

# Education: the uncertain future OF A GENERATION

JUNE, 2021

SIGNOS VITALES  
EL PULSO DE MÉXICO

Image: "Open my school" at <https://www.facebook.com/abremiescuela/>

# Education: the uncertain future OF A GENERATION

## CONTEXT

According to UNESCO, due to COVID-19 and the millions of girls, boys, and youngsters (NNJ for its acronym in Spanish) that have left school, the world will have to face a learning crisis.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, an alternative is not being foreseen in Mexico that can solve the learning calamity which came to show inequalities and break schemes that affect the National Education System (SEN for its acronym in Spanish) performance and cripple the learning quality of millions of girls and boys in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. School, health and nutrition: Why COVID-19 demands a rethink of education to address gender inequalities. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdcap5ks>

Revolving the COVID–19 pandemic, there are so many terrible news that education has been left out of the emergency context. Regrettably, the government’s actions have been limited to the deployment of fortuitous measures such as school closures and launch of the educational palliative called “Aprende en Casa” [“Learn at home”], without extra resources or a sector program within the frame of the distance education strategy in existence before the COVID–19 sanitary contingency.

Education is one of the most influential factors in the progress and development of people and decreases conditions such as poverty, ignorance, violence, and discrimination; a mechanism that is at stake and feeds a tremendous academic concern in light of the lack of immediate planning of an uncertain future in educational matters.

The signs aiming towards disaster in the education system indicate that the SEN will continue to operate inertially, with no planning, educational lags, no mitigating policies, or extra resources. If left unsolved, the pandemic could drive towards a generational catastrophe<sup>2</sup> and decades lost on the learning of our students and professionals in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO: UN Secretary-General warns of education catastrophe, pointing to UNESCO estimate of 24 million learners at risk of dropping out. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/5x7wm-vs7>

