Latin American and Caribbean youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

An examination from within the United Nations system

Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean

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Introduction: the 2030 Agenda and the three dimensions that frame the challenges facing young people in Latin America and the Caribbean

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development makes determined commitments to the diversity of young people, to their access to rights and to their ability to exercise them in full. Youth well-being is directly linked to the eradication of poverty and undernutrition, the reduction of inequality, the development of universal social protection systems, gender equality, access to health and education, the pursuit of sustainable economies and an environment that is protected and cared for, access to decent work and the construction of more peaceful and transparent societies. The implementation and progress of the 2030 Agenda stand to have a positive impact on the integral development of the region's young people if its elements are thought of as a whole, in a universal and comprehensive manner, so that no one is left behind.

Young people can clearly contribute innovative solutions to the challenges posed by the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and accelerate progress towards its attainment to the extent that there are venues for their participation and the incorporation of their views and perspectives. In addition, the recently adopted United Nations Youth Strategy "Youth 2030" (United Nations, 2021) provides a general framework to guide the actions of the entire United Nations system and aims to ensure that broader global, regional and national actions are taken to address the needs of young people in all their diversity, to build their capacity for action, to promote their rights and to ensure their participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and other relevant global agendas and frameworks.

Within that framework, the purpose of this document is to review the status of a selection of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets as they affect the youth population of Latin America and the Caribbean and to define lines for future action towards promoting resilient, sustainable and inclusive development among the region's youth sectors.

Young people are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and, from an intergenerational perspective, attention must be paid to the determining effects that today's decisions will have on the population's future situation. At the same time, the region is currently facing the challenge of capitalizing on its demographic dividend in order to set the foundations for a fairer society in the future. Focusing on young people today is therefore essential from the point of view of solidarity and intergenerational

responsibility. Despite this, none of the SDGs refers specifically to youth; instead, concern for young people is a cross-cutting theme in all of them. An analysis of the situation of youth sectors in relation to the SDGs therefore involves examining and analysing each of the Goals individually and identifying regional indicators that can record progress in relation to this specific population. Data availability is thus one of the main limitations of this exercise.

This document offers proposals for the further development of actions aimed at accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It calls for the more determined inclusion of the participation and deliberations of young people from different territories and regions and for endorsing investment in youth as a tool for constructing societies that are more equitable and sustainable.

The purpose of this document is to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities related to the promotion of the rights of young people and their development in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Another aim is to generate data and arguments to inform the debate and guide the actions of decision makers, civil society representatives and other stakeholders engaged with youth populations, particularly at a time of crisis when recovery and stimulus packages will play a key role with regard to short- and medium-term public policy and investment priorities.

A. Three dimensions to highlight challenges and opportunities

In order to cover the full scope of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, this document is structured around three major dimensions of challenges and areas of opportunity for Latin American and Caribbean youth: (i) inclusion, (ii) climate change and environmental protection, and (iii) governance.

These dimensions of analysis were selected in order to observe the difficulties in attaining the SDGs as regards young people in these areas that pose the greatest challenges in the region. Latin America and the Caribbean is the world's most unequal region and it is also facing a profound crisis of governance, evidenced by public distrust of institutions and their frequent inability to handle conflicts. Finally, the effects of climate change are having a major impact in the region, as shown by the increased frequency of extreme weather events.

The challenge of making progress towards achieving the SDGs as they relate to young people falls simultaneously into these three areas. The problem of inequality and exclusion demands effective and reliable institutions that design inclusive policies based on a development model that is sustainable for present and future generations.

Likewise, although these dimensions can structure the analysis in a way that highlights which of these three topics has made the most or least progress, where the greatest difficulties are being faced or which measures could be most effective in addressing the challenges arising in each, the construction of more inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies requires simultaneous progress along all three paths and, therefore, cross-sectoral collaboration efforts. The identification of the three dimensions thus serves to underscore the constant need to monitor progress towards the SDGs in these three areas, as this is the only way to ensure that achievements can be sustained over time.

1. The challenge of social inclusion: inequalities and the impact of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean

Before commencing, and since it is often used imprecisely, the concept of inclusion must first be briefly defined. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2019a), inclusion is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the enjoyment of rights, participation in social life, access to education, health, care and basic infrastructure services, and the availability of material resources, such as income and housing. It refers to a process whereby economic, social, cultural and political conditions are improved so that people can participate fully in society.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) defines inclusion as the process of improving the terms of participation in society, in particular for those who are disadvantaged by reasons of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, religion or socioeconomic status, by increasing opportunities and access to resources, thus enabling their voices to be heard while respecting their rights (United Nations, 2016). Under that approach, inclusion aims to promote the full participation of all people and to remove the multiple barriers that affect certain populations, groups or individuals in exercising their rights and accessing well-being, as a prerequisite for social cohesion. This chapter is based on this broad conception of inclusion, which calls for the full active exercise of human rights and equity and which comprises both objective and subjective dimensions.

The concept of inclusion is clearly expressed in the 2030 Agenda, which recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are interlinked and interdependent goals (United Nations, 2015). More inclusion and participation are essential in strengthening institutions and making political processes more legitimate and transparent, which are core conditions for sustainable development. Inclusion as a guiding theme of the 2030 Agenda is finally embodied in the call that no one be left behind along the path to development.

Over the last decade, the region's youth have been at the forefront of several waves of protests and social movements demanding more inclusion and equity. Although today's young people are living at a time of rising living standards in their countries, these movements are in response to persistent levels of inequality and injustice they face in different areas. In the current context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the lack of inclusion is a decisive factor in the heightened social and economic impact of the crisis on the region's youth, which is threatening some of the gains already made in areas such as education, health, work and security.

The pandemic's effects have drawn attention to shortcomings in social protection, health, education and employment systems. It is estimated that an additional 45 million people will swell the ranks of those living in poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, bringing the total to 37% of the region's population (ECLAC, 2020b). Among youth sectors, this impact is compounded by the educational challenges that have arisen due to the closure of schools and universities: as of early May 2020, those closures affected more than a billion students worldwide, including 165 million in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2021). This is in addition to the repercussions on employment, seen in the 34 million workers who have lost their jobs, many of them women and young people (ILO, 2020). According to estimates by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in Latin America and the Caribbean, more than three million children and adolescents may never return to school, and primary school enrolment is likely to decline by more than 1.8% (UNICEF, 2020a). According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), in relative terms, during 2020 employment fell the most among women (5%) and the youngest workers (8.7%) (ILO, 2021). At the same time, the pandemic has exposed and aggravated the inequality faced by young women in various spheres, including greater job insecurity and informality, limited access to social protection, increased risk of falling victim to gender-based violence (UNFPA, 2020) and the imbalance in the burden of unpaid domestic and care work.

Temporary crises such as COVID-19 can have a permanent impact on the lives of vulnerable children and young people (Lustig and Tomassi, 2020). "Circumstances such as child malnutrition, school dropout, and traumatic experiences occurring at early stages in life often have irreversible effects. Research on past crises reveals that these long-lasting effects do exist and are a leading cause for persistent inequalities and low mobility" (Lustig and Tomassi, 2020, p. 5).

To achieve inclusion, the following actions are required: (i) reverting the dynamics of inequality and exclusion in the area of well-being, (ii) expanding access to basic and social services, and (iii) fighting discrimination in all its manifestations. At the same time, young people must be considered as targets of reconstruction policies, but also as active participants in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

2. The environmental and climate challenge: the context of the new generations in light of the 2030 Agenda

One of the main messages of the 2030 Agenda is the need to implement a new development model that allows progress towards building inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies. This need is becoming increasingly urgent as the effects of climate change affect more and more people around the world, particularly the most vulnerable segments of the population. The urgency of addressing climate change is a challenge for all generations. Moreover, the actions taken today —or today's failure to act— will have repercussions for generations to come. Indeed, inaction may well bring the planet to a tipping point where the consequences of global warming are no longer reversible.

2020 was the second hottest year on record, outstripped only by 2016, and it marked the end of the hottest decade of all time (WMO, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need to rethink our relationship with nature. Humans and nature are part of a connected system, and there is a clear relationship between healthy ecosystems and human health. It is estimated that about 60% of human infections are of animal origin (UNEP/ILRI, 2020).

Likewise, greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise (UNEP, 2019a). While the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on certain activities could cause the 2020 figure to fall by about 7% compared to 2019, in the long term this rate of decline would mean a reduction of only 0.01°C by 2050, unless countries' economic recovery plans ensure the decarbonization of the energy supply. However, even if today's national commitments were met, global warming would total 3.5°C by the end of the century, far short of the 2°C target set by the Paris Agreement (UNEP, 2020).

This is accompanied by a direct impact on people's lives as extreme weather events and disasters increase around the world. In 2019, for example, nearly 7 million people were displaced from their homes by natural phenomena such as storms, floods and a number of devastating cyclones (WMO, 2020). In addition to breaking records, the 2020 Atlantic hurricane season left a bleak picture in its wake. UNICEF has estimated that as of 1 December 2020, the number of people affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua totalled 6.8 million, including 2.6 million children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2020b).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, these are not the only phenomena shaping the climate scenario. The prospect of an increase in the number and intensity of extreme events such as floods and droughts poses a critical challenge. Half of the world's countries most severely affected by extreme weather events between 1998 and 2017 are located in the region: Puerto Rico, Honduras, Haiti, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. This is compounded by the loss of biodiversity through human activity and global warming: the mass deaths of corals or mangroves, for example, which are the breeding grounds for countless species and a natural defence against weather events. Over the past ten years, the region has experienced an enormous number of extreme phenomena with a significant impact, as well as slow or gradually evolving phenomena that have affected communities just as much or even more. An example of the latter is the fact that the Andean cryosphere is receding; this is affecting the seasonal distribution of water flows, including drainage into the River Plate basin. The risk of water scarcity will increase due to lower precipitation and increased evapotranspiration in semi-arid regions, affecting city water supplies, hydroelectric power generation and agriculture (IPCC, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the vulnerability of our societies more visible and highlighted our relationship with the world we inhabit. Moreover, the devastating consequences of climate change in the region are due not only to the different levels of resilience or vulnerability of each ecosystem, but also to the interaction of those consequences with the institutional, political, social and economic structures of each national and subnational context. Thus, young people from the most vulnerable population segments feel the impact in key aspects of development —such as food and water security, migration, education and security— which widens existing social and economic gaps and deepens inequalities.

3. The challenge of governance: young people building peaceful, just and inclusively participatory societies

Young people in Latin America and the Caribbean face major challenges that limit their participation in building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Those challenges are closely linked to their situations as regards access to and full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Those inequalities are reinforced in discourse —through stigmatization, for example— and in interactions with other actors, whenever youth groups are not considered, consulted or included in community decision-making processes. Accordingly, participation is closely tied to institutional development and to the existence of opportunities for their voices to be heard.

The growing dissatisfaction with democracy as a form of government that is emerging in that scenario should not give cause for surprise, nor should the widespread distrust towards institutions and the party system (Schulz and others, 2018). These factors are catalysing crises in the region's governance and in its political and social —and even economic— stability.

The Latin American module of the most recent International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 2016, revealed that, on average, 69% of eighth-grade students in five countries (Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Peru) would prefer dictatorial governments if they provided security and order, while an average of 65% would prefer them if they brought economic benefits (Schulz and others, 2018). In the same study, however, nearly 80% of the young people surveyed said they did not agree with the idea of government leaders making decisions without consulting anyone. In addition, 72% stated their belief that peace can only be achieved through dialogue and negotiation.

