Youth[1]

A. Normative framework

As young people transition to adulthood, individual autonomy takes on more and more importance. Unlike the situation for children, there is no globally accepted international legal instrument that refers specifically to this age group. There is however, a regional instrument on the human rights of young people, the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth, which sets forth the commitment of the States parties to that treaty to recognize the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of young people. The Convention also serves as a guidepost for the design and implementation of policies, programmes, projects and other types of initiatives.[2]

A number of different studies are also available that provide a variety of perspectives on the nature and issues facing this segment of the population. For example, the Ibero-American Youth Organization (OIJ) has carried out studies in conjunction with ECLAC on such subjects as gender differences, identities and attitudes around discrimination and tolerance, and the right to a quality education. Other organizations, such as the Ibero-American Youth Observatory,[3] have also done work in similar areas on the basis of the studies carried out by the Fundación SM with a view to fostering further research on youth, education and culture in the region.[4]

The work undertaken by ECLAC[5] in this field has been based on its definition of the young population as persons between the ages of 15 and 29 years,[6] which differs from the definition used in the Iber-American Convention.[7] While the concept of youth is a social construct that is influenced by the prevailing historical context and is not necessarily bounded by a set age range (Trucco and Ullmann, 2016), since the average age at which people complete higher education and enter the labour market is 23 or 24 years, the Commission feels that it is important to look at young people up to the age of 29 years in order to be able to analyse how they position themselves within the labour force.

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[1] This chapter was prepared by Humberto Soto de la Rosa, Social Affairs Officer of the Social Development Unit of the ECLAC subregional headquarters in Mexico; Elsa Gutiérrez, Research Assistant with the Social Development Unit; and Citlalli Lamotte, a consultant with the Social Development Unit.

[2] All the countries of the region also have national policy instruments for safeguarding and promoting the rights of young people that draw on elements of the Convention to varying degrees.

[3] See [online] https://www.observatoriodelajuventud.org/.

[4] See [online] https://www.observatoriodelajuventud.org/categoria/nuestros-estudios/.

[5] See, for example, Trucco and Ullmann, (2016) and Muñoz and Rojas (2019).

[6] The chapter on childhood defines that stage of the life cycle as encompassing persons between the ages of 0 and 18 years; therefore, the recommendations made there that apply to people between the ages of 15 and 18 also apply to the adolescents included in the age bracket dealt with in this chapter.

[7] The Ibero-American Youth Organization (OIJ) and the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth define young people as those between the ages of 15 and 24 years.

B. Assessment of inequalities among young people

ASSESSMENT

- Youth is a stage of the life cycle during which the family ties that were all-important during childhood begin to become less so as the individual autonomy that is characteristic of adult life takes on greater and greater importance for them.

- The social inclusion of young people should be based on a multidimensional and integrated perspective that encompasses the existing gaps in education, employment, health, culture, violence and political participation. For example, in 2019 the gross enrolment rate for higher education, which reflects the gap in education, was 52.7%; in other words, half of the population does not reach that level of education. Universal access to education is therefore a goal that remains to be achieved.

- A significant portion of the young population is excluded and marginalized from economic, political and social processes. In 2018, 17.3% of the people between 15 and 24 years of age was neither studying nor working.

ECLAC views youth as a period during which a series of events generally occur that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood (withdrawal from the education system, entry into the labour market, departure from the family home, commencement of life as a member of a couple and the commencement of the reproductive stage), although these events do not follow any set pattern and are frequently non-linear. During this period, the family ceases to play its formerly central protective role, while the market, the State and young persons themselves begin to play a greater part in meeting their needs and upholding their rights (Rossel and Filgueira, 2015).

The approach taken by ECLAC to understanding the issues inherent in this stage of life entails analysing the realities and challenges faced by young people through the lens of social inclusion. Viewed from a rights-based perspective, this concept goes beyond inclusion in (relevant and quality) education and (worthy and decent) employment, which have traditionally been regarded as the main elements involved in the process of inclusion. ECLAC, however, proposes considering other dimensions that are also of pivotal importance if young people are to make headway not only as measured by objective parameters of inclusion (access to education, health, participation and so forth) but also in terms of subjective parameters that make them feel that they are part of a society that they are working with others to shape and build.[8]

Within this framework, a multidimensional, integrated perspective affords a more solid basis for analysing the gaps experienced by young people in the areas of education, employment, health, culture, violence and participation (Trucco and Ullmann, 2016; Soto, Trucco and Ullman, 2015). This focus provides a scaffolding for the following baseline assessment of the realities faced by this sector of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Today, young people are one of the largest segments of the population in the region, as persons between 15 and 29 years of age represent one fourth of the total population. This fact underscores the need to invest in young people as one of the fundamental pillars for the drive to achieve sustainable development with equality and to match their capacities with commensurate opportunities within the framework of a rights-based approach. The available evidence indicates, however, that young people in the region are often excluded from education and employment, from traditional political spheres of activity, decision-making circles and socioeconomic, political and environmental forums.

Universal access to secondary and tertiary levels of education is a goal that has yet to be achieved. Although progress has been made in opening up access to a secondary education, rural areas still lag far behind, and the gaps are even wider in higher education. In 2019, the region's gross

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[8] As part of the project entitled "Social inclusion of youth in the context of increasing violence and insecurity with a focus on Central America", ECLAC developed a toolkit for the analysis and design of policies for the promotion of the social inclusion of young people. See Soto, Trucco and Ullmann (2015).

tertiary education enrolment rate was 52.7%. There is also a gender gap in this connection, with the gross enrolment rate for women (59.7%) being considerably higher than the corresponding rate for men (45.9%) (ECLAC, 2021b). Despite women's higher overall enrolment rate in higher education, however, many fewer women are pursuing studies in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects), which has implications over the long run for their position in the labour market and their pay levels.