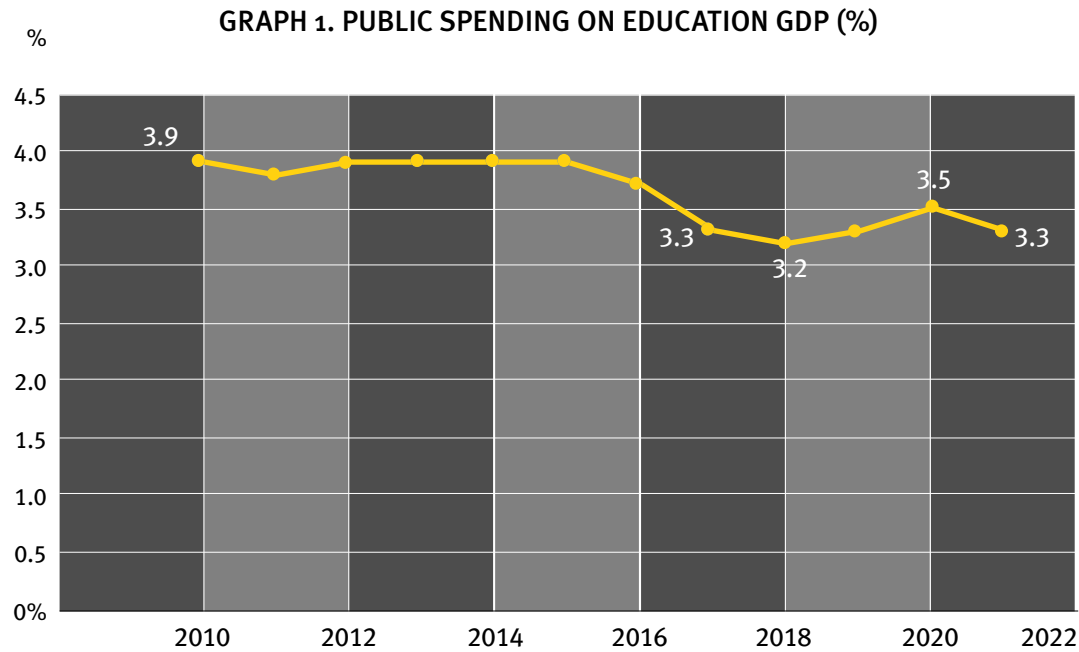
## EDUCATION: THE FUND-LESS EMERGENCY

Before the pandemic, the educational challenge has represented education's recognition as a human right and a sustainable development force.<sup>3</sup> Objective 4 of the Agenda 2030 (ODS 4, Sustainable Development Goals 4 for its acronym in Spanish) comprises the education ambitions synthesis, whose goal is to “ensure an inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote learning opportunities during the whole life for all.” Nonetheless, inclusion, equality, and quality in Mexico have been left adrift under a government hand, that thinks opacity is cheaper at the expense of the quality of the students.

Despite the efforts that the sanitary crisis requires and its impact on the educational system, Mexico stands out for the absence of mitigating policies compared to Argentina and Brazil (Lustig and Martínez, 2020). Under that framework, a larger budget is not considered for 2021 and much less an education impact mitigation plan.

Within the Budgetary Project of the Nation Expenditure (PPEF, for its acronym in Spanish) of the current year, an educational budget of 836 thousand 400 million pesos (mdp, for its acronym in Spanish) is proposed. It involves null growth for the educational expenditure, in respect to the Expenditure Budget of the Federation (PEF, for its acronym in Spanish) of 2020 (Graph 1). Likewise, this forecasted budget highlights the absence of a strategy or an action plan that attends to the deficiencies of distant education of the current COVID-19 pandemic, adding the elimination of 13 budgetary programs (CIEP, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Agenda 2030. UNESCO



*Source:* In-house elaboration with information from public accounts 2010-19, PEF 2020, and PPEF 2021.

A big part of the eliminated programs from the PEF 2021 constitute part of the basic education sub-function. The most significant part of the enrollment of students is focused there.

Nevertheless, some other programs showed important changes. There are more reassigned resources to programs presented as a priority and are related to educational scholarships (Table 2). Notwithstanding, those resources lack a strategic framework around distance educations to face the COVID-19 sanitary contingency (CIEP, 2021).

TABLE 1. ELIMINATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS	
ELIMINATED PROGRAMS	PEF 2020 (MDP)
Attention to Diversity on Indigenous Education	92.5
Educational Attention in the School Migrant Population	92.5
Teaching major in UPES	254.9
Significative Learning Development in Basic Education	163.9
Full-time schools	5,100.0
Quality evaluations for education	132.0
High School and Higher Education Expansion	576.7
Job Training and Certification	3656.8
Strengthening of Educational Excellence	1,039.0
Competency-based human resources training program	6.7
School Harmony National Program	223.8
Rebuilding National Program	9.0
Education Management and Information System	75.8

*Source:* In-house elaboration with information from CIEP.

TABLE 2. PROGRAMS WITH MAJOR CHANGES PPEF 2021

PROGRAMS	PEF 2021 VS PEF 2020 (%)	PROGRAMS	PEF 2021 VS PEF 2020 (%)
National Program for Men and Women Equality SDN (Defense Secretariat, for its acronym in Spanish)	-97.1	Support to education centers and organizations	19.3
Professional Lecturer Development Program	-48.8	Education policy design	24.2
Projects of Social Infrastructure on the Educational Sector	-37.9	Jóvenes escribiendo el futuro (Youth writing the future)	26.5
National Professional Registry and its Partnerships	-37.2	La escuela es nuestra (The School is ours)	63.1
Physical Education Excellence	-37.1	Certification and Standardization of Working Skills	1,646.5*

*Note:* \*In this program there was a real increase of 1,646.5% because it rose from 56 million pesos budget in 2020 to 922.04 million pesos in 2021.

*Source:* In-house elaboration with information from CIEP.