According to the 2018 Latinobarómetro Report, 71.3% of the region's young people between the ages of 15 and 25 feel dissatisfied with the state of public affairs in their countries, and 70% believe that their countries' democracies face challenges. According to ECLAC (2018), an average of 88.2% of people aged between 16 and 29 in 18 Latin American countries think that their countries are governed by a few powerful groups for their own benefit and not for the good of all. On the other hand, 64% agree or strongly agree that democracy has problems but is the best form of government: in 2009, however, the average figure was 76%, which means that it dropped 12 percentage points over a decade. The 2018 Latinobarómetro Report reveals that as age increases, so does the value placed on democracy: 44% of the 16-to-25 age group agreed with the statement that democracy is preferable to any other form of government, compared to 52% among those aged 61 and over (ECLAC, 2018).

Overall, the figures show that in terms of perception, young people today do not value formal democracy as they once did, and that they rate its functioning as poor. Undoubtedly, the many cases of corruption and abuses in recent years have undermined confidence in institutions. And not only that: distrust has undermined the very legitimacy of the system based on its legality. This can be seen in the fact that 64% of students in the region would agree to break the law if that were the way to achieve their goals, and 73% would do so if it were the only way to help their families (Schulz and others, 2018).

Youth confidence in institutions is essential for the development of a democratic political culture and, therefore, for the sustainability of democracies, human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region. The future cannot be conceived of without more and better democracy (UNDP, 2020). But the world is living times of great change. Access to digital devices, the Internet and social networks in general dynamizes political processes and yields ambivalent results. The ability to access and produce knowledge through new virtual platforms has amplified the voices of the young people to whom they are available, which has enabled the development of a new digital citizenship. However, these networks are also sounding boards for intense polarization, symbolic violence and disinformation.

"The structural barriers that people with disabilities generally face have always been there, but with the pandemic, they have now been reinforced and strengthened. Primarily the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitization of the world and, although on the one hand connectivity and the possibility of meeting virtually has in some ways bolstered the participation of young people, for people with disabilities it in many ways continues to be another barrier, since the accessibility measures, support and reasonable adjustments that we require to participate on equal terms are often not considered."

Source: Uriel Weicman, META (network of people with disabilities), remarks at the side event "Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean: the key for recovery and achievement of Agenda 2030", fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, March 2021.

Seen in this light, this is a historic moment when Latin American youth is questioning effective governance, or, in other words, the governance that creates opportunities for inclusion and guarantees minimum institutional conditions that ensure access to rights and services, as well as genuine venues for participation that promote personal development without distinctions of any kind. In recent years, young people have acquired a critical eye with regard to the exercise of forms of power and participation in which they feel neither recognized nor represented. They are therefore promoting new forms of political and social participation that also question the perspectives through which the main challenges of their countries and the region are understood and tackled.

In accordance with the 2030 Agenda, one precondition for development is effective democratic governance: responsive in its actions, transparent in its work and based on the ideals of inclusion, equity, social justice and human rights. Democratic governance is a process through which opportunities are created for all people and, as such, it is a precondition for the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda. It is through effective governance that States can structure and undertake its implementation, using their institutions to formulate and promote coordinated, comprehensive and intersectoral policies. If youth sectors distrust current governance mechanisms, progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda itself may be impeded. The energy of student movements, youth organizations, young peace-builders and networks engaged with climate change and sustainability must therefore be channelled into improving the democratic governance mechanisms that have already been created.

In keeping with the comprehensive spirit of the 2030 Agenda, actions must be taken simultaneously and synergistically around these three dimensions to move towards the full inclusion of Latin American and Caribbean youth. Ensuring good standards of public health, for example, requires violence-free environments and access to adequate nutrition. This is essential for the full exercise of the right to education and cultural rights throughout life, in order to attain the learning milestones necessary for a dignified life and participation in the labour market, in building and strengthening cohesive and peaceful social relations and in processes of democratic transformation within communities and countries. Healthy nutrition depends, in turn, on access to clean water and a protected environment, and on economies that do not disrupt or damage ecosystems.

In light of the foregoing, the following sections will analyse some of the SDGs with a particular focus on youth. The awareness that young people are connected to everyone else will be a constant theme, and the aim will be to achieve synergies in the actions taken in pursuit of those objectives.

I. The SDGs and youth: an empirically based diagnosis

In the context of the pandemic, it is more necessary than ever to review progress towards meeting the SDGs, as the policies implemented during the recovery phase will determine the likelihood of achieving them. The framework of the SDGs is intended to ensure that the actions taken in pursuit of them are not a series of isolated measures, but that, in addition to meeting certain thresholds, they also represent progress towards a model of holistic development that is sustainable, inclusive and resilient.

So long as these actions recognize, include and prioritize the diversity of youth sectors and invite them to be part of the design and formulation of those policies, effective progress can be made towards a form of development that leaves no one behind, excludes nobody and allows maximum use to be made of young people's transformative potential.

This document proposes that the three dimensions examined above can constitute a road map for the region's efforts towards that objective, since inclusion, governance and environmental protection in the context of climate change represent, in a manner that is both complementary and indivisible, the main challenges and areas of opportunity for Latin American and Caribbean youth.

Using different sources of information from the agencies of the United Nations system, the following sections will review indicators and studies that address different challenges that the hemisphere's young people face within the framework of the 2030 Agenda. Since data and studies are available for most of the countries in the region, the indicators are focused on the following SDGs: 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reducing inequality) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The aim is not to provide an exhaustive overview of all the Goals and their targets, but rather to briefly showcase some of the challenges facing the new generations, in order to draw up a road map for actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda's objectives.

As an additional source of information, some results from the United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic —conducted by the Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean—

are presented in order to highlight the voices of young people at this time of crisis. The consultation was conducted online in 2020 and more than 7,000 young people took part. It should be noted, however, that the survey was neither random nor representative of the population as a whole, and so the data presented are not statistically representative; instead, they are intended to illustrate trends and offer approximations to complex phenomena.

The analysis is structured around the factors that are hindering or assisting the inclusion of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean within the framework of the 2030 Agenda. As far as possible, three stages in the life cycles of men and women will be distinguished: between the ages of 15 and 19, between 20 and 24, and between 25 and 29. In addition, when the data or studies allow, different groups of young people who are in a situation of greater vulnerability and at greater risk of being left behind will be examined, placing special emphasis on communities that are subject to social exclusion.

A. Goal 1: poverty among youth is the ultimate expression of exclusion and a barrier to full development

The impact of poverty experienced in childhood, adolescence and youth is long and enduring, and it is a key element in the intergenerational reproduction of poverty and inequality (Espíndola and Milosavljevic, 2019). This applies both to monetary poverty and to other dimensions of the phenomenon that undermine the chances of millions of the region's young people to develop to their full potential. Living in a poor household may mean, for example not having sufficient quality food, no timely access to health services, insufficient resources to attend school, a home that lacks the wherewithal to foster good academic performance, being forced to abandon school early to contribute to the household income or care for other family members, having to migrate in unsafe conditions, being a victim of a forced union or marriage, or lacking information on how to prevent an unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection.

- **Target 1.1**: By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than US$ 1.25 a day.

- **Target 1.2**: By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

These multiple deprivations and shortcomings are felt and experienced differently by the different members of poor households that include adolescents and young people. These situations are experienced simultaneously and have cumulative effects throughout childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Figures on monetary poverty among adolescents and young adults are not encouraging (see figure 1). After the sustained improvements of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century, the pace of poverty reduction slowed from 2015 onwards and, by 2018, poverty rates among young people had already risen: that year, almost a third of all people aged 15 to 24 were living in monetary poverty. In addition, levels of poverty and extreme poverty among young people in rural areas are markedly higher than in urban areas (FAO, 2018). It is estimated that in 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the number of people living in poverty will have increased by 209 million, 78 million of whom will be condemned to extreme poverty (ECLAC, 2021).

Figure 1
Latin America (18 countries):[a] poverty and extreme poverty, by age group and area of residence,
2010, 2015 and 2018
(Percentages)
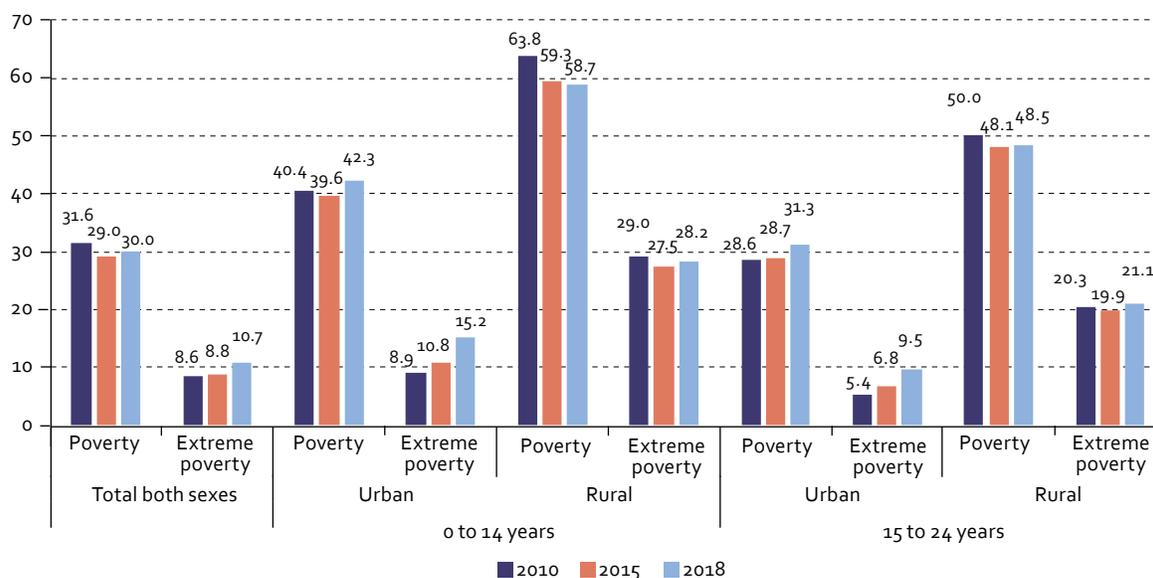
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a]   Weighted average of the following countries: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

- **Target 1.3**: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

SDG 1 also identifies social protection as a key tool for reversing poverty and promoting access to basic services. Today, however, young people represent a bottleneck in that process, as they face pronounced shortcomings in access to social protection under both the contributory and non-contributory pillars. As regards the first of those pillars, youth employment is more unstable and informal and generally does not provide access to social security (see figure 2). The figure shows that while the percentage of employed youth contributing to a pension system increased between 2002 and 2014, a slight decrease was recorded between 2014 and 2018 and, in 2018, only four out of ten employed young people were contributing to or enrolled in a pension scheme. The percentage was higher among young wage-earners (5 out of 10) but much lower among non-wage earners (less than 1 in 10). In addition, there were major differences by age: the younger people are, the smaller the proportion of them who contribute to pension systems. In other words, unwaged young people face an almost total lack of protection.

Regarding the non-contributory pillar, many of the instruments in place in the countries —such as conditional transfer programmes or other cash transfer programmes— focus on families with children under the age of 18 and exclude older young people.