It is often difficult for young people to make the transition from school to the workplace, and a considerable number of them have left school but have not succeeded in becoming part of the workforce. In 2018, approximately 17.3% of persons between 15 and 24 years of age in the region (12.6% in urban areas and 17.2% in rural areas) were neither studying nor working (ECLAC, 2021b).

There is also a gender gap within this latter group, as 8.8% of young men were in this category in 2018 whereas 25.9% of young women were (ECLAC, 2021b). For young women, this situation is chiefly associated with the need to perform unpaid domestic and caregiving work, whereas most of the young men in this situation are either unemployed or first-time jobseekers (Espejo and Espíndola, 2016; Soto, Trucco and Ullmann, 2015).

Even among those young people who do manage to enter the labour market, most are confronted by various obstacles in their search for a decent form of employment, whether because they had difficulties earlier in acquiring the necessary job skills or because the labour market offers few opportunities for people without prior job experience.

One of the indicators of these kinds of difficulties is the percentage of the employed young population that belong to a pension plan, which is smaller, especially for those under 25 years of age. This is one illustration of the fact that, as young people have access to fewer social benefits, they are in a more vulnerable position and have less job security (see figure VI.1).
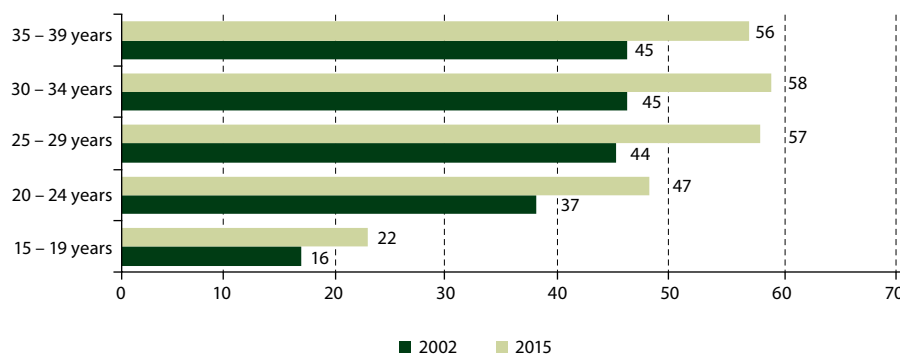
FIGURE VI.1
Latin America (17 countries):[a] affiliation to pension systems among employed persons,[b] by age group, around 2002 and 2015
(Percentages)

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2017* (LC/PUB.2018/1-P), Santiago, 2018.
[a] Argentina (urban areas), Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay (urban areas).
[b] The figures for Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Dominican Republic and Guatemala include wage earners only.

Low percentages of pension coverage are associated with a trend in labour laws and practices towards greater flexibility in employment contracts, the growing use of outsourcing and a tendency for people to change jobs more often. This shift has not, however, been coupled with a reconfiguration of social security systems, which are still based on traditional forms of employment. As a result, fewer young people are able to obtain a pension plan.[9] In Mexico,

9   It is important for all the countries to ratify the ILO Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181).

Young people are confronted with gaps in education, employment, health, participation, culture and violence.

for example, the 2012 labour reform[10] introduced more flexible recruitment and contracting provisions. This may well be a positive development for the labour market, but it also means that young people have less of a chance of obtaining social security coverage (loss of labour rights), since the reform was not paired with alternative social security schemes.[11]

The available data on health care indicate that young people residing in rural areas, along with people in low-income groups, have much less access to preventive and curative care. This type of inequality exists not only in access to health-care services but also in health outcomes in such cases as teenage pregnancies. Young women in the lowest income quintiles, those who live in rural areas and those who belong to indigenous groups or are of African descent are more likely to become mothers while they are still adolescents. This is yet another reflection of how the axes of inequality intersect and overlap and how they deepen the exclusion of vulnerable groups (Trucco and Ullmann, 2016; Rossel and Filgueira, 2015; Soto, Trucco and Ullman, 2015). This situation, for which there are various explanations, places young rural, low-income mothers in a position that makes it harder than ever for them to position themselves as a full member of society by obtaining work or remaining in school, all of which has an impact on their future.

Suicide is another health-related issue for young people. It was already discussed in the section on adolescents but is raised again here because it is a very serious problem in this age group. According to data compiled by WHO (2021), suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people worldwide, after accidents and homicide. There are many different and multi-faceted reasons why young people self-harm or commit suicide, including school bullying and cyberbullying, traumatic events such as domestic violence, armed violence, accidents, assaults and natural disasters, which, even if they do not result in suicide, may mark young people either temporarily or for life. Genetic and/or biological factors may also play a role. In most of the countries of the region, suicide rates are highest in the 20–24 age group (see figure VI.2). In addition to suicide, a considerable number of young people suffer from mental, emotional, food-related or behavioural disorders, all of which are mental health issues that need to be dealt with, especially in areas where young people have limited access to health-care providers. One factor to be taken into account is that the suicide rate among young men is much higher than it is among young women. In El Salvador, for example, in 2016 the suicide rate among males between 15 and 29 years of age was 42.5 per 100,000 whereas the corresponding rate for females was 9.7 per 100,000.