## THE INTERRUPTION OF EDUCATION

School closure in Mexico and the rest of the world has been one of the measures taken by governments in an attempt to stop the spread of the COVID–19 virus; nevertheless, some Asian and European countries have managed to re-open study centers with the required protocols to ensure the on-site return.

From April until practically mid-June 2020, when COVID–19 fatalities soared in some countries, the governments opted to keep the schools closed; in the meantime, as COVID–19 behavior was discovered and the efforts to stop its spread, some countries decided to open the doors to on-site classes (UNESCO, Table 3).

For example, the city of Wuhan, China (the source of the pandemic) state media said that more than 2,840 primary and junior high schools that cater to almost 1.4 million students reopened by the end of August 2020.<sup>4</sup> In Belgium, starting with 5-year-old and older children returned to school,<sup>5</sup> while masks were needed for older students. The measures included having their temperature checked and the compulsory wash of hands.

In Latin America: In Uruguay, primary and junior high schools are already working on-site, but under strict protocols that forced the reduction of class time, as

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<sup>4</sup> Back to school in the whole world. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2020/09/01/espanol/mundo/vuelta-a-clases-coronavirus.html>

<sup>5</sup> In this case, only the high-risk groups were allowed to stay home, and the children that came back from vacations from a high rate of infection area could not go back to school for 14 days.





*Image:* “This is how returning to school was at Wuhan, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2020” at <https://www.bbmundo.com/comunidad/noticias/asi-fue-el-regreso-a-clases-en-wu-han-en-china/>

TABLE 3. COVID-19 SCHOOL CLOSURE FOLLOW-UP

CLOSED ● PARCIALLY OPENED ● OPENED ●

COUNTRY	27 <sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2020	22 <sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2020
Canada	●	●
United States	●	●
Mexico	●	●
Colombia	●	●
Brazil	●	●
Peru	●	●
Argentina	●	●
France	●	●
Spain	●	●
England	●	●
Germany	●	●
Greece	●	●
Somalia	●	●
Congo	●	●
South Africa	●	●
Uruguay	●	●
China	●	●
Japan	●	●
Sweden	●	●
Italy	●	●
Nicaragua	●	●
Zambia	●	●
Australia	●	●
Belgium	●	●
Russia	●	●

Source: In-house elaboration with information from UNESCO, selection of 25 countries.



*Image:* classes in France after two months of distance education at <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202005/467274-vuelta-a-clases-francia-aislamiento-coronavirus.html>



*Image:* back to school in Nicaragua on January 11th, 2021 at <https://www.infobae.com/america/agencias/2021/01/11/nicaragua-cita-a-clases-presenciales-a-17-millones-de-estudiantes/>

well as the free food given in the schools. The key to the return to schools is social distancing and the mandatory use of masks.<sup>6</sup>

The on-site return to school has not been considered in Mexico; since March 23rd, there are no on-site classes due to COVID-19; consequently, the National Safe Distance Timeframe began. Under SEP (The Secretariat of Public Education, for its acronym in Spanish) results. It was informed that according to the survey on “Aprende en casa II” (“Learn at home II”), 94% of teachers estimated that: “it is positive and indisputable” that SEP started the school cycle 2020-2021 with

<sup>6</sup> CNN. Latin America studies from home. Available at: <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2020/09/03/america-latina-estudia-desde-casa/>

the long-distance system “Aprende en casa II” (“Learn at home II”). And more than 90% graded “Correct decision” the broadcasting of classes through television.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, said survey lacks statistical significance and it is unknown if there is a budget being forecasted to a safe return or if there is a contingency plan for the return to school.