Figure 2
Latin America (18 countries):[a] people aged 15 to 29 affiliated to or contributing to a pension system,
by age group and wage-earning status, 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
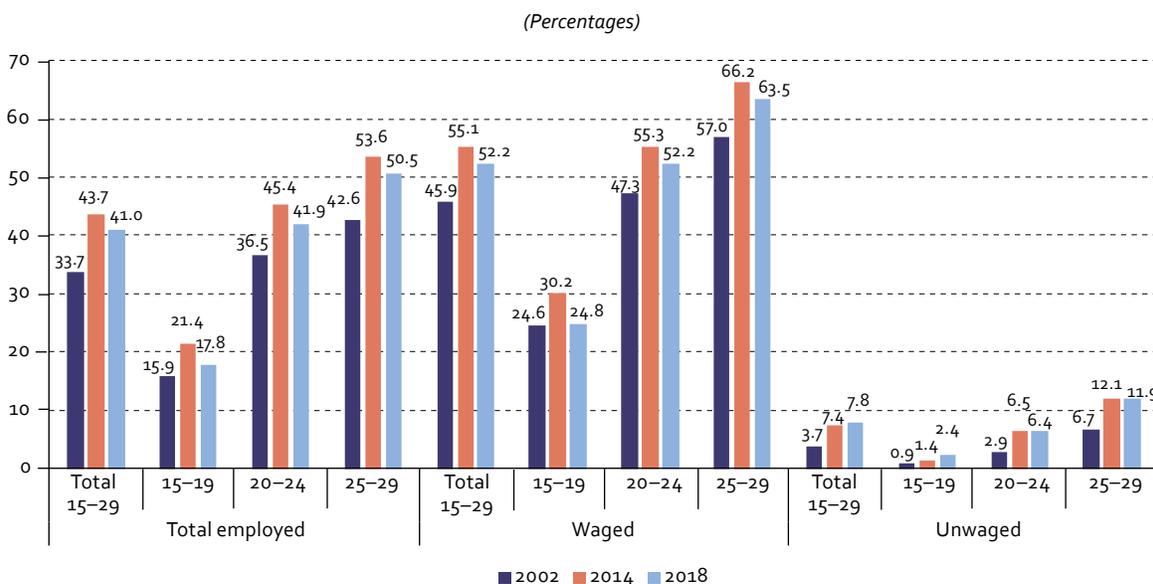
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a]   Weighted average of the following countries: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In the context of the pandemic, the alarming figures for economic contraction and rising unemployment that are expected will have profound effects on the region's poverty levels, a situation that already had a significant impact on adolescents and young people prior to the crisis. This outlook poses a serious threat to the possibility of the hemisphere freeing itself of poverty in all its manifestations by 2030. This is clear not only in the data, but also in people's pe rceptions. Thus, according to data from the United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, two thirds of the respondents expressed concern about their families' future financial situation, and 45% did so with respect to their personal situations (see figure 3). Among the young people who spoke of this personal fear, significant response rates were reported among the 25 to 29 age group (65%) and among those neither studying nor in paid employment (64%). Concern about falling behind in their studies was notable among those aged 15 to 19 (70%). And of course, a high percentage in all groups feared losing family or friends.

As an additional reflection on this issue, one of the challenges posed by the pandemic is promoting a model for sustainable recovery that breaks the vicious circle of environmental and social vulnerabilities that continuously and progressively feed back on and amplify each other. The crisis must be seized as an opportunity to rethink a development model that puts heavy pressures on the planet: the strategies deployed to overcome the crisis must place special attention on not overloading ecosystems. This is necessary because the poorest sectors of society are also the most affected by the environmental impact of natural resource use. Thus, economic recovery decisions will directly affect the most vulnerable populations: not only through the impact of those decisions, but also through their impact on the environment. Progress towards achieving SDG 1 therefore requires internalizing the impact that climate change has on the most vulnerable populations, including young people, and especially those belonging to the various categories that are in a situation of exclusion.

Figure 3
Latin America and the Caribbean: main concerns about the future among young people aged 15 to 29, 2020
(Percentages)
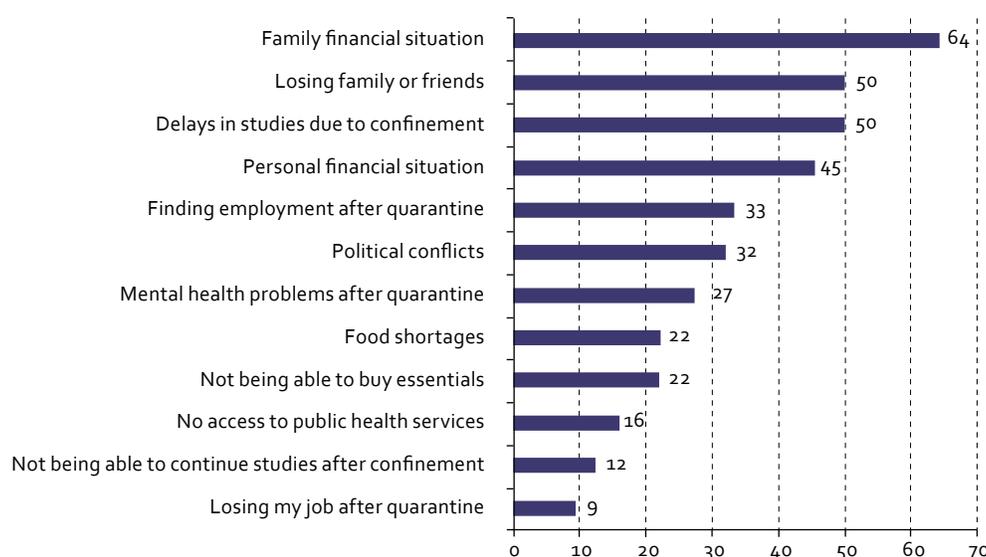
Source: Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, *United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic* (LC/TS.2021/68), Santiago, United Nations, 2021.
Note: The question was: "What are your main concerns for the future? Select maximum 5." The survey, which was conducted between 4 May and 15 June 2020 among people aged 15 to 29 in Latin America and the Caribbean, used an online form with 49 questions. The sample was non-probabilistic and comprised a total of 7,751 people: 4,570 from South American countries, 2,684 from Central America and Mexico, and 497 from the Caribbean. Given the type of sampling, the survey results presented in this report are not intended to represent the region's youth in full; instead, they are limited to the situations of the young people who responded to the survey. They can, however, shed some light on the potential challenges and main issues that young people in the region have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. Goal 2: ensuring young people food security and nutrition requires improving their health and long-term productivity

Another challenge facing the region is the double burden of malnutrition: food insecurity and undernutrition on the one hand, and overweight and obesity on the other. These phenomena, which go hand-in-hand with health and personal development, are particularly prominent at certain stages of the life cycle. Healthy and adequate nutrition is one of the foundation stones for the full development of the region's young people. Research into this issue generally focuses on childhood, as the stage in life when people may be most vulnerable to malnutrition and when the future impact on health is potentially the greatest. For example, estimates indicate that between one third and one half of obese children become obese adults (Palma, 2018). This reality requires that youth be analysed as a stage in life when this situation could be reversed through programmes focused on nutrition, food and healthy lifestyles.

- **Target 2.1**: By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

- **Target 2.2**: By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons.

The region has made significant progress towards reducing undernutrition. Between 2000 and 2018, the proportion of children under the age of 5 with stunted growth fell from 16.7% to 9%, and the acute child undernutrition rate reached a low of 1.3% (FAO and others, 2019). At the same time, the region has experienced an increase in the consumption of unhealthy food and a decrease in physical activity, which has led to a higher incidence of overweight among people aged over 18, and a similar trend can also be seen at the global level (FAO and others, 2019).

The prevalence of obesity among adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean tripled from 1990 to 2016, to reach a total of 11 million obese adolescents (about 10% of the total); similarly, the proportion of overweight adolescents rose from 15% to 29%, for a total of almost 32 million (FAO and others, 2019; see figure 4). As indicated by UNICEF (2019), the region's burgeoning urbanization also encourages the consumption of unhealthy foods by making them available in the retail market, where 65% of the food products on offer are processed. For that reason, advertising and the legislation applicable to it take on a central role.

Box 1
The role of advertising in food consumption

Children and adolescents have become a target audience for food advertising. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), a study conducted by the InterAmerican Heart Foundation in Argentina revealed that, on average, children are exposed to 60 advertisements per week, 90% of which encourage the consumption of unhealthy food. In addition, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has noted that these advertisements proliferate at times of day when children are most likely to see them. Restrictions on such advertising and food labelling strategies are the most common initiatives adopted to mitigate the impact of this phenomenon.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Childhood Overweight and the Retail Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean: Synthesis Report*, Panama City, 2019.

Figure 4
Latin America and the Caribbean: evolution of overweight and obesity among adolescents
aged 10 to 19, 1975–2016
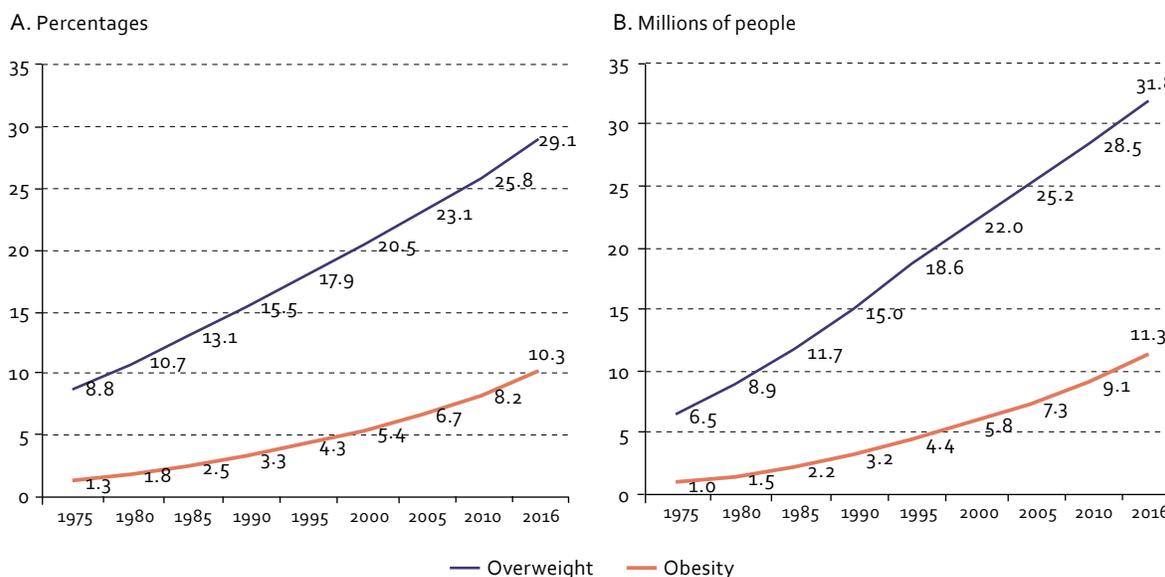
A. Percentages

B. Millions of people

—— Overweight   —— Obesity

Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and others, *Panorama of Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and the Caribbean 2019*, Santiago, 2019.

Overweight and obesity in childhood and adolescence are a health risk, leading to increased cholesterol, triglycerides, glucose and blood pressure, and the development of type 2 diabetes. Obesity also increases the likelihood of respiratory problems such as asthma. As regards mental health, obesity may be associated with an increase in psychosocial problems caused by mockery and stigmatization (Palma, 2018). The appearance of these health problems at such an early age entails a significant cost not only to individuals and their families, but also to society. In the context of the health emergency, overweight and obesity are factors that increase the risk of severity in COVID-19 cases.

In the context of the pandemic, the closure of school meals programmes, the significant decline in household incomes —especially among those already in vulnerable situations— and the travel restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are all factors that have led to young people eating less nutritious, less fresh and less affordable food. Of the young people surveyed, 31% said there was a food shortage in their communities (see figure 5) and 16% said they did not have enough money to buy food (see figure 6). In addition, as already noted in figure 3, food shortages were a source of concern among 22% of young people. Perceptions of community food shortages were particularly high among indigenous youth (45%), and problems buying food were reported by 32% of the respondents identifying as indigenous. People with children also face greater difficulties in this regard: insufficient resources to buy food were reported by 36% of the young people with at least one child.

Box 2
Climate change and food security in rural areas

Accelerating climate change has innumerable repercussions that are already being felt around the world, and more intensely among the most vulnerable populations and in the most underdeveloped territories. An examination of rural environments reveals that all livelihoods become precarious in the aftermath of hurricanes or drought (FAO, 2018). Since those populations depend directly on agriculture, fisheries and forestry as their sources of income and food security, they are the most vulnerable to climate change and, frequently, they are also the first victims of disasters and natural resource degradation, as well as those most severely impacted.