FIGURE VI.2
Latin America (11 countries): suicide rates, by age group, 2016
(Per 100,000 persons)
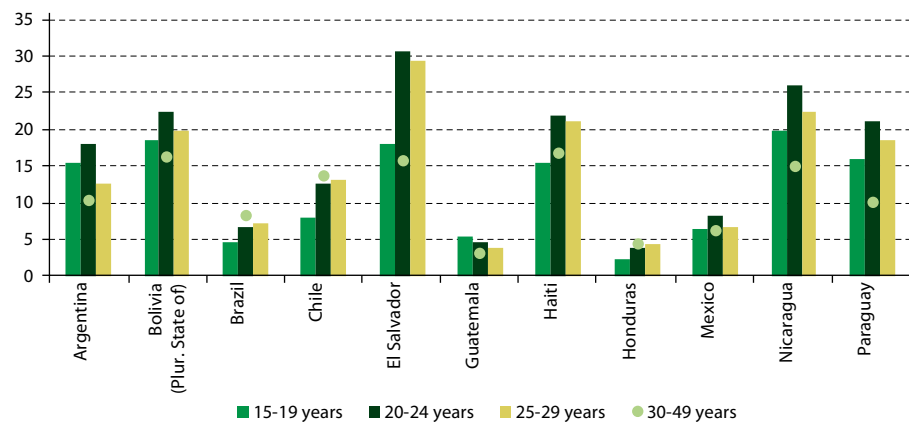
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of data from the World Health Organization (WHO), The Global Health Observatory [online] https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/suicide-mortality-rate-(per-100-000-population).

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10   See Mexico (2012).
11   For further information on the labour market transition and how it is affecting young people, see ECLAC/ILO (2017).

In many countries, young people are also exposed to a great deal of violence. Death by violence or intentional injury is more common among young men, while young women are at greater risk of being victims of sexual abuse or rape, kidnapping or violence at the hands of their partner; they are also more exposed to verbal or psychological violence.

Persons between 16 and 25 years of age report that the kinds of violence that they are exposed to the most are street violence (34.1%), gang violence (26.9%), harassment, intimidation or bullying at school[12] (23.2%) and, especially in the case of girls and women, domestic violence[13] (25.4%) (Latinobarómetro, 2018) (see figure VI.3). When these forms of violence are intertwined with geographic and ethnic gaps, they take the form, for example, of racist biases against young people of African descent, who are often dealt with more severely than others if they are suspected of having committed a violent act.

FIGURE VI.3
Latin America and the Caribbean (18 countries): most common types
of violence encountered, by age group, 2018
(Percentages)
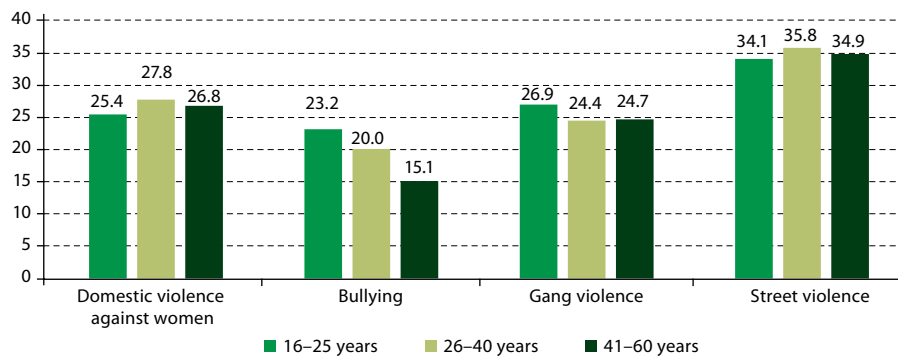
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of data from Latinobarómetro, "Latinobarómetro Análisis de datos", 2018 [online] https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp.
[a] Argentina, Brazil, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

One of the areas in which intergenerational gaps work in the young population's favour is access to cultural activities and the use of cultural assets. Young people have more access to cultural goods and services than adults do. The extent of their access varies across countries and socioeconomic strata, however. Central American youth have less access to these types of goods and activities than their peers in the other subregions of Latin America (Sunkel, 2016; Soto, Trucco and Ullman, 2015). The degree of digital inclusion is also lower among low-income youth as a consequence of the fact that they have fewer opportunities to use or gain access to the associated technology. This results in less use of the Internet as a cultural channel, as well as interfering with their development of computer skills and reducing their opportunities for cultural integration.

Young people's participation in social affairs and their performance of their role as citizens are key factors in their inclusion in society, since these kinds of activities enable them to take part in making decisions that will influence their own development and in working as a team to achieve a shared goal. This kind of engagement is not universal, however (ECLAC/OIJ, 2004). At the regional level, many young people remain uninvolved in conventional politics and distrust that kind of political activity (see figure VI.4),[14] preferring instead to engage in social movements as their main avenue for political participation and for voicing their demands (Maldonado Valera, 2016; Soto, Trucco and Ullman, 2015).

[12] The term "*bullying*" refers to various types of intimidation, harassment, abuse, persecution and victimization that are repeatedly inflicted by some students on others.
[13] This is the most common type of violence in the home.
[14] Young people are not the only ones who view conventional politics with mistrust. The figures shown in the graph for persons between 16 and 25 years of age are very similar to the averages for the population as a whole, which reflect widespread distrust among the general population.

