowledge.
- f. *Scholarships, second opportunities and other focused efforts, in order to encourage complete educational paths.* This pillar aims at scholarship programs distributed to the population that needs it most, and at designing alternatives that allow student graduation.

In 2018 - during the last year of *Peña Nieto's* administration - the Strategy for equity and inclusion in elementary education: for students with disabilities, outstanding abilities and severe learning, conduct or communication difficulties» (SEP, 2018) is published, a central document, given that among its international legal proposals it specifies connections to the 2010 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly with SDG 4. Concerning the nature of the strategy, it is based on Ainscow and Booth's inclusion index (2015).

5.3. *Educational policies during the term of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the 2030 Agenda: contributions to equity and inclusion*

Following a temporal line, this section examines certain key documents in educational policy in the term of López Obrador and highlights issues related to equity and equality of vulnerable and marginalized groups. The term in question started with significant legislative changes. Thus, Constitutional Article 3 undergoes relevant changes in terms of equity and inclusion in section II paragraphs e and f, and notes that the educational system:

- a. **Shall be fair**, for which purpose, the State shall implement measures that favor the full exercise of people's right to education and tackle socioeconomic, regional and gender inequalities in the access, transition and permanence in educational services. In highly marginalized elementary education schools, actions shall be promoted to improve student living conditions, with emphasis on food. Additionally, socially vulnerable students shall be supported, by means of establishing inclusive and transversal policies.

In adult education, strategies will be implemented to ensure their right to enroll in educational institutions in their different types and formats.

In villages and indigenous communities, multilingual and intercultural educational shall be offered, based on respect, promotion and preservation of the historical and cultural heritage.

- b. **Shall be inclusive**, taking into account the various student abilities, circumstances and needs. Based on the principle of accessibility, reasonable adjustments shall be made and specific measures shall be implemented, for the purpose of eliminating barriers to learning and participation.

In turn, the General Education Law, in its Article 8 (Federal Government, 2019) stipulates that:

The State is required to provide educational services with *equity* [italicized by the authors] and excellence. The measures adopted in that sense shall be directed, as a matter of priority, to people belonging to groups and regions with higher educational deficit, scattered communities or people faced with vulnerable situations due to socioeconomic, physical, cultural identity, ethnic or national origin, migratory situation circumstances, or to gender, sexual preference or cultural practice circumstances.

Also in 2019, the Operating Rules of the Program for Educational Inclusion and Equity for the 2019 fiscal year (DOF, 2019) are published. Being the first issue of the recently commenced term, certain of its fundamentals are of interest, the same which have remained in force throughout the entire term of López Obrador. The Program in question:

Seeks to prioritize the student population in greatest need to receive support, as indicated by the Guidelines to the 2019-2024 National Development Plan [*core document for the elaboration of the Sectoral Education Plan*, authors' note], in their section on Social wellbeing and equality, course of action «the wellbeing primarily for vulnerable groups, who suffer deprivation, neglect and abandonment; especially, the indigenous populations of Mexico» (DOF, 2019, p. 6).

On the other hand, said Program specifies its relationship to the 2030 Agenda, particularly with SDG 4, aligning itself with the following goals:

4.3 to ensure equal access to all men and women to quality technical, professional and higher education, including university education; 4.5 to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of learning and professional training for vulnerable individuals, including people with disabilities, indigenous peoples and vulnerable children [italicized by the authors]. There are also connections to sub-goal 4.7a) to build school facilities that meet the needs of children and people with disabilities and take into account

gender issues and offer safe, non-violent, inclusive and efficient learning environments for all (DOF, 2019, p. 6).

When analyzing the general goal of the Program, what stands out is *adaptability* of the school conditions and *accessibility* for vulnerable populations. In that respect, it states:

To contribute to social wellbeing and equality, by means of supporting elementary, secondary and higher education institutions, so that they offer *adapted infrastructure, equipment* and consolidation actions that facilitate focus on *vulnerable populations*, eliminating barriers to learning that limit access to educational services [italized by the authors] (DOF, 2019, p. 7)

When focusing on the specific goals, it highlights multiple groups to be addresses, among others: indigenous people, immigrants, people with disabilities, with outstanding abilities and/or specific talents.

In 2019, the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (SEP, 2019) was also published, which highlights its inclusive nature, putting equity on a lesser plane. Said Strategy aims to gradually turn the national Education System (SEN) into an «inclusive, flexible and pertinent system, which favors the access, advancement, permanence, learning, participation and completion of studies for children, teens and youth throughout the country, in all their diversity, with equal conditions and opportunities». (SEP, 2019, p. 75).

It is worth noting that both the «Strategy for equity and inclusion in elementary education: for students with disabilities, outstanding abilities and severe learning, conduct or communication difficulties» (SEP, 2018) as well as the «National Strategy for Inclusive Education» (SEP, 2019) share Ainscow & Booth's inclusion index (2015) as conceptual reference. Lastly, the «National Strategy for Inclusive Education» (SEP, 2019) includes 6 guiding principles: 1) Legislative and normative alignment (15 courses of action); 2) Development of support models with an inclusive focus (17 courses of action); 3) Training educational agents (8 courses of action); 4) Comprehensive information system for inclusive education (4 courses of action); 5) Accessible educational centers for learning and participation (12 courses of action); 6) Communication and linkage strategies in favor of intersectoral inclusion (10 courses of action).