As highlighted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2019), climate change in rural areas has a series of consequences that affect the lives of young rural people once agricultural yields decrease: from reductions in the nutritional value of food to changes in the dynamics of livestock and fishery activities. Similarly, because of ongoing deforestation, ecosystem degradation and the resulting loss of biodiversity, many communities that depend on ecosystem resources for their livelihoods will no longer be able to rely on many of their sources of income.

This indicates an urgent need to design production mechanisms and systems that are resilient to climate change, and to promote subsistence models that encourage the sustainability and empowerment of rural populations, particularly young people. In this context, there is a need to transition to a more sustainable production and consumption model that encourages measures to create more resilient societies that are prepared for adverse and catastrophic events —droughts, hurricanes, floods and the like— in order to increase their capacity to recover before another disaster occurs.

Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *Panorama of Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and the Caribbean 2018*, Santiago, 2018; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *Crear oportunidades para los jóvenes del medio rural: Informe sobre el Desarrollo Rural 2019*, Rome, 2019.

Of all the young people surveyed, 79% reported not having received food support in the form of either vouchers or foodstuffs. Of the remaining 21%, about 75% received that support from the government and about 25% from a civil society organization (non-governmental organization, business, employer or church).

Figure 5
Latin America and the Caribbean (39 countries and territories):[a] young people who say there are food shortages in their communities, by sex, age and group they identify with, 2020
(Percentages)

Source: Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, *United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic* (LC/TS.2021/68), Santiago, United Nations, 2021.
[a] The countries and territories included are Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States Virgin Islands and Uruguay.

Figure 6
Latin America and the Caribbean (39 countries and territories):[a] young people stating they do not have the resources to buy food, by sex, age group and group they identify with, 2020
(Percentages)

Source: Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, *United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic* (LC/TS.2021/68), Santiago, United Nations, 2021.
[a] The countries and territories included are Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States Virgin Islands and Uruguay.

The challenges posed by SDG 2 underscore the fact that youth is a time when nutrition demands attention and concern. Proposals have been made for the adoption of a life-cycle approach that ensures better nutrition in childhood, adolescence and youth, because this will largely determine people's dietary practices in later life (FAO and others, 2019). Indeed, many habits —both harmful and healthy— are acquired during adolescence and youth, and those habits can evolve into factors that heighten the risk of non-communicable diseases in adulthood or that provide protection against them (Ullmann, 2015).

C. Goal 3: to sow equality and inclusion, the comprehensive health of young people must be promoted through participatory strategies

As the Pan American Health Organization has pointed out (PAHO, 2018), attaining the SDGs requires investing in the health and well-being of adolescents and youth and meeting their targets for coverage, quality, equity, access and confidentiality that promote healthy lives. This is essential in order to achieve educational and labour insertion, as well as full participation in other areas of society, thus helping to reduce inequalities (ECLAC, 2016). In turn, there is a two-way relationship between education and decent work on the one hand, and health on the other, since the former favour the latter by providing information, means and access to services. Hence, physical and mental health is a fundamental element in the comprehensive inclusion of young people. In the context of the pandemic, the interrelationship between health, including mental health, and other areas of well-being has become more evident than ever.

- **Target 3.3**: By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases.

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a key issue for the health of the region's young people: although its presence among them has decreased, it continues to be a threat, especially among certain groups, such as the indigenous population, where sexual activity begins early in life (UNICEF/UNAIDS, 2018). Today, there are approximately 120,000 young people aged 15 to 24 in the region living with HIV, and the presence of the virus is concentrated among the 20 to 24 age group (see figure 7).

Figure 7
Latin America and the Caribbean: number of children, adolescents and young people aged 0 to 24 living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), by age group, 2010–2019
(Thousands)
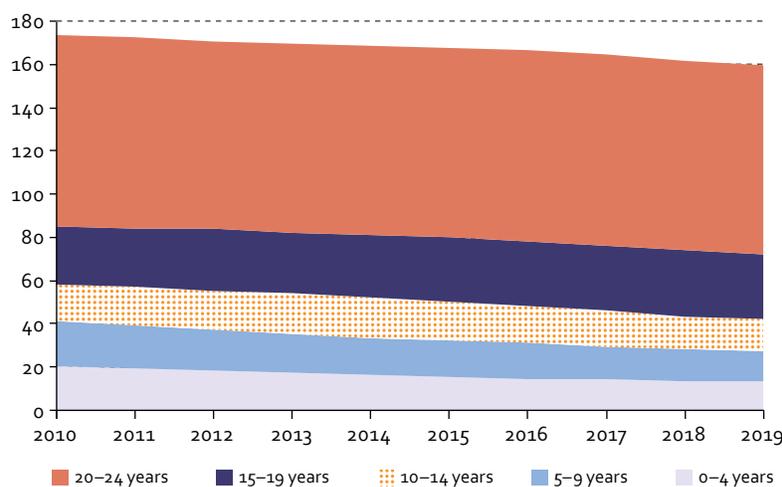
Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), on the basis of Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *Indicators for monitoring the 2016 Political Declaration on Ending AIDS: Global AIDS Monitoring 2021*, Panama City, 2020.

One of the greatest HIV-related obstacles for the region's young people is the lack of comprehensive education services about sexuality, sexual health and reproductive health, both in and out of school. This can be seen in the significant knowledge gaps surrounding HIV. Figure 8 shows the percentage of adolescent girls and young women in different countries in Latin America and the Caribbean able to correctly identify ways to reduce their HIV contagion risk (abstinence, condom use, minimizing partner numbers). Other research has shown that women under the age of 20 are the least able to identify such risk mitigation measures. That is a cause for particular concern given that the region's women generally become sexually active before the age of 20 (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015). Without this essential information and access to prevention methods, they are at risk of contracting HIV. It is also important to consider the circumstances and HIV-related needs of adolescents and young people who are outside the education system and who, in many cases, are subject to multiple forms of vulnerability and exclusion that may increase their risk of contracting HIV.

Figure 8
Latin America and the Caribbean: women aged 15 to 19 with correct and comprehensive knowledge about the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), 2010–2019
(Percentages)
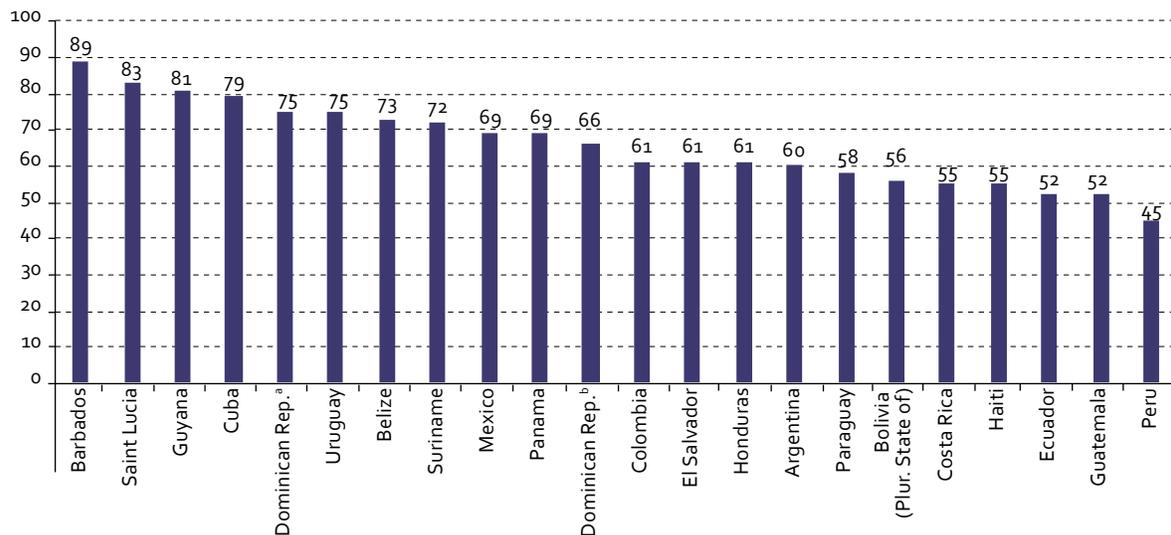
Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), on the basis of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other national household surveys, 2010-2019.
[a] Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).
[b] Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).

Another challenge is ensuring that young people can access friendly, quality health services, primarily in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, independently and without the consent of their parents or guardians. A recent study found that in 9 of the 17 countries surveyed, young people under the age of 18 could only access HIV testing and test results if they had the consent of their parents or legal guardians. In those same countries, the legal age of consent for sexual relations ranged from 12 to 16, underscoring a disparity between the age at which sexual consent can be granted and the age at which health services can be sought without adult supervision (UNICEF/UNAIDS, 2018).

One key element to consider in dealing with this issue is the continued stigmatization of people living with HIV, which gives rise to discriminatory and exclusionary practices in access to treatment, care and support, with the most vulnerable populations most severely affected. The exclusion that prevents people from accessing HIV treatment leads to their not being able to enjoy its benefits, such as improved quality of life and reduced opportunistic infections.

"Far from reaching the goal of ending AIDS by 2030, we also want to denounce that structural discrimination, extreme poverty, social inequality, high rates of gender violence and institutional violence, with all their nuances, are pandemics that put our human rights at stake and have exposed young people and adolescents to violations throughout the region. For many years, people in our continent are born, live and die in quarantine, because they belong to the LGBTI community, because they are HIV-positive, because they are sex workers or because they are drug users."

Source: Juan de la Mar, red Jóvenes y Adolescentes Positivxs de América Latina y el Caribe Hispano (J+LAC), remarks at the side event "Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean: the key for recovery and achievement of Agenda 2030", fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, March 2021.

- **Target 3.4**: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.

Target 3.4 of the 2030 Agenda reflects the broad conception of health proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines health as an integral phenomenon encompassing the physical, mental and social dimensions. This sheds light on a facet of health that has long been invisible: mental health. Mental and neurological disorders, as well as those caused by substance use among young people, are a major cause of morbidity, disability, injury and premature death, and they also increase the risk of other diseases and long-term health problems (PAHO, 2018).

Young people with mental health problems can face significant barriers to completing their education due to poor academic performance, discipline and attendance problems and, eventually, the abandonment of their studies. Such school experiences leave them ill-prepared to enter the job market, which means weak labour market insertion that affects their future careers. Mental health problems during adolescence and young adulthood can also affect the forging of safe and healthy relationships with their peers, parents and others. Mental health problems affect young people's self-esteem and social interactions, and they increase the likelihood of discrimination and stigmatization. In the most extreme cases, these health problems can lead to self-harm and incidents of violence against others.

Numerous factors are known to be behind mental health problems among young people. Poverty, working or living on the street, bullying, domestic violence, traumatic events and conflict and post-conflict experiences are important risk factors for young people's mental health (WHO, 2014). The more risk factors they are exposed to, the greater the effects on their mental health, particularly in the absence of protective factors. Risk factors specific to adolescence and young adulthood include the desire for more autonomy, peer pressure, exploration of sexual identity and increased access to and use of technology. The influence of the media and the imposition of gender norms can exacerbate the discrepancy between the reality adolescents live in and their perceptions of the future and aspirations for it (WHO, 2014).

Regionally comparable data on mental health among young people are scarce. Figure 9 examines suicide —the maximum expression of mental health disorders— and shows that in the 12 countries for which data are available, suicide rates are higher among the 15 to 29 age group than among those aged 30 to 49. The disparity between young people and adults is particularly pronounced in some of the countries, including El Salvador, Nicaragua and Paraguay. Also noteworthy are Guyana and Suriname, which report the region's highest suicide rates.