The results of the school closure were reflected in the ECOVID-ED results.<sup>8</sup> 33.6 million students from 3 to 29 years old were enrolled in the 2019-2020 school cycle (62.0% of the total population). Out of them, 740 thousand (2.2%) did not finish the school cycle, 58.9% of those abandoned for a reason related to COVID-19, and 8.9% for lack of money or resources. Due to COVID-19 or the precarious economic situation, 5.2 million people did not enroll in the 2020-2021 school cycle (9.6% of the total of 3-to 29-year-old), more than half the population of 3-to 29-year-old that can attend on-site classes once the government enables it.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Forbes. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com.mx/la-sep-prepara-un-regreso-seguro-a-las-aulas/>

8 The COVID-19 Impact measurement Survey (ECOVID-ED) 2020 was specially performed with the goal to know the impact on the provisional cancelation of on-site classes in the countries educative institutions to avoid the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the learning experience of girls, boys, and youngsters from 3-29 years old, during the 2019-2020 school cycle, as the 2020-2021 school cycle.

9 ECOVID-ED. Available at: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/investigacion/ecovided/2020/>

## APRENDE EN CASA II: AN EDUCATIONAL PALLIATIVE

The aggravation of the inequalities has been present with the technical complexities that come with the learning process under a confinement context that entailed long-distance learning strategies, which resulted in the deployment of the “Aprende en casa II” (“Learn at home II”) program.

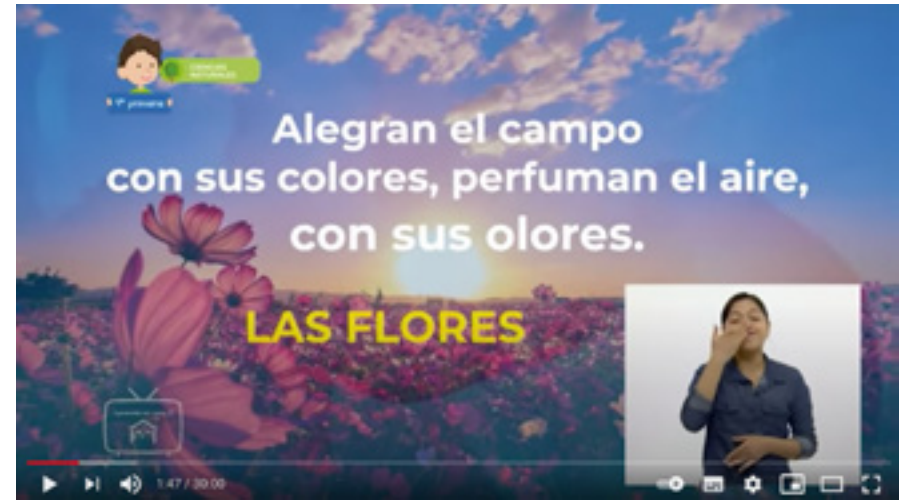
The aforementioned transition brought substantial challenges like information technology access, television, radio, and the internet<sup>10</sup> for millions of students.<sup>11</sup> The landscape that demands governmental, social, and most importantly, economic efforts with an unclear scope of the issue. Those elements have not been addressed by a government under republican austerity and against the investment in education during the crisis.

Though hard and representative evidence from SEP or any other alternate body is not found, there are efforts to measure the evolution of education during the pandemic. Under that framework, the National Commission for the Continuous Improvement of Education (MEJOREDU for its acronym in Spanish) publishes the results of the educational experience survey. In turn, the survey performed by Grupo Reforma and the Quality and Equity Education Initiative from Tecnológico de Monterrey disclosed the opinion of family heads of the “Aprende en casa II” program allowing visibility on the consequences of the school closure.

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<sup>10</sup> In Mexico, only 44.3% of households own a computer, and 56.4% have an internet connection.

<sup>11</sup> Emergency in the education sector, a sector program without vital signals P. 208



Images: Aprende en casa II, 4° Elementary | C. N. | Sexual and asexual reproduction... | November 18th, 2020 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXYiL9b1Dc>

Efforts to continue education have been joint, where teachers, students, and parents had to look for pedagogical alternatives to perform the online courses. Nevertheless, it has been found that during the pandemic, only a third of the alumni in primary schools and half of junior high have a computer at home to do their homework (MEJOREDU). It is also reported that half of the teachers used materials unavailable in the homes of some students. In contrast, the other half considered that online activities and television and radio shows were boring to students.