Latin America (18 countries):[a] persons between 16 and 25 years of age
who say that they do not trust selected institutions, 2008-2018
(Percentages)
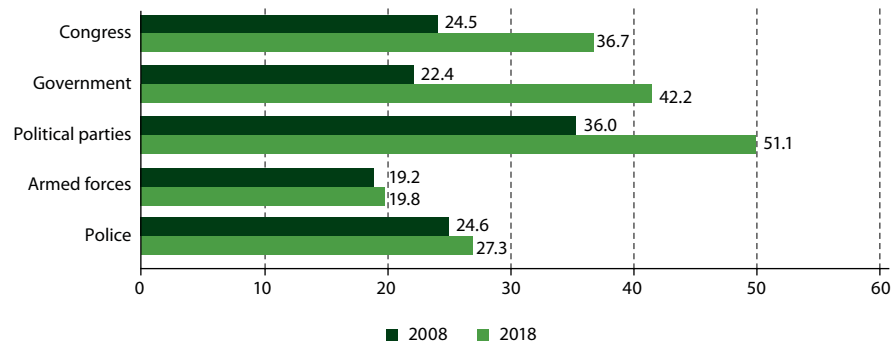
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of data from Latinobarómetro,
"Latinobarómetro Análisis de datos", 2018 [online] https://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp.
[a] Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador,
El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

BOX VI.1
COVID-19 and its impact on young people

Although the available evidence indicates that young people are less vulnerable than middle-aged adults and older adults to the serious health problems that can be caused by COVID-19, the measures adopted to contain the pandemic have had a strong impact on their surroundings and their development. According to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, the interruption in young people's educations, the reduction in available jobs, lockdowns, the alteration of social protection structures and the economic and health-related burdens that families have had to shoulder have all triggered concern, frustration, feelings of isolation and, in many cases, anxiety and depression among young people. This is all in addition to the limitation of their opportunities to engage in physical exercise, which may lead to increased tobacco, alcohol and drug use that will have long-term effects on their health.

According to ILO, the impact of COVID-19 on employment has been disproportionately severe in the case of young workers. One out of every six is currently unemployed. The pandemic has made what was already a grim job outlook for young people before the pandemic (forcing most of them into the informal economy) even worse. The *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*, fourth edition, discusses the sharp and substantial rise in unemployment among young people (and especially young women) seen since February 2020.

Adolescents and young people have also been more exposed to domestic violence as a consequence of the lockdowns and, particularly in the case of women, to sexual violence, along with its serious physical and emotional consequences.

Vulnerable groups of young people, such as migrants, refugees, those who are living in the streets, those in detention facilities or prison and those who live in poor or marginal districts, are at an even greater risk. Young people living in crowded conditions and lacking access to clean water and health-care services are more likely to become infected. They also have less access to technology and therefore less or belated access to information about how to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19.

In order to turn this situation around, the following types of policy and programmatic actions are recommended:

- Ensuring that young people's educational and vocational training opportunities continue to be offered and to be accessible.
- Identifying and supporting sectors that offer the greatest job opportunities for the young people who have been impacted the most.
- Ensuring that young people have access to health-care systems for the treatment of COVID-19 even if they are not covered by contributory health insurance systems.

INSTITUTIONS

Various institutions are doing research on the inequality gaps found among young people, including UNFPA, OIJ and ECLAC.

- Introducing new counselling systems, mental health and addiction treatment services, and support for victims of violence during lockdowns.

- Expanding Internet service and access to new technologies for young people living in poverty and/or in marginalized or excluded settlements.

Once the pandemic has subsided, it will also be important to direct recovery efforts towards the sectors that are most able to create decent and higher-productivity jobs over the long term and to support the development of skills for which there will be a demand in the future.

Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of *Infosalus*, "OMS avisa de que los efectos secundarios del Covid-19 en mujeres y menores pueden ser mayores que las muertes", 12 June 2020 [online] https://www.infosalus.com/salud-investigacion/noticia-oms-avisa-efectos-secundarios-covid-19-mujeres-menores-pueden-ser-mayores-muertes-20200612175729.html; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) preparedness and response", *Technical Briefs*, 24 March 2020 [online] https://www.unfpa.org/resources/adolescents-and-young-people-coronavirus-disease-covid-19?page=6%2C0%2C0; International Labour Organization (ILO), "ILO: More than one in six young people out of work due to COVID-19", 27 May 2020 [online] https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_745879/lang--en/index.htm.

C. Priority policies for reducing inequalities among young people

Priority policy objectives for narrowing the gaps between young people and the rest of the population include:

- Helping young people to stay in school and to go on to higher levels of education, along with a broadening of the curricula, by providing support measures such a scholarships and promoting financial, digital and citizenship education.

- Providing vocational training and job placement support via internships and first-job assistance programmes, cross-cutting job skills training and the use of dual training models.

- Providing access to comprehensive health services by putting in place guaranteed mechanisms for furnishing access to health services and promoting healthful habits, pregnancy prevention, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health.

- Reducing the incidence of violence and promoting cultural development with the help of strategies for fostering a culture of peace, preventing violence in schools and sexual violence, and promoting access to cultural activities and participation in decision-making.

POLICY PROPOSALS

In order to include young people in a meaningful and lasting manner, comprehensive policies that mainstream a generational perspective will need to be consolidated. ECLAC recommends that these kinds of comprehensive policies should incorporate three key dimensions of social inclusion: (i) building institutions capable of promoting the social inclusion of the young population and of maintaining the ground gained in that respect; (ii) taking an equality- and rights-based approach to the task of closing the social inclusion gaps existing in the areas discussed earlier; and (iii) incorporating the needs and visions of young people with respect to their own social inclusion into the design and implementation of these policies (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015).

In crafting policies for closing or narrowing these gaps, attention should be devoted, as a matter of priority, to expanding the education system, keeping young people in school and improving the quality of the education that they receive as a means of strengthening one of the central elements contributing to their inclusion. This will involve using a number of different tools, one of which should be monetary transfers designed to help young people attain economic autonomy. Steps also need to be taken to reinforce training and facilitate entry into the workforce by improving labour laws and regulations, among other things, in order to

ensure access to decent forms of employment (Rossel and Figueira, 2015). Action also has to be taken to promote and provide access to health care, including sexual, reproductive and mental health care. The following sections will outline more specific recommendations focusing on the expansion of the scope of education and measures for helping young people to stay in school, training and entry into the workforce, the promotion and expansion of access to health care, and the reduction of violence and promotion of cultural activity and participation.