Figure 9
Latin America and the Caribbean (28 countries): gross suicide rates by age group, 2016
(Deaths per 100,000 inhabitants)
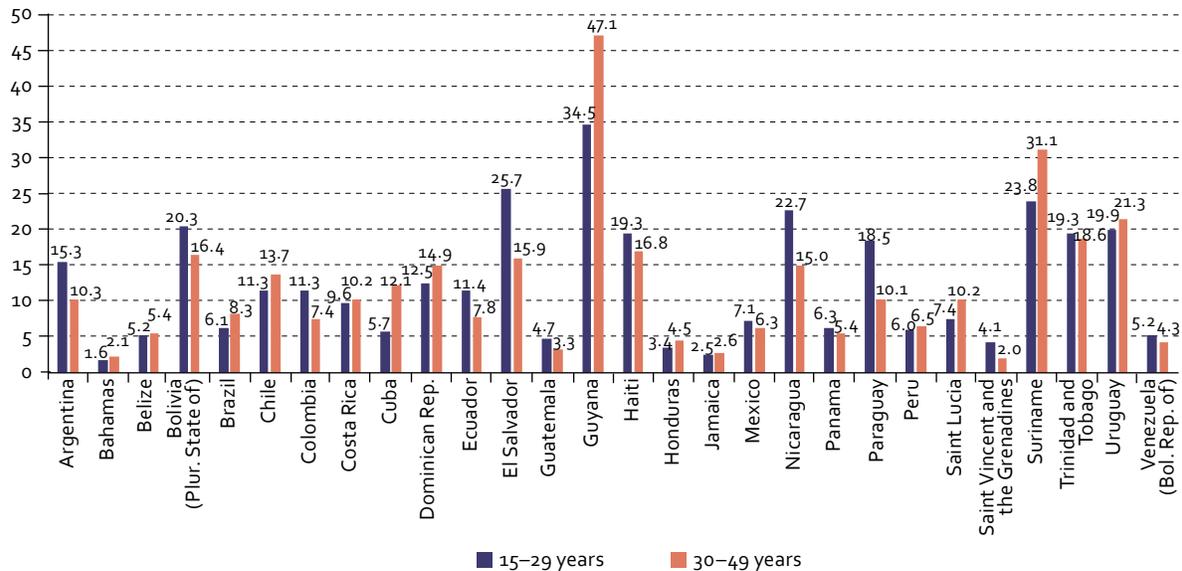
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory [online database] https://apps.who.int/gho/data/?theme=main.

The pandemic has underscored the importance of mental health to people's overall well-being. While the way young people experience the pandemic has some overlap with the general population's experiences of it, young people do face specific challenges. From the closure of educational institutions and uncertainty about future studies, to limited social interaction and worries about work and family circumstances, the social impact of the pandemic causes additional pressure and stress for the region's young people, which can trigger depression and anxiety. In the online survey, 52% of the young people said they felt more stress and 47% said they had suffered moments of anxiety or panic attacks during the lockdown. It is not surprising, then, that half of the young people said they would like to receive pandemic-related psychological support (see figure 10). Persons with disabilities were the group with the highest incidence of this phenomenon (63%), followed by young women (58%).

The pandemic provides an opportunity to expand mental health services for young people, to innovate in the ways those services are delivered and to advance the provision of self-care tools for young people. It is important that health system staff have the necessary skills to provide respectful, friendly and empathetic care to young people, to detect potential mental health problems at an early stage and to provide timely counselling and treatment. A call must be made for recognition and awareness of the implications of mental health at different stages of youth in order to provide greater access and prevent exclusion. Young people outside the education system must not be left out, as this issue is often addressed at school, and the resources needed to respond to the particular needs of the LGBTQI population must also be created.

Figure 10
Latin America and the Caribbean: young people who would like to receive certain health services, 2020
(Percentages)
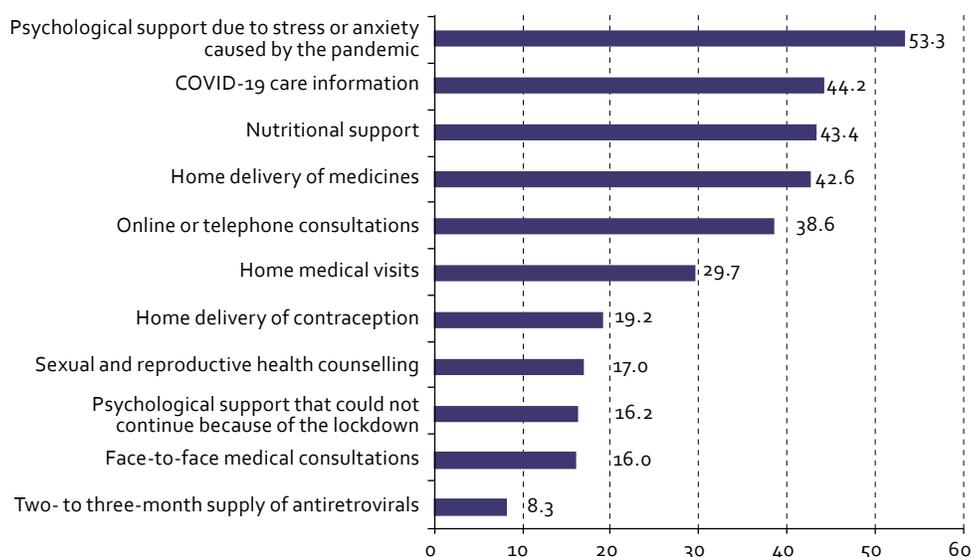
Source: Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, *United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic* (LC/TS.2021/68), Santiago, United Nations, 2021.
Note: The question was: "I would like to receive from health services at this time. Multiple answers, not exclusive."

- **Target 3.5**: Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.

Mental health is also associated with another relevant aspect of young people's health: alcohol and drug abuse. Drinking and drug-taking by adolescents are beginning at increasingly younger ages (UNICEF, 2016). As shown in figure 11, high percentages of persons aged 13 to 15 in some of the region's countries report having consumed an alcoholic beverage. Consumption tends to be higher in Caribbean countries and in two Southern Cone countries: Argentina and Uruguay. Although this does not always trigger problematic alcohol use, it can if it is combined with risk factors. Alcohol and drug abuse are also linked to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, as suggested by data indicating that such behaviours are associated with lower rates of condom use (UNICEF, 2016).

Several factors influence alcohol consumption. An important one is gender, with higher consumption being observed among men. Other relevant factors are sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnic or racial origin and characteristics of the family environment: for example, whether their parents abuse alcohol or whether situations of domestic violence exist (Del Popolo, 2018). Indigenous youth are more prone to alcohol and drug addiction, as well as to suicide and depression.

Current initiatives aimed at preventing alcohol, tobacco and drug use and abuse among adolescents and youth are far from effective and often come too late. To reach young people, prevention measures should consider the social determinants, design intersectoral actions and use a range of communication strategies to convey targeted messages.

Figure 11
Latin America and the Caribbean (23 countries): people aged 13 to 15 years who have consumed
an alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days, by sex, 2007–2017
(Percentages)
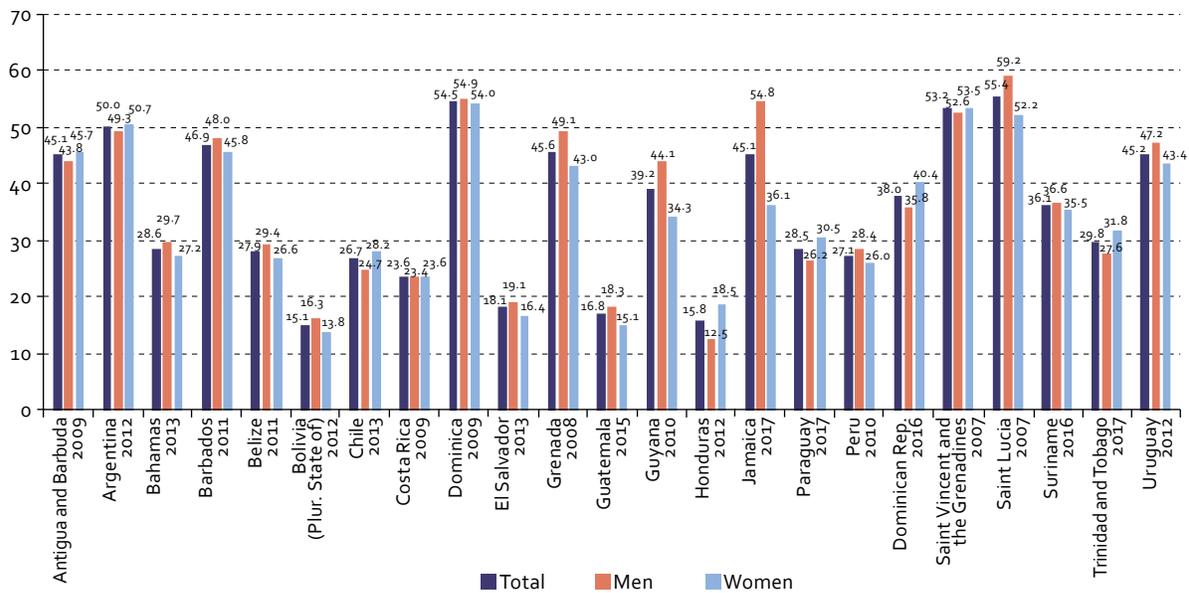
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory [online database] https://apps.who.int/gho/data/?theme=main.

To summarize, in terms of health, making progress towards the SDGs requires policies focused on investing in programmes that promote health in all its dimensions, including mental health, health at school, and sexual and reproductive health, that encourage physical activity and nutrition and that reduce risks associated with mortality, unwanted pregnancies, unintentional injuries, violence and substance use (PAHO, 2019).

The significant barriers to health access that exist in the region must be broken down, and one particularly important strategy for making policies and programmes effective in this regard is to promote the participation of young people by ensuring that they are included in the planning, implementation and monitoring of initiatives (PAHO, 2018). Equitable and quality access must be ensured for all young people, with efforts to include groups that generally do not have access and are not well treated: indigenous, Afrodescendent, migrant, rural and LGBTQI populations, young people living with HIV, women, and those with low incomes and low levels of schooling. Overcoming the persistence of the adult-centric and welfare-based perspective that prevents the adoption of a rights-based approach to young people's health care is another crucial element.

D. Goal 4: inclusive and equitable quality education is a lever for people's inclusion and a driver of sustainable development

Education is one of the main keys for the comprehensive inclusion of young people in societies, given that it positively impacts multiple dimensions of sustainable development: access to decent work, social mobility, permanently escaping poverty, access to information, the empowerment needed to make decisions regarding health and sexuality, the acquisition of skills and knowledge that enable the exercise of critical, active and informed citizenship for the strengthening of democracies and the rule of law, the appreciation and recognition of diversity, the adoption of sustainable lifestyles and consumption patterns and, through all of the above, the attainment of the 2030 Agenda.

- **Target 4.1**: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

The significant progress made with school coverage and retention in Latin America and the Caribbean has made the current generation of young people the most educated in the region's history. While the achievements are undeniable, they do not mean that challenges do not persist, including the shortcomings in access that can be observed in successive stages of the education cycle. Progress in access to education has concentrated on the first stage of the cycle and, in general terms across the region, primary education completion rates are high: universal primary completion was practically achieved in 2018 for both sexes and across all income quintiles (see figure 12).