Pertaining the evaluation processes: 57% of teachers had difficulties providing feedback to students; an issue that has been reported by two out of three teachers in indigenous primary schools and telesecundarias (TV junior high schools).

In terms of management and teacher support: seven out of ten teachers spent more on telephony, electricity, and the internet, while 56% of parents had more expenses on photocopies and 64% on pedagogic materials. Likewise, between 71 and 87% of teachers reported an increase in their working hours. Something similar happened to students: between 52 and 83% reported dedicating more time to some school activities. Likewise, six out of ten parents stated that it was difficult or complicated to reconcile their household activities with the accompaniment of their daughters and sons.

On the other hand, according to the Grupo Reforma's phone survey,<sup>12</sup> one out of two students relies on the television to continue their classes. Mothers and fathers observed that: 68% of television classes do not motivate the children, 70% considers the lack of on-site classes has emotionally affected their children, 62% thinks that teacher companionship is required, and 3 out of 4 parents believe their children will not learn the same with distance school, despite that, 8 out of 10 parents prefer long-distance classes to avoid risks. Hence, parents agree with long-distance schooling even if there are learning adverse effects on their children.

On top of that, the forecasted new crisis has not limited its effects on learning. There is also a psychological aftermath in 1 out of 2 students (51%), school efficiency in almost 7 out of 10 (68%), and (70%) of the mood of the students,

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<sup>12</sup> Survey performed by Grupo Reforma and the Quality and Equity Education Initiative from I Tecnológico de Monterrey. A survey was conducted from October 7th to October 27th, 2020. Available at: <https://www.ieec.mx/posts/que-opinan-las-madres-y-padres-de-aprende-en-casa-ii>

where the main symptoms noted in their children are: anger (67%), anxiety (53%), sadness (51%), weight gain (42%), fear (29%), and depression (22%). Nevertheless, there is no plan considered to mitigate these problems.

## **SOCIAL MOBILITY'S BROKEN LADDER: AN UNPRECEDENTED SETBACK**

Education drives the nation's economic growth and is one of the inequality criteria; therefore, the impact in social, institutional, educational, and macro-economic indicators on the behavior of inequality show that increasing public spending, education, and public investment have a positive impact on the decline of inequality.<sup>13</sup> (González and Martner, 2012).

With that in mind, the most crucial future productivity criteria are the current formation of human capital (De Hoyos, 2020). As long as the pandemic impacts the future productivity criteria, its effects will be visible for several generations, productivity that is given through access to health and education that guarantees learning (De Hoyos, 2020).

The improvement of the original conditions is defined mainly in the education quality and educational achievements. Until 2019, at the national level, 64% of children from parents with higher education manage to obtain a bachelor's

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13 For OCDE's 27 countries and 18 from Latin America (Including Mexico) from 1990-2010.



degree (blue bar). That condition is more robust in the central states (68%) and north-west (65%) region, while only one out of ten people studied a professional career whose parents have finished primary school or less (Graph 2). On the other hand, the percentage of people born in households on the highest quintile and remained in that quintile in adulthood was 57%, while only 3% of people born in the poorest households from quintile I reached the highest level of income (quintile V) in adulthood.