1. Attainment of a higher level of education and expansion of curricula

The education system is one of the main avenues for the social inclusion of young people. Continued attendance until the completion of secondary school—and, ideally, higher education as well—is of key importance because it facilitates young people's entry into the workforce. In addition, the education system's curricula need to be broadened to include financial education, digital skills, citizenship education and a whole series of other soft skills that are in demand in the labour market. The following policy actions are proposed:

- *Providing monetary transfers (scholarships) to help low-income youth to continue to attend school.* The aim here is to provide a level playing field for access to a higher education that will better prepare young people to make the transition into employment. Some of the expenses that could be covered by scholarships include registration fees and tuition, materials, meals, transport and lodging. At the secondary school level, for example, Mexico has its Benito Juárez Scholarships for Well-being Programme,[15] which provides a monetary transfer once every two months throughout the 10-month school year as a means of helping to ensure that students will not drop out of school. Other examples include the national *Jóvenes Escribiendo el Futuro* ("Young People Writing the Future")[16] programme for Mexican university students, which provides funds to cover their living expenses, social services and internships, and the National Scholarship Fund (FONABE)[17] for university students in Costa Rica. Uruguay's *Programa Compromise Educativo* ("Educational Commitment Programme")[18] helps young people to remain in the public education system and to complete their upper secondary studies. To this end, it uses three different types of measures: (i) an agreement is signed by the student, the student's parent or guardian and the school's director or principal that sets forth commitments regarding goals and measures to be taken to support the student's education; (ii) mentoring opportunities whereby university students can accompany students in upper secondary school to class at least once per week; and (iii) scholarships for students in economic difficulties.

- *Promoting financial education so that young people can learn how to use their money wisely.* Family members and teachers also need to receive instruction in financial matters so that they can encourage young people to save and to use their money efficiently. As one example, Costa Rica has launched the National Strategy for Financial Education,[19] whose target group includes young people. This strategy focuses on working with the government and the private sector to reduce the population's debt load. In Peru, the National Strategy for Financial Inclusion (Multisectoral Commission for Financial Inclusion, 2015) includes a national financial education plan[20] that includes young students among the target groups for its financial management skills module.

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15   See National Coordination of Benito Juárez Scholarships for the Well-being (2021).
16   See [online] https://www.gob.mx/becasbenitojuarez/articulos/beca-jovenes-escribiendo-el-futuro-de-educacion-superior.
17   See [online] https://www.mep.go.cr/programas-y-proyectos/programa-de-becas-fonabe.
18   See [online] http://www.compromisoeducativo.edu.uy/sitio/.
19   See Costa Rica (2019).
20   See [online] https://www.bn.com.pe/inclusion-financiera/archivos/ENIF/plan-nacional-educacion-financiera-junio2017.pdf.

- *Promoting digital education*. The Dominican Republic, for example, has a number of projects that are working to integrate information and communications technologies (ICTs) into the education system.[21] Projects focusing on young people include the Human Capital Software Development Training Programme (BECASOFT), which is aimed at training young software developers as a means of building up that industry in the country, as well as opening up more job opportunities for young people. The country also has the *Internet Sano – Navegando Seguro* ("A Healthy Internet – Safe Browsing") initiative, which provides guidance to parents, children, adolescents and young people for the ethical and responsible use of the Internet at the individual, household and community levels. The Dominican Republic is also working to provide each student in institutions of higher learning with a laptop or tablet and to offer in-person and virtual workshops for the development of ICT skills with a view to training up competitive professional personnel in this industry.

- *Promoting citizenship education*. Since 2019 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have been partnering on the development of inputs for global citizenship education curricula at the basic and intermediate educational levels to serve as a basis for skills and knowledge acquisition and the formation of a sense of responsibility and commitment to society.[22]

2. Training and entry into the workforce

Stepping up the implementation of strategies for expanding access to postsecondary education and boosting enrolment at that level of education —in conjunction with vocational and job skills training and intensified strategies for helping young people to secure their first job and for enforcing labour laws that facilitate young people's entry into decent forms of employment— are essential steps towards closing up gaps in access and fortifying the education-employment linkage for this segment of the population. This line of action is an important one for helping young people to meet the challenges they will encounter in the workplaces of the future, where workers will need to be more flexible and innovative and to acquire new skills. Measures for accomplishing this include:

- *Monetary transfers to supplement the low wages earned by young people when they first enter the labour market*. One example of this type of programme is Mexico's *Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro* ("Youth Building the Future") initiative, [23] which provides a monetary transfer over a one-year period to help young people obtain training in companies, public institutions and/or civic organizations.

- *Internships as a means of gaining the work experience required in order to enter the labour market*. The *Mi Primer Empleo* ("My First Job")[24] programme in Ecuador provides internships in the private and public sectors for young people attending institutions of higher learning. The *Yo Estudio y Trabajo* ("I Study and Work")[25] programme in Uruguay offers an initial opportunity to gain work experience in the formal sector of the economy to students between 16 and 20 years of age so that they can develop the skills and competencies they will need to deploy in the labour market. The Plurinational State of Bolivia's *Mi Primer Empleo Digno* ("My First Decent Job")[26] initiative offers training and internships to young people who have completed their second year of secondary school.