Figure 12
Latin America (18 countries):ᵃ completion of primary education among young people aged 15 to 19, by income quintile and sex, 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
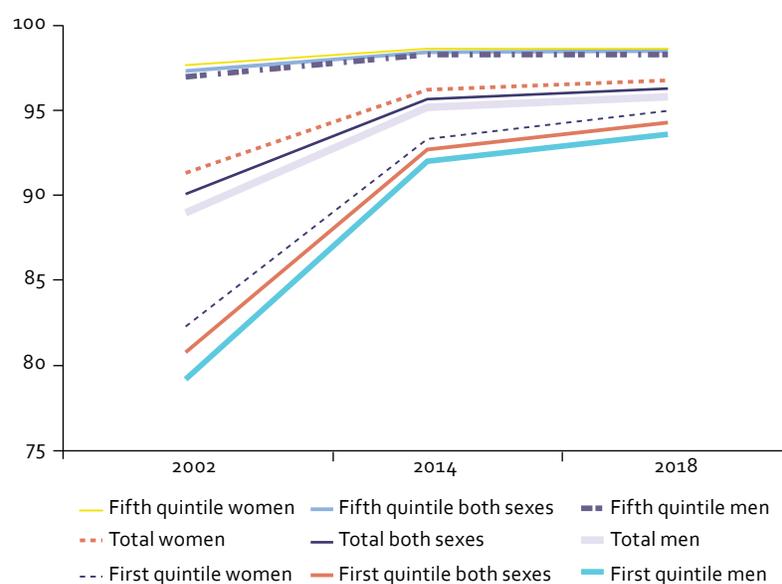
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
ᵃ The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

The period from 2002 to 2018 also saw an increase in secondary school completion: in 2018, 62% of people aged 20 to 24 had completed their secondary education. These improvements have not, however, succeeded in overcoming the gaps that still exist in this area: 92% of young women in the fifth income quintile complete secondary school, compared to 44% among young men in the first income quintile (see figure 13).

A second challenge relates to gaps in education quality that lead to inequalities in the acquisition of the skills that enable people to respect, recognize and value diversity and to participate actively, responsibly and with engagement, alongside others, in present and future decision-making at the community, national and international levels. These gaps also produce inequalities in the acquisition of skills, the results of which include segmentation in labour market access. Attending school does not ensure that young people acquire the knowledge, skills, culture and experiences necessary for their comprehensive development. Thus, defending the right to mother-tongue education and bilingual intercultural education is critical in building more inclusive and equitable societies.

Likewise, the fact that more than half the Latin American youth who attend school do not achieve a basic level of competence in reading, mathematics and science should be a cause for alarm, especially considering that such learning deficits are even greater among students from the lowest socioeconomic strata, those who live in marginalized and rural areas and those of certain ethnic and racial origins (ECLAC, 2019a). Incidentally, this phenomenon is present even at the primary-school level. According to a 2013 study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 75% of sixth-grade students in Latin America achieved barely basic levels in the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study on Education Quality (TERCE), with even worse results in mathematics, where the proportion was 42% (UNESCO, 2013a).

Figure 13
Latin America (18 countries):[a] secondary school completion among young people aged 20 to 24,
by income quintile and sex, 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
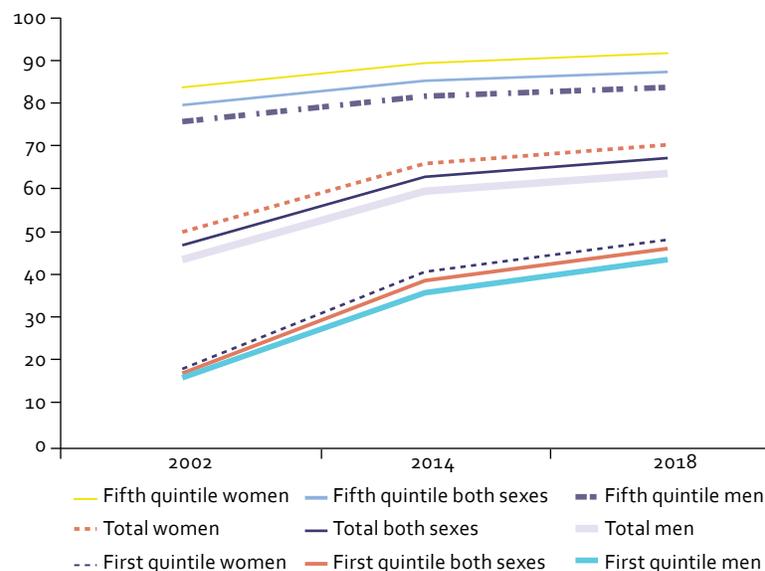
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a]   The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In the twenty-first century, due to the exponential digitization of numerous spheres of everyday life and the labour market's demand for technological skills, a quality, relevant and pertinent education must necessarily include the transmission of knowledge and skills related to information and communications technologies (ITCs). Young people are undeniably closer to technological tools and use different digital platforms more intensively than earlier generations (Sunkel and Ullmann, 2019). Nevertheless, the increasing ubiquity of digital technologies among young populations does not mean that they are evenly distributed or that users have the same mastery of the skills needed to exploit them. On the contrary, the expansion of digital technologies reproduces countries' pre-existing patterns of inequality. Moreover, digital inclusion and exclusion deal with more than the binary concept of having or not having access: factors such as the quality of access are also involved, together with the skills needed to obtain and produce knowledge and information (Trucco and Palma, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has sharply intensified this reality, and the gaps will widen if nothing is done.

According to Berlanga and others (2020, p. 46), 61% of 15-year-old students have access to a computer at home for educational use, 79% have access to the Internet and 30% have access to educational software. The statistics vary between urban and rural areas. Thus, the report indicates that "there is a greater likelihood that students in rural areas will lack access to computer equipment than access to the Internet. (...) Among the 15-year-old students assessed by PISA, the largest gaps were observed in hardware: with the exception of Chile and Costa Rica, less than half of rural students had a personal computer for homework. Cross-referencing this information against socioeconomic conditions reveals significant differences. For example: between 70% and 80% of students have a laptop computer at home in the highest quartile, compared to a range of 10% to 20% in the lowest. These differences are less pronounced in Chile and Uruguay thanks to public mobile device distribution programmes" (Berlanga and others, 2020, p. 47).

Another key element in this digital context is preparing young people to understand the causes and consequences of the pandemic, as well as to learn to live together and to design actions to address the pandemic's main effects comprehensively and sustainably. The closing of schools, their reopening and the new educational models —whatever shape they may take— require that special attention and dedication be given to the acquisition of socio-emotional skills and, with them, to the creation of safe, affective and supportive learning environments. Even if teachers, students, school authorities and other education personnel have not experienced the disease first-hand or have no relatives or close friends who suffered from it, the context of lockdowns and isolation will require reinventing, rebuilding and bolstering trust and understanding to prevent the emergence of different forms of violence.

In a context that calls for rethinking education in terms of its pedagogy, contents and policy, as well as regarding its contribution to development, efforts must also be made to ensure greater access to artistic education, promoting the arts in the different educational settings encountered throughout life, together with greater access to physical education and sports. As stated in the Kazan Action Plan (UNESCO, 2017), physical activity is essential for the health and well-being of young people, for their personal and social development and for their empowerment, because it provides them with intercultural and peace-building skills.

A third challenge relates to the discrimination, stereotyping and stigmatization that affect all learners at risk of exclusion in a similar way and that impact their learning. Most of the region's countries conduct surveys of young people, but they contain no questions about sexual orientation or gender identity and expression (Barrientos and Lovera, 2020, cited in UNESCO, 2020c). The national surveys of LGBTQI youth that explore at-school experiences conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay "show that they face a hostile school environment. Those who experienced higher levels of victimization based on sexual orientation were at least twice as likely to miss school and had higher levels of depression than those experiencing lower levels of victimization" (UNESCO, 2020c).

- **Target 4.3**: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Tertiary education is a determining factor for people's future (ECLAC, 2019a) since it generally entails the acquisition of skills and abilities that increase the likelihood of higher earnings and of access to better workplaces that offer the possibility of advancement. However, progress in this level of education has been more modest than that achieved in primary and secondary schooling, particularly for young people in the lowest income quintiles (see figure 14). Across the region, only slightly more than two out of every ten young people complete the tertiary cycle, and the differential between income quintiles is pronounced. Young women in the highest income quintile complete tertiary education at a rate of 60%, compared to a figure of 4% among their peers in the lowest quintile. Figure 14 also clearly shows that the female advantage in tertiary completion applies mostly to women from the richest quintile, while the gap between young women and young men in the poorest quintile is quite small.

Figure 14
Latin America (18 countries):[a] completion of four-year tertiary education among young people aged 25 to 29,
by income quintile and sex, 2002, 2004 and 2008
(Percentages)
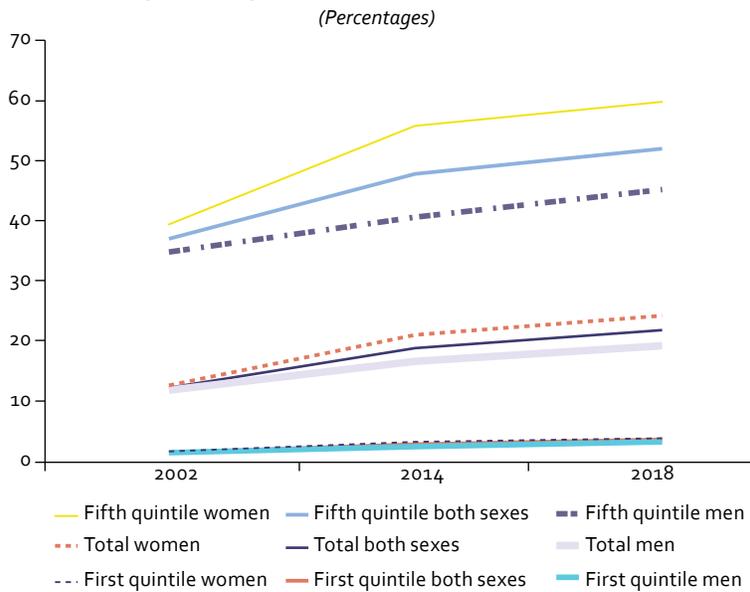
Fifth quintile women	Fifth quintile both sexes	Fifth quintile men
Total women	Total both sexes	Total men
First quintile women	First quintile both sexes	First quintile men

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a]   The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is a fundamental part of the secondary and higher education on offer; in fact, its availability is above the global average (see figure 15). Despite the growing strategic importance of TVET, however, it can be seen that —especially in South America— only 5% of young people enrol in this type of education. Another cause for concern is the variable quality of the training provided and its weak linkage with the labour market.

Figure 15
Latin America and the Caribbean and subregions: young people aged 15 to 24 enrolled in technical and vocational
education and training programmes (ISCED levels 2 to 5),[a] compared to global figures, 2018
(Percentages)
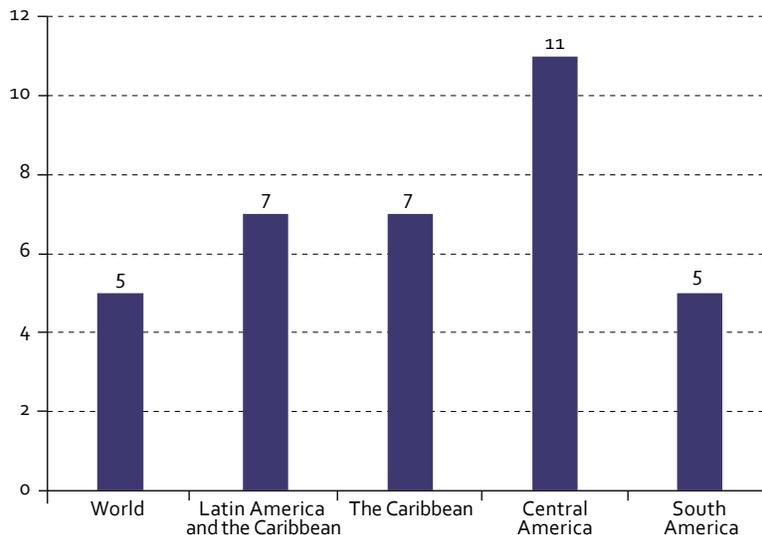
Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020. Latin America and the Caribbean. Inclusion and Education: All Means All*, Paris, 2020; *International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011*, Paris, 2013.
[a]   International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). For a detailed description of ISCED levels, see UNESCO (2013b).