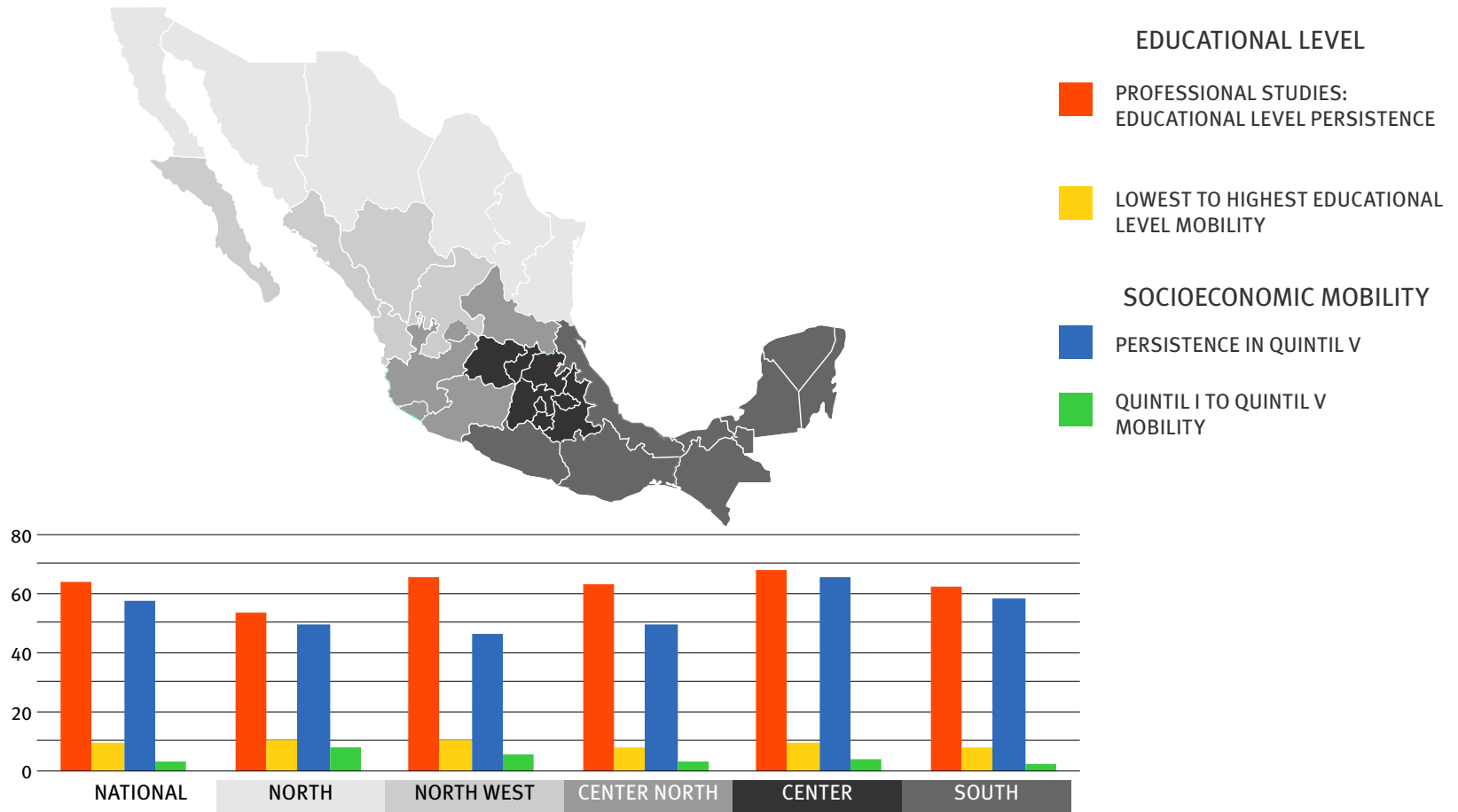
Education reflects (though not exclusively) the opportunities a person will have from childhood to youth, since this life cycle is when most education is achieved<sup>14</sup> and reflects its impact on economic accomplishment. If action is not taken on the matter, education could become a burden to drag through entire generations. It may become a factor that will harshen the reality of millions of girls, boys, and youngsters in the country, resulting in the inheritance of poverty.



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<sup>14</sup> CEEY. Social Mobility in Mexico Report 2019. Towards equal regional opportunities. Available at: <https://ceey.org.mx/informe-de-movilidad-social-mexico-2019/>

**GRAPH 2. CROSS-GENERATIONAL EDUCATION AND SOCIOECONOMIC MOBILITY**



Source: In-house elaboration with information from CEEY.

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