POLICIES

Strengthening policies that will help people to stay in school will be of key importance in fostering a more advanced level of training that will translate into better-quality jobs for young people.

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[21] See [online] https://republicadigital.gob.do/eje/educacion/N.
[22] See [online] https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/rule-law.
[23] See [online] https://jovenesconstruyendoelfuturo.stps.gob.mx/.
[24] See [online] https://www.trabajo.gob.ec/mi-primer-empleo/.
[25] See Ministry of Social Development (2019).
[26] See [online] https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/programme?id=66.

- *Cross-cutting skills in education and technical/professional training that will facilitate young people's integration into the labour market.* In Mexico, the Council for Standardization and Certification of Labour Competence (CONOCER) offers a skills-based human resources training programme[27] whose chief objective is to increase the employability of graduates of the country's upper secondary schools. The focus is on upgrading the professional training and skills of teachers and preparing them to apply that training in their work. Other examples are the work being done in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay to identify technical and general training needs.[28]

- *Promotion of job skills training based on dual education models that combine vocational or professional training and work experience.* For example, under the Mexican Dual Training Model,[29] candidates for degrees in technology studies, or in technical/professional courses of study in upper secondary public schools (IPEMS), study and receive on-the-job training at the same time. Starting in the third semester, students join companies where they follow an individualized training plan. They then alternate between the classroom and the workplace for at least one or two years, depending on their course of study or specialization. As another example, Guatemala's Technical Institute for Training and Production (INTECAP) has a training programme for young people 16 years of age and over and adults[30] that provides initial and supplementary instruction to help students acquire operational and mid-level job skills. Successful graduates of the programme receive a professional certificate.

- *Training and job skills programmes outside school settings. Both theoretical and practical instruction can be provided in connection with job placement services, internships and support services for business start-ups.* This kind of initiative can be coupled with monetary transfers that enable students to attend professional or vocational training courses. The PROGRESAR student assistance programme[31] is one example. This programme is intended for persons between the ages of 18 and 24 who have not completed their primary or secondary education and who are unemployed, working in the informal sector or earning less than the minimum wage. Participants are all paid the same flat rate per month while receiving job training, guidance and job placement support, along with childcare assistance. Brazil has a similar initiative: the *ProJovem* national youth inclusion programme[32] targets young people between 15 and 29 years of age and has four different components: (i) *Projovem Trabalhador* ("ProJovem workers") provides training to persons between 18 and 29 years of age who are unemployed or who earn less than the minimum wage; (ii) *ProJovem Urbano* ("Urban ProJovem") furnishes economic support to persons between 18 and 29 years of age who have not completed their secondary education so that they can go back to school; (iii) *ProJovem Campo* ("Rural ProJovem") is similar to the second component but targets young people working in the agricultural sector; and (iv) *ProJovem Adolescente* ("Teen ProJovem") is for persons between the ages of 15 and 17 who are in the *Bolsa Família* family grants programme. Chile's *Yo Trabajo Jóvenes* ("Young People at Work") programme[33] assists persons between 18 and 24 years of age (and, on an exceptional basis, 17-year-olds and persons up to 29 years of age) who are jobless or employed under a casual or informal arrangement, belong to the poorest 40% of the population and live in a district where the programme is available. Its objective is to help

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Implementing policies that equip young people with more and better job skills is an increasingly important line of action in today's changing employment environment.

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27   See Secretariat of Public Education (2020).
28   See [online] https://www.cepal.org/en/educacion-tecnico-profesional/technical-assistance.
29   See Secretariat of Public Education (2014).
30   See [online] https://intecap.edu.gt/formacion-de-jovenes-y-adultos-forja/.
31   See [online] https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ingresar-al-programa-estudiantil-progresar.
32   See Ministry of Education (2017).
33   See [online] https://www.fosis.gob.cl/es/programas/trabajo/yo-trabajo-joven/.

these young people find a stable job either as an employee or an independent worker. Participants are provided with funds to buy work clothes, tools and inputs; assistance in drawing up a curriculum vitae and preparing for interviews; childcare services during group activities; and a transportation allowance.

- *Job training for underprivileged young women who did not attend school.*[34] Instruction designed to help young women increase their knowledge, broaden their skill set and acquire new abilities provides them with a path to economic autonomy. For example, the Mujer Emprende ("Women Starting Out") programme[35] in Chile gives a boost to businesses run by women over 18 years of age. It employs two strategies for strengthening their skills and building their capacity. The first, called the Mujer Emprende School, is aimed at helping them to professionalize their businesses by reinforcing their self-confidence, competencies, talents, and people and business skills. The second one, Fomento de Redes y Asociatividad ("Networking and Partnering"), works to help women entrepreneurs to network with each other so that they can share know-how, experiences and advice. In Costa Rica, the Avanzamos Mujeres ("Women Moving Forward") programme[36] targets women living in poverty. In addition to job training, it deals with socialization, gender roles, the issue of violence, organization and leadership, and sexual and reproductive health. Another example is the Ministry of Social Development of Uruguay, which runs a programme called Uruguay Trabaja ("Uruguay Works") to help participants find employment. One of its target groups is socioeconomically vulnerable young women who have not completed three years of the basic education cycle and who have been jobless for over two years.