While it is not possible to speak of a single model for the provision of this type of education, since various systems are used across the region, studies indicate that TVET, despite its heterogeneity, shares certain common characteristics in all the countries: for example, the fact that it covers populations from lower socioeconomic strata who have traditionally been excluded from the formal education system or have been unable to reach its more advanced levels. Nevertheless, its availability at the tertiary level is still limited in most countries; it is therefore a type of education that should be developed in order to further expand and democratize higher education (Sevilla, 2017).

- **Target 4.5**: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

Data on progress towards SDG 4 suggest that there is a long way to go to meet target 4.5, which calls for inclusive and equitable education for all. Socioeconomic and gender inequalities in access to and retention in education often intersect and are reinforced by inequalities arising from ethnic and racial origin, place of residence, disabilities, migration status and gender identity.

For young people in the context of mobility, education affords access to multiple forms of social inclusion and offers protection against the rights violations —such as child labour, labour exploitation, forced unions and human trafficking— that accompany many international relocations. However, various factors related to the lack of uniformity between sectoral regulations, the planning and management of admission processes, educational inclusion policies and the recognition of competencies, studies, degrees and diplomas pose specific obstacles to the realization of the right to education of persons on the move in the region (UNESCO, 2019a). The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration therefore identifies actions for educational inclusion: for example, producing disaggregated information on education, investing in the development of human capacities through education, adapting migration regularization options to optimize educational opportunities, promoting technical education and encouraging activities that promote respect and non-discrimination.

The persistence of gender gaps throughout the educational process is clearly visible as regards access to education in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and as regards progression, retention and re-entry in STEM subjects (UNESCO, 2018). In addition, the factors that shape educational trajectories and affect the chances of completing school differ for young men and young women. One powerful reason for young men dropping out of school is the early need to enter the world of work, while for young women such concerns as caregiving tasks, pregnancy and early marriages and unions take centre stage. This highlights the need to promote initiatives that advocate for the inclusion of pregnant adolescents and young women in the education system, in light of the alarming rates of teenage pregnancy seen in the region. For young men, especially those from low-income households, there is a need for measures that enable them to reconcile work and studies and that provide financial support as an incentive for continued study.

An analysis of the intersection between gender and race inequalities reveals that secondary school completion rates are lower among men and women of African descent (see figure 16). In six countries observed, women of non-African descent report the best results, while men of African descent report the worst, with very significant gaps in all cases.

Figure 16
Latin America (6 countries): young people aged 20 to 24 with complete secondary education,
by ethnicity or race and sex, around 2018
(Percentages)
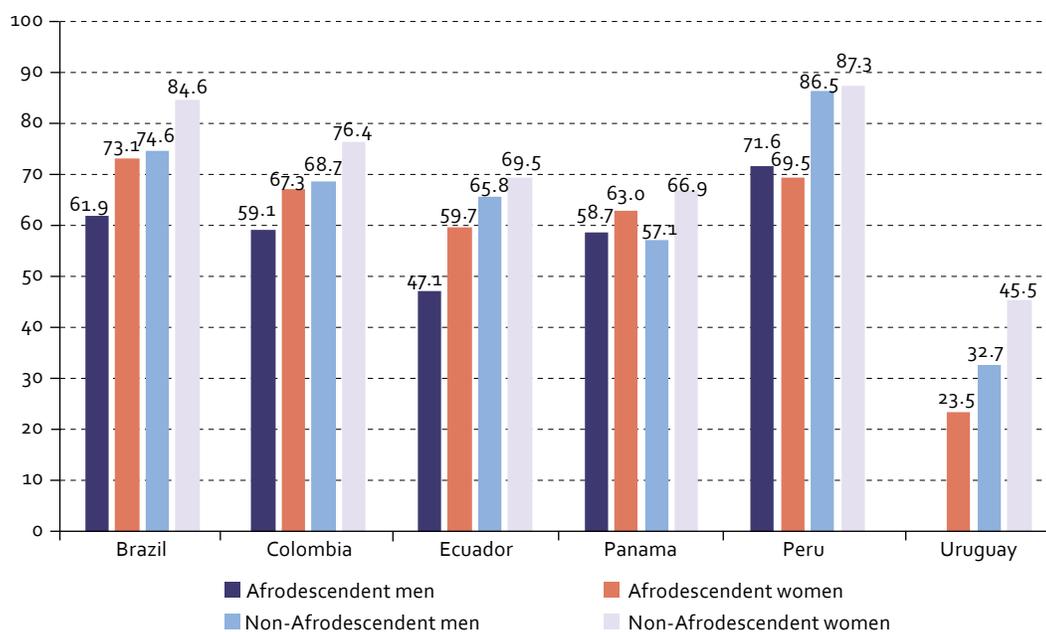
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión* (LC/PUB.2020/14), Santiago, 2020.

At the same time, disadvantages can also be detected in the completion of secondary education by young people in rural areas (see figure 17). In 2018, only 42% of young men and 47% of young women in rural areas had completed secondary school.

Figure 17
Latin America (18 countries):[a] young people aged 20 to 24 with complete secondary education,
by area of residence and sex, around 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
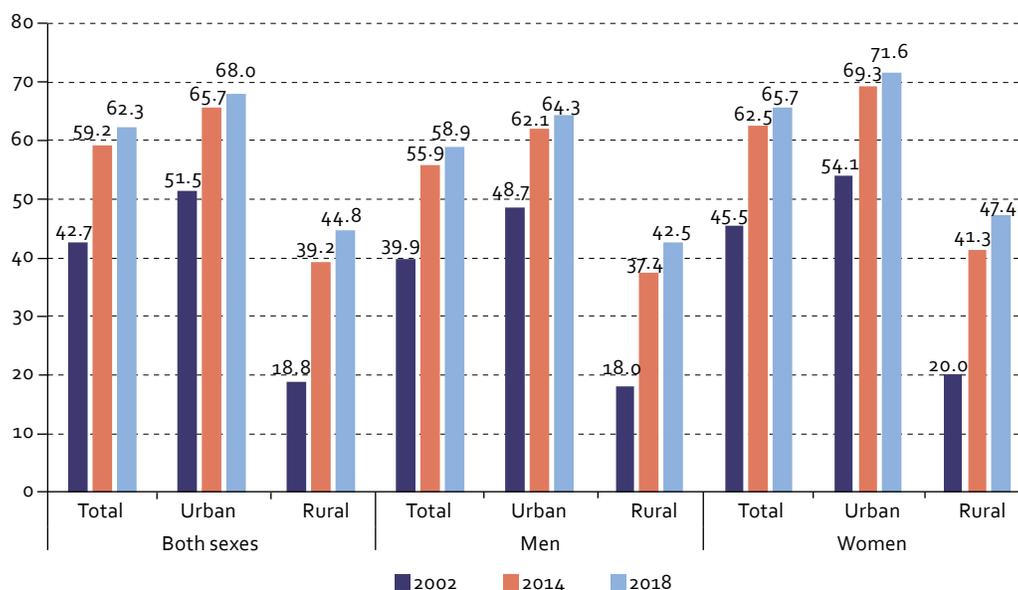
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

[a] The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In the case of children, adolescents and young people with disabilities, exclusion from education and the limited opportunities they have to acquire relevant work and life skills are at the root of various forms of exclusion throughout the life cycle. The educational inclusion of persons with disabilities is expressly stated in targets 4.5 and 4.a of SDG 4, but despite this commitment and the significant progress that has been made at the primary level (Ullmann and others, 2021), there is still a long way to go to ensure that adolescents and youth with disabilities have equal access to education (see figure 18). In the few countries for which information is available, the percentage of young people with disabilities who complete secondary school is lower than that of their non-disabled peers, even in countries where secondary education has been expanded, such as Chile, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Figure 18
Latin America (4 countries): young people aged 20 to 24 with completed secondary education, by disability status and sex, around 2018
(Percentages)
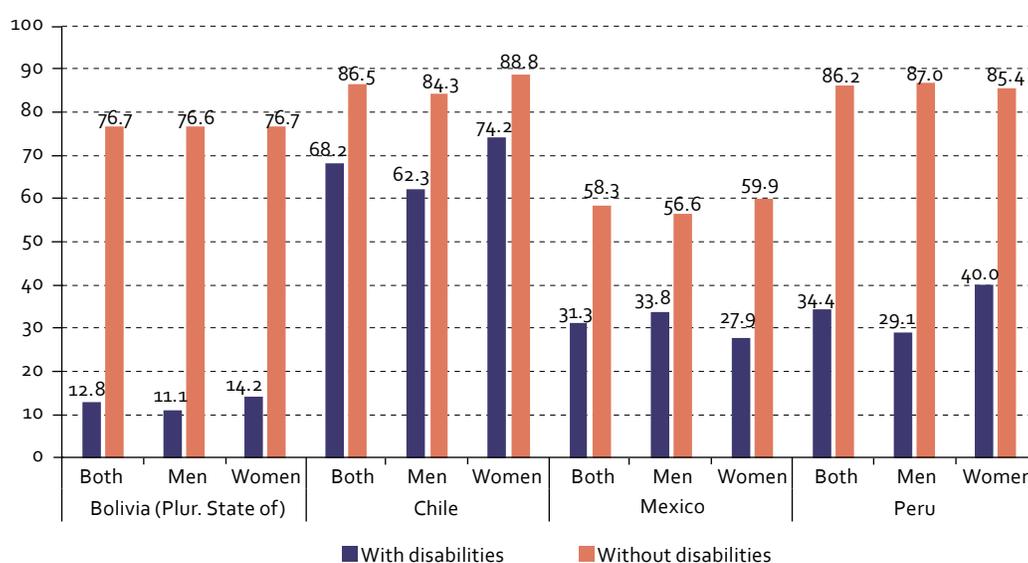
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Education is where learning practices of relevance and pertinence for the reality of young people can be put in place: practices that foster the acquisition of cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural competencies and skills —based on the appreciation, respect and recognition of human rights and fundamental freedoms, gender equality, diversity and equity— that promote the construction of collective actions oriented towards the common good and solidarity.

Comprehensive education about sexuality plays a central role in promoting equality-based gender relations and new forms of masculinity that help prevent gender violence and teenage pregnancy. Thus, quality education fosters individual inclusion and contributes to the achievement of other SDGs. At the present juncture, however, the COVID-19 crisis has jeopardized the achievements made and threatens to expand the education gaps described above, which would sow inequality among future generations and have serious repercussions for both individuals and societies.

- **Target 4.7**. By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Target 4.7 sets challenges for and intersects with all areas of education. Although there are few concrete indicators for examining their implementation in all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, some of the main concepts should be highlighted to underscore their relevance for youth sectors. Within this framework, UNESCO has emphasized the importance of promoting the strengthening of global citizenship education (GCED) and education for sustainable development (ESD).

GCED aims to empower children, adolescents and young people to transform the world through the acquisition of cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural skills (UNESCO, 2015). Accordingly, it promotes the following: a critical understanding of interrelationships between the various political, economic, social, cultural and other processes present at local, national, regional and global levels; the acquisition of socio-emotional skills for the construction and strengthening of social relationships based on the common good, respect and recognition of diversity, the appreciation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and gender equality and equity; learning attitudes and behaviours for planning and decision-making that allow relationships to be established between means and ends, bringing into play cognitive and socio-emotional skills as the basis of decisions.

GCED aims to contribute to meeting the challenges of a world where peace and sustainable development are threatened by human rights violations, inequalities and poverty. It seeks to transform the world by strengthening the social relationships that are necessary for coexistence and social cohesion and that are the basis for the construction of collective actions for addressing the challenges of humanity as a whole (UNESCO, 2019b).