In turn, the 2020-2024 Sectoral Education Program (DOF, 2020), in the description of its normative foundation, recalls SDG 4 of the 2030 Agenda. Said Program includes six priority goals. Particularly, the first states: «To guarantee the right of the Mexican population to a fair, intercultural and comprehensive education, whose main focus is the best interest of girls, boys, teens and youth»; it addresses the problem of the lack of fair and inclusive educational opportunities, impacting the wellbeing and development of the country.

In order to achieve said goal, it prioritizes access to education, especially in priority areas. To that end, it stipulates expanding «the service offer on all educational types, levels and formats, taking into account the regional characteristics and the needs of each population group» (DOF, 2020, p. 11). Additionally, it postulates

«curricular adaptation» in community, indigenous, multi-level and bicultural educational centers, as well as promoting educational inclusion of people with disabilities and consolidation of special education. Scholarships play a predominant role in supporting the educational path of children, teens and youth, especially of those most vulnerable. It stipulates reduction of the educational deficit throughout the country.

The following Table 3 breaks down the priority strategies in Goal 1 of the 2020-2024 Sectoral Education Program, as well as the number of priority actions and, as an example, it cites some of those actions which contribute to the support of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Table 3. Priority strategies, number of specific actions and examples of actions that make up Priority Goal 1 of the 2020-2024 Sectoral Education Plan

Goal 1. Guarantee the right of the Mexican population to a fair, inclusive, intercultural and comprehensive education, whose main focus is the best interest of girls, boys, teens and youth.		
Priority strategies	Specific actions	Examples of specific actions
1. Expand educational opportunities, to close social gaps and reduce regional inequalities	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop educational services that consolidate regional and community learning, by means of the social use of indigenous languages and information, communication, knowledge and digital learning technology. ● Promote training for dignified and inclusive work, in order to consolidate the employability of the young and adult population, with special attention to women.
2. Foster measures to favor enrollment and permanence within the educational system of children, teens and youth from historically discriminated groups, which encourage the timely completion of their studies, and allow the development of comprehensive educational paths.	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generate culturally pertinent local and regional educational projects that favor educational continuity and completion in elementary education and access of the historically discriminated population to secondary education. ● Establish a national system of scholarships aimed as a matter of priority at people enrolled in schools located in high and very high marginalization regions, indigenous towns and municipalities and Afro-descendant communities, in order to encourage enrollment and permanence in the National Educational System. ● Develop specific support frameworks, focusing on human rights and gender perspective, for teens and youth at risk of exclusion, that favor continuity and successful completion of their educational path. ● Design mechanisms, in conjunction with other government departments and institutions, for the comprehensive support of immigrant children and teens in school centers, where they should be offered education, health and food, with a focus on human rights and gender perspective. ● Provide universal scholarship allocation, with a focus on human rights and gender perspective, to all teens and youth enrolled in upper secondary education, in order to favor the increase in coverage and completion rate.

<p>3. Promote the reorientation and transformation of educational institutions, so that they address the needs of their communities and the specific characteristics of their context.</p>	<p>8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consolidate the community and indigenous elementary education services, as well as preschool and tele-secondary education, taking into account diversity and interculturality, with a focus on human rights and gender perspective. ● Consolidate the operation of upper secondary education campuses located in towns with high and very high marginalization, using inclusive and sustainable infrastructure, services, equipment and access to information, communication, knowledge and digital learning technologies.
<p>4. Guarantee equity conditions for all, with a special emphasis on historically discriminated groups and populations.</p>	<p>8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement in the SEN (National Educational System) measures for equality among people, so they can fully enjoy the right to education, with complete respect for diversity, so as to foster social inclusion. ● Create conditions of accessibility in the regular service campuses, in order to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in all types, levels and formats. ● Provide healthy, nutritious and sufficient food in public elementary schools in priority areas of the country.
<p>5. Ensure that the population with educational deficit acquire the minimum knowledge and skills to have access to better living conditions and opportunities for a comprehensive development.</p>	<p>10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Carry out actions to identify and focus on the population with the highest rates of educational deficit, according to their situation of vulnerability or in towns with high and very high marginalization. ● Promote efficient measures to foster and disseminate the educational offer in priority areas, with a particular emphasis on indigenous and Afro-descendant women with educational deficit. ● Consolidate differentiated support measures, in accordance with the population groups and their condition of vulnerability, with cultural and linguistic pertinence, as well as gender perspective.
<p>6. Guarantee mandatory and free upper-secondary and higher education as a condition to ensure the access of teens and youth to knowledge, culture and comprehensive development.</p>	<p>8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design flexible support frameworks for youth outside the educational system who want and can access public higher education institutions and who meet the applicable normative requirements, so they can exercise their right to education. ● Gradually increase higher education enrollment with an inclusive, pertinent, flexible and diversified educational offer, that meets the needs for local and regional development, social, linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as the priorities defined by the communities.