3. Promotion of and access to comprehensive health care[37]

Even though a number of countries have made headway in expanding the coverage of health care for the young segments of their populations, they still face the challenge of guaranteeing and promoting young people's right to health, including in such important areas as sexual and reproductive health. Priority lines of action include encouraging young people to adopt healthy habits and to avoid of the use and abuse of harmful substances; ensuring that they are free to choose the point in their lives where they wish to become part of a couple, the number of children they want to have and when they want to have them; and enabling them to avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases. A rights-based, non-discriminatory and inclusive approach needs to be taken to all of these issues. Consideration could be given to the following strategies in these areas:

- *Guaranteeing young people's access to health-care coverage.* Young people's access to health care is in some cases contingent upon their status as a dependent of an adult or their formal employment in a job that affords them social security coverage. If the right to health is guaranteed for everyone, then access can be provided by membership in optional health-care plans that are not subject to dependency status or formal employment. In Mexico, students are covered by the Mexican Social Security Institute. It is also important to ensure that young people can obtain health care without being accompanied by an adult. The National Programme for Comprehensive Adolescent Health in Argentina promotes and publicizes the right of adolescents to use the health-care system on their own on a confidential basis, without having to be accompanied by an adult.

POLICIES

Policy actions must be directed towards closing the gaps in young people's access to physical and mental health care.

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[34]   See [online] https://www.cepal.org/en/projects/technical-and-vocational-education.
[35]   [online] https://www.chileatiende.gob.cl/fichas/13045-programa-mujer-asociatividad-y-emprendimiento.
[36]   See [online] https://www.inamu.go.cr/web/inamu/programas-de-formacion.
[37]   See the recommendations on sexual and reproductive health and mental health made in the chapter on children and adolescents.

- *Supporting and promoting young people's adoption of healthy habits.* In Mexico City, for example, the Mexican Institute for Youth lends out bicycles[38] free of charge during festivals and recreational events such as the Sunday *Muévete en Bici* ("Ride Your Bike")[39] and Ciclotón (Cycle-a-thon)[40] bike rides.

- *Strengthening the coverage of sexual and reproductive issues in the education system.* Policies, regulations and laws in this area should embrace the incorporation of these subjects into the education system and their inclusion in teacher training. In such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, sex education is a mandatory subject in the formal school system. In Uruguay, the Ministry of Public Health has launched a mobile phone application called El Gurú del Sexo ("The Sex Guru").[41] The aim of this initiative (one of whose objectives is to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies) is for young people to become better informed about sexual and reproductive health.

- *Strengthening policies for the prevention of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.* These policies complement policies on sex education and tie in with measures for changing procedures and developing special health-care protocols for young people that take their particular disease-prevention and sexual and reproductive health needs (e.g. provision of free or subsidized access to contraceptives) into consideration. The National Programme for Sexual Health and Responsible Parenthood in Argentina provides information and advice about contraceptive use with a view to ensuring that young people will have access to these and other means of allowing them to decide when to have children and how many to have. As another example, in Uruguay anyone (including young people) registered with the Integration National Health Care System (SNIS)[42] can ask for and receive 12 coupons that are good for 15 condoms each month simply by showing their SNIS membership card at the pharmacy associated with their health provider.

- *Increasing young people's access to preventive and curative mental health services.*[43] The objectives of the comprehensive mental health action plan for the period 2013-2020 of WHO and its member countries are to strengthen leadership and governance for mental health; provide comprehensive, integrated and responsive mental health and social care services; design strategies for mental health promotion and the prevention of mental health disorders; and strengthen information systems and research for mental health. In Chile, the National Mental Health Plan 2017-2025 includes sectoral and intersectoral strategies for promoting mental health, preventing mental disorders and guaranteeing socially inclusive mental health care in line with a model for the provision of comprehensive care in family and community settings. Chile also has a management model for mental health care focused on the specific objectives of implementing promotional, preventive and detection strategies for improving people's mental health status; ensuring timely access, effective treatment and continuity in care for the general population; and formulating guidelines for the development of a mental health information system (Ministry of Health, 2018).

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[38]   See Mexican Institute for Youth (2020a).
[39]   Every Sunday, Mexico City closes off streets between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to provide a 55-km route for cyclists and others.
[40]   On the last Sunday of every month, Mexico City closes off streets between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to provide an 83-km route for cyclists.
[41]   See [online] https://guru.msp.gub.uy/.
[42]   See [online] https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-salud-publica/sistema-nacional-integrado-salud.
[43]   The same recommendations regarding policies on mental health as those made in the chapter on children are applicable here.

4. Reduction of violence and promotion of culture and participation

Public policies for young people need to incorporate the objective of reducing the violence to which they are exposed. Starting with the expansion of opportunities for social inclusion by, among other things, increasing young people's access to education and to the labour market, they should also incorporate law enforcement mechanisms into the actions recommended in the preceding section. Possible lines of action in this area include the following:

- *Sensitizing the entire population to the need for a culture of peace.*[44] The main objective of the *Convivencia y Espacios Seguros para Jóvenes* ("Living Together and Making Places Safe for Young People") (CONVIVIR) programme in Honduras, for example, is primary violence prevention and the promotion of peace in a community setting. The Dominican Republic's Youth Development and Violence Prevention Programme,[45] which is being implemented in collaboration with UNESCO, is seeking to reduce the current levels of violence by working on preventive measures with young leaders working for peace and progress, dispute mediators, entpreneurs and communicators. In Honduras, an inter-community football tournament is being organized under the aegis of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children as a tool for disrupting the vicious cycle of violence by bringing together young people from rival groups on the same playing field (Villars, 2019).

- *Running sensitization and integration campaigns targeting young people who are or were gang members.* For example, the National Institute for Youth of El Salvador has carried out a programme focused on building institutional capacity for crime control, skill development and tattoo removal.[46] Its main thrust is to improve the quality of life of persons who are stigmatized and discriminated against because of their tattoos by providing medical services for their removal, along with psychological consultations and the purchase of medicines and medical supplies.

- *Developing strategies for dealing with bullying in schools and cyberbullying.* Under the National School Medication Programme[47] in Argentina, for example, teachers, parents and students serve as mediators to help settle disputes that arise at school. In Mexico, the Federal Criminal Code[48] has been amended to set the penalty for cyberbullying and sexual harassment of persons under 18 years of age or persons who are unable to understand the significance of such acts at from 2 to 6 years in prison and a fine equivalent to between 400 and 600 days' wages at the minimum wage. Chile has passed what is informally known as the "Pack Law",[49] which makes it a crime to post images, audio files or videos with explicit sexual content on the Internet or social media without the consent of the person(s) involved.

- *Preventing violence and sexual harassment by undertaking sensitization initiatives in schools, universities and communities.* The *Ciudad Mujer* ("Women's City") programme[50] in El Salvador provides women with comprehensive services to address gender-based violence, to meet sexual and reproductive health needs and to support women's economic empowerment. These services, which are provided free of charge, focus on group learning, sexual and reproductive health, childcare, economic autonomy, and preventing and addressing violence. Another example is the initiative taken by the

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Policies on education, health and workforce inclusion should be coupled with strategies for ensuring young people's access to culture, participation and a life free of violence.

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[44] A culture of peace comes about through the espousal of a set of values, attitudes and modes of behaviour that reject violence and ward off conflicts by addressing their root causes so that problems can be resolved through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.

[45] See [online] https://dds.cepal.org/juvelac/politica?id=57.

[46] See National Institute for Youth (2014).

[47] See García Costoya (2014).

[48] See Mexico (2021).

[49] Bulletins Nos. 12164-07 and 11923-25.

[50] See [online] http://inclusionsocial.egob.sv/ciudad-mujer/.

University of Chile in developing a policy for putting an end to sexual harassment[51] and reducing gender violence within the university. This initiative entails preventive action based on workshops, colloquiums, seminars and campaigns; courses on human rights and gender-based violence; protocols for the introduction and modification of university regulations and standards concerning the identification and investigation of cases of sexual harassment and the punishment of perpetrators; advisory services, assistance and support for persons targeted by such actions; and training for teachers and other staff members.

5. Promotion of culture

Youth policies should also be aimed at promoting cultural expression and development by introducing strategies for overcoming the limitations on access stemming from a lack of resources or dispersed settlement patterns. The objective should be to create the necessary conditions for guaranteeing young people's cultural rights in terms of appreciation (concerts, exhibits or other cultural events) and creativity (accessible art workshops). Measures in the following areas are proposed:

- *Developing programmes to provide young people with access to cultural activities.* The Institute for Youth of Mexico City has, for example, organized workshops, talks, films and concerts during Youth Week every year since 2013.[52] The Ministry of Culture, the Arts and Heritage of Chile runs a programme that offers courses in rock music[53] to provide training for musicians. The schools that offer these courses work together as a national network to organize music festivals and to stage other events to promote the country's cultural heritage.

6. Political participation by young people

Last but not least, steps have to be taken to guarantee young people's right to political participation. Young people's perception of their country's institutions and democratic system are reflected in the in-person and virtual youth rallies that they participate in,[54] and opportunities therefore need to be provided for young people to be involved as participants in democratic institutions, elections and, of course, public policymaking, especially in areas that directly concern youth. Scope needs to be provided for unconventional forms of participation and for the use of electronic platforms and other technologies for interacting through social and other media. For example:

- The Youth Agenda of the Organization of American States (OAS) is aimed at encouraging young people to participate in government. It rests on three main pillars: (i) institutionalization of a dialogue with young people; (ii) capacity-building; and (iii) strengthening the institutional framework of States members and OAS for the consideration of youth issues. As another example, Mexico's Youth Delegates Programme[55] promotes and finances young people's participation in the Youth Delegate Programme of the General Assembly of the United Nations during the three-week event that it holds each year. There are three categories for participants: youth delegates, indigenous youth delegates and youth delegates who reside in the United States.

Closing the gaps confronting young people promotes their autonomy, their identity and their participation in the development process.

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[51]   See [online] https://www.uchile.cl/portal/presentacion/rectoria/direccion-de-igualdad-de-genero/142805/politica-de-prevencion-del-acoso-sexual.
[52]   See Mexican Institute for Youth (2020b).
[53]   See [online] https://www.cultura.gob.cl/programas/escuelas-de-rock/.
[54]   Virtual rallies are organized and carried out on electronic (usually social) media.
[55]   See Mexican Institute for Youth (2019).

D. Suggested references

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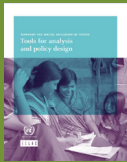
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E. Questions

- Undertake an assessment of the current situation with respect to the main youth issues in your country/region/district and rank them in terms of how urgently they need to be addressed.
- Undertake an assessment of what percentage of young people in your country/region/district belong to a social security system of some kind. Do the young people who are not covered by any such plan have some non-contributory form of social protection?
- Analyse the current suicide rate in your country/region/district and determine if there are public policies on suicide prevention and on the provision of counselling and mentoring in this area. How could these policies be improved?
- Among the young people in the region who are enrolled in an institution of higher learning, young women outnumber young men. Undertake an assessment of this situation in your country/region/district and determine if there are public policies for encouraging people to go on to post-secondary studies. How could this policy be improved or what alternative policy would you propose?

- Entry into the formal labour market is one of the main hurdles that young people face. Undertake an assessment of the current situation faced by young people in your country/region/district who are neither studying nor part of the workforce. What are the main barriers to their entry into the labour market? How would you remedy this situation?

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