In the context of the pandemic, GCED represents a fundamental learning process for understanding its causes and consequences, for questioning models of production, consumption, lifestyle and social relations, for learning to live together in times of crisis, and for building joint actions to rethink development paths and the characteristics of development, strengthening the resilience of people and communities so that recovery can take place, not only for all, but with all and leaving no one behind.

ESD, in turn, aims to equip people with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed to construct a more inclusive, just, peaceful and sustainable world. That holistic approach is of even greater relevance today, when the pandemic is once again highlighting the urgency of seeking alternative paths to growth and of questioning consumption and production patterns in the search for a new relationship with the environment and our communities.

In order for youth sectors' voices to be heard, special emphasis must be placed on the role of environmental education as both a trainer of leaders and an engine of change. Education must be understood as a cross-cutting transformative instrument that produces citizens who are committed to environmental protection and, consequently, new leaders who are committed to sustainable development.[1]

As regards the recovery phase, the response emerging in the countries points to a path along which education in all of its dimensions will need to be rethought. The link between humans and nature must be re-established, a critical analysis of the challenges and opportunities for communities in the face of climate change must be conducted, and a vision of hope for the future must be provided. Likewise, content of relevance to the students must be included so they can understand reality, recognize strengths and critical points for action at times of crisis and uncertainty, and pursue collective solutions that reduce structural gaps (ECLAC/UNESCO, 2020).

ESD can be a key vector for progress towards raising the awareness of new generations and encouraging the adoption of more sustainable practices and lifestyles. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, substantial progress has been made with the circular economy and sustainable models for consumption and production. In particular, with the support of the UNEP-coordinated Regional Council of Governmental Experts on Sustainable Consumption and Production and the Environmental Training Network for Latin America and the Caribbean, significant achievements have been made in areas such as sustainable public procurement,

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[1]   This is one of the action recommendations for environment ministers (UNEP, 2019b).

eco-innovation, eco-labelling and the formulation of pro-sustainability national consumption and production plans. Similarly, progress has been made in the construction of national road maps in order to provide the infrastructure, public policies and conditions necessary for the adoption of more sustainable lifestyles.

Including environmental education and climate change in school curricula is a key element in promoting long-term change and ensuring the acquisition of the knowledge, values and skills needed to foster the sustainable and resilient development of societies. It also offers an opportunity to move forward towards the elimination of gender inequalities. For example, gender norms can be broken down by providing girls with education in skills to promote climate change adaptation and reduce vulnerabilities, by providing them with gender-sensitive science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education to train them to design solutions to address the impact of climate change and to use technology for innovative and effective civic participation, or by providing them with services that empower them and assure them greater opportunities in the future.

Much remains to be done in this area. A recent study by the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education (LLECE) analysed third- and sixth-grade primary school curricula in 19 Latin American countries. It revealed that the concepts of GCED and ESD are more present in the declarative sections of the curriculum documents than in the programmatic materials that guide and support the teaching of those topics in the classroom (UNESCO, 2020a). In the specific case of GCED, notions of citizenship, identity, respect and diversity were found in all the countries analysed. As for ESD, the concepts of environment and sustainability were present in the curriculum documents of all the countries, but climate change and critical thinking appeared in the declarative sections rather than in the programmatic contents. Promoting recovery in all the region's countries will require adopting a pragmatic approach, especially after the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In the post-pandemic scenario, efforts must be made to ensure that the reopening and operation of schools are based on the principles of sustainability, efficiency and resilience, and to ensure that the carbon footprint of education infrastructure is low or, if possible, neutral. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis and in line with SDG 7, the importance of access to electricity in promoting children's right to education has become evident. Access to clean energy, in addition to mitigating climate change, allows connectivity and access to digital platforms and online resources.

Box 3
2030 Education for Sustainable Development Road Map

As part of education for sustainable development, UNESCO has been working with governments, civil society organizations and academic institutions to promote a holistic and contextualized discussion on global citizenship, to rethink approaches, learning objectives and teaching in formal and non-formal settings, and, on that basis, to strengthen and update strategies to promote and expand the implementation of this type of education based on multifactoral collaborations involving different venues and environments (schools, communities, families) and multiple actors (youth, educators, government leaders, civil society and the private sector, among others).

Along these lines, UNESCO recently launched the Road Map for the 2030 Education for Sustainable Development programme in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2020b). Its main lines of work include empowering and mobilizing young people to actively contribute to the creation of more peaceful and sustainable societies, and so they acquire a sense of responsibility towards our planet for present and future generations in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The road map is supported by the "Education for Sustainable Development: towards achieving the strategic goals of sustainable development" framework (ESD 2030), approved by the UNESCO member States in 2019 (UNESCO, 2019).

Education for sustainable development can also be a key vector for raising the awareness of new generations and encouraging the adoption of new lifestyles. One example of the transformative potential of this type of education is its ability to create a new culture of consumption by changing current unsustainable production and consumption patterns and encouraging the adoption of lifestyles that promote sustainability.

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap*, Paris, 2020; "Framework for the implementation of education for sustainable development (ESD) beyond 2019", Resolution No. 40 C/14, Paris, 2019.

To summarize this section, although the region has made significant progress in terms of education coverage at different levels, there are still gaps in terms of progression, completion and quality that particularly affect excluded groups and hinder the achievement of SDG 4. Likewise, since education is the key to forming new generations that are committed to environmental preservation, further progress must be made with the content of educational curricula in order to incorporate sustainability and the idea of global citizenship.

Young people's learning processes have been tremendously affected by the interruption of studies or the problems of online classes caused by the pandemic crisis. Coupled with the economic crisis that will affect household incomes, this will increase the risk of students dropping out of school, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. Efforts must therefore focus on prioritizing and protecting education budgets and education itself, placing schooling at the centre of the countries' policy and financial responses. Intersectoral and inter-agency collaboration should be promoted to ensure that education equally equips young men and women with the skills and tools that today's world requires, in order to achieve full inclusion in an environment that promotes learning opportunities around education for peace and a culture of non-violence, leaving no one behind.

E. Goal 5: without gender equality there can be no sustainable development

Gender equality and women's autonomy must be at the heart of sustainable development. Empowering adolescent girls and young women and ensuring their economic and physical autonomy and active participation in decision-making has a multiplier effect that helps promote inclusion, economic growth and development throughout the region.

Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme in the 2030 Agenda, but it is also addressed by a specific Goal that involves several of the critical issues concerning the exercise of rights and the inclusion of girls and adolescent, young and adult women throughout the life cycle. In turn, gender-based discrimination deepens the exclusion of young women, as does the intersection between that and other forms of discrimination on the grounds of factors such as ethnic or racial origin, disability status, area of residence, migration status and HIV status.

- **Target 5.2**: Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Violence against women hampers the achievement of the goals of equality, development and peace that are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. It also undermines or prevents the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms and has far-reaching and long-lasting consequences, including repercussions on physical and mental health and even the denial of the right to life itself. Violence against women also has intergenerational consequences, because when women experience violence, their children are also affected or victimized. Indeed, a growing body of scientific evidence indicates that children who have witnessed or directly experienced violence may be at greater risk of becoming perpetrators or victims in adulthood (PAHO, 2014).

The causes of violence against women are largely rooted in social and cultural norms that, in the case of Latin America, were traditionally built on a patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes. Given the devastating effects of violence on women and societies, urgent efforts are needed to raise the visibility of the problem, and to implement prevention initiatives accompanied by victim services and responses. The best way to prevent violence against women is, however, to address its roots and structural causes (UN-Women, 2019).

The data on gender-based violence in Latin America and the Caribbean are not encouraging. According to official information compiled by the ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 4,551 women were killed because they were women in 15 Latin American and 3 Caribbean countries in 2018 (ECLAC, 2019d). Femicide is the murder of a woman because of her gender and constitutes the end of a chain or sequence that entails various forms of violence, ranging from insults, intimidation and threats to sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape (ECLAC, 2018). Non-lethal violence against young women by intimate partners is just as troubling a phenomenon (see figure 19). Data indicate that in half of the countries for which information is available, adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 are the most likely to experience this type of violence. In this case, once again, the intersection between gender and other dimensions —such as ethnicity or race (ECLAC, 2020c) or disability status (UNFPA, 2019a)— can increase the likelihood that an adolescent girl will be a victim of violence.

Figure 19
Latin America and the Caribbean (10 countries): adolescent girls and women aged 15 to 29 who have had intimate partners and have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner in the past 12 months, 2011–2017
(Percentages)
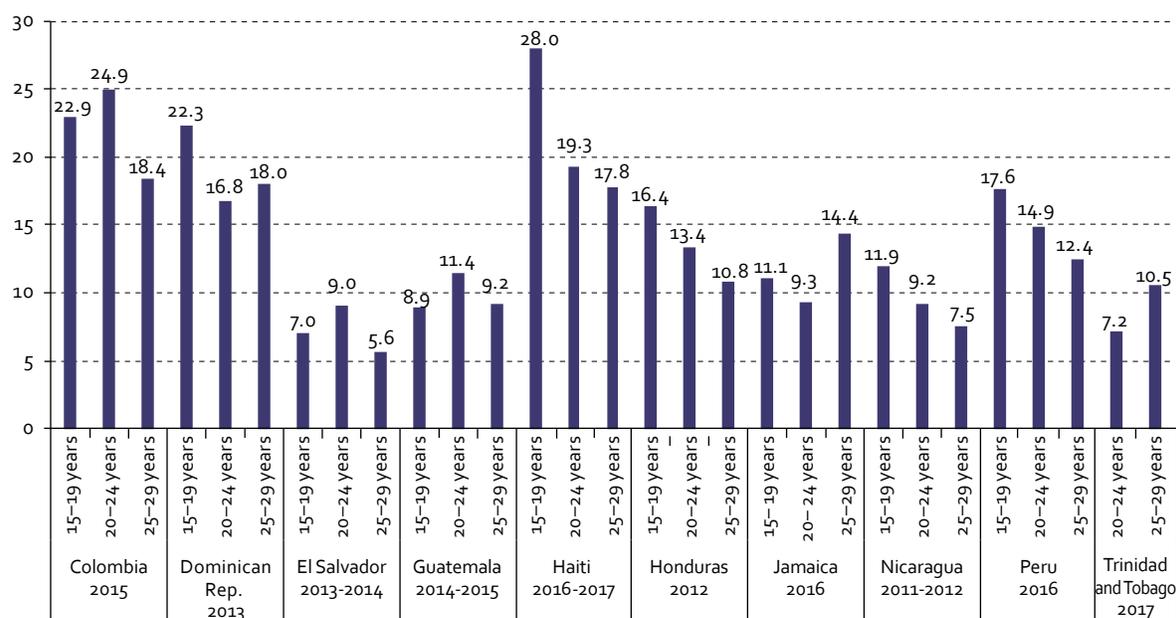
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory data repository [online database] https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.

Box 4
Legislation against femicide

Gender-based violence against women has been acknowledged and prioritized in all the region's countries. This has led to the adoption of comprehensive laws to combat violence, the criminalization of femicide, the establishment of action protocols and frameworks to address cases of violence, the improvement of specialized training services for public officials, the creation of observatories, and the provision of access to justice and reparations for survivors. Between 2014 and 2019, femicide was criminalized in five countries: Ecuador and the Dominican Republic in 2014, Brazil in 2015, Paraguay in 2016 and Uruguay in 2017. In two other countries, laws already punishing the murder of women as aggravated homicide were amended: the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 2014 and Colombia in 2015.

Latin America (18 countries): laws criminalizing femicide, 2007–2017

Country	Name of statute	Year enacted	Crime
Before the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+20) (2013)			
Costa Rica	Law No. 8589	2007	Femicide
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