Source: prepared by the authors, based on the 2020-2024 Sectoral Education Program (DOF, 2020)

As the reader can see, the strategies corresponding to Goal no. 1 are consistent with support for vulnerable and marginalized groups. Additionally, they emphasize reducing gaps and social inequalities. As previously mentioned, the educational equity policies in Mexico were historically focused on access and permanence of the population at risk of exclusion, thus promoting full educational paths. This is confirmed by the spending budget of the Federation for the 2022 fiscal year (DOF, 2022), which states in Article 36 as follows:

The programs of the Ministry of Public Education, aimed at promoting the expansion of the educational offer [for] preschool, upper-secondary and higher education, shall establish mechanisms that allow for the reduction of the deficit in the coverage rate in the federal entities that are below the national average (DOF, 2022, p. 33).

A pending issue is the promotion of successful graduation, that guarantees significant and relevant learning for the dignified development of people and their communities. It is worth noting that during the term of López Obrador, the scholarship programs (strategy no. 2) have played a dominant role; such is the case of the Benito Juárez Upper-Secondary Universal Scholarship for Wellbeing. Additionally, for higher education, in spite of the large number of educational institutions and the budget difficulties most of them face, the Federal Government has spearheaded the Program for Benito Juárez García Universities for Wellbeing, which aims to expand the coverage of higher education and offer priority support to young people who, due to various circumstances, have not had access to Higher Education (strategy no. 6). Three years after the creation of said program, its contributions to the support for vulnerable groups are far from materialized, moreover, they seem to configure closed circuits that replicate inequality and asymmetry in the more marginalized sectors and their communities.

6. Conclusions

Throughout history, several important achievements stand out, in questions of education, since the year 2000, which have given rise to the six Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Nevertheless, in 2015, derived from the unfinished agenda, Goal 4 is proposed, to transform our world – 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and with it, to establish a more ambitious universal education towards 2030.

In the case of Mexico, in this journey through the educational policies in the face of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, a certain continuity is observed, in the core of the general approaches to equity, maintained since the decade of the 90s. there have been important changes such as the incorporation of inclusive policies, albeit with different emphasis in the last two presidential terms. Particularly, in the term of López Obrador, it appears that inclusion has been given privilege over equity, as expressed in the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2019).

Progress reports concerning the educational agenda give us certain guidelines for action within the national framework: sustained commitment to promote an educational system focusing primarily on vulnerable communities, as well educational as assistance and permanence of children and youth of school age; a sustainable vision, with an impact on public training, equity, gender perspective and attention to diversity, are all strategies that should not be conditional to presidential terms. A change is required, in the emphasis of educational policy. It is necessary to approach public issues from a perspective of shared responsibility, in order to find transversal and co-educational solutions.

Through the present article, we have traced an analytical path to discuss the mark of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on educational policies in contemporary Mexico. Particularly, we have analyzed certain key documents issued during the presidential terms of Peña Nieto (2013-2018) and López Obrador (2018-2024). Concerning the question, «What are the focal points of educational policies in Mexico and their relationship with the 2030 Agenda?», we have concluded that in both terms there has been a prevailing interest in guaranteeing educational inclusion and equity, however, it must be recognized that these are issues that have marked educational policies in Mexico for a long time. During the term of Peña Nieto and following the 2030 Agenda, the concept of equity focused on guaranteeing access and permanence in the educational system, particularly for vulnerable segments of society. In turn, inclusion emphasized the actual access to quality education, by eliminating barriers. During the term of López Obrador, there were major changes to legislation. In terms of the concepts of equity and inclusion, the first one is frequently uttered in relation to reducing inequality, while the second emphasizes attention to diversity. In both cases, there is a strong relationship with the 2030 Agenda, not only concerning «not leaving anyone behind» and catering to more vulnerable and unprotected groups, but also explicitly in the context of national education policies.

Regarding the question, «How have said educational policies materialized at the legislative level and in federal programs?», this article presents a multitude of documents. For example, during the term of Peña Nieto, what stands out is «Strategy for equity and inclusion in elementary education: for students with disabilities, outstanding abilities and severe learning, conduct and communication difficulties» (SEP, 2018), and during the term of López Obrador there have been constitutional changes with legislative impact, as well as in the definition of national programs and strategies, one such being «National Strategy for Inclusive Education» (SEP, 2019).

With regard to the third question, «What specific answers have been constructed, to recognize inequality and educational attention to vulnerable groups», the educational equity policies in Mexico have historically focused on access and permanence of the population at risk of exclusion, thus seeking to promote complete educational journeys. Particularly, during the term of López Obrador, the attention to vulnerable groups has been focused into scholarship programs and expanding the coverage in marginalized segments of society, by building new schools (such as the Benito Juárez Garcia University for Wellbeing).

Lastly, future research should focus on investigating the realization of educational policies in contemporary Mexico, and their scope for the 2030 Agenda.

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