Priority policies to reduce inequality among youth
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 as 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.

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, 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”) programme for Mexican university students, which provides funds to cover their living expenses, social services and internships, and the National Scholarship Fund (FONABE) for university students in Costa Rica. Uruguay’s Programa Compromiso Educativo (“Educational Commitment Programme”) 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 students’ 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, 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 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.
• **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. 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 peoples 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.
• 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 Familia 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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\(^{27}\) See Secretariat of Public Education (2020).


\(^{29}\) 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**. 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 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 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**

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 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.

36 See [online] https://www.inamu.go.cr/web/lnamu/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\(^\text{38}\) free of charge during festivals and recreational events such as the Sunday *Muévete en Bici* (“Ride Your Bike”)\(^\text{39}\) and Ciclotón (Cycle-a-thon)\(^\text{40}\) 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”).\(^\text{41}\) 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)\(^\text{42}\) 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.**\(^\text{43}\) 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, entrepreneurs 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 Programme47 in Argentina, for example, teachers, parents and students serve as mediators to help settle disputes that arise at school. In Mexico, the Federal Criminal Code48 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”) programme50 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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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.

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

University of Chile in developing a policy for putting an end to sexual harassment⁵¹ 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 music⁵³ 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 Programme⁵⁵ 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.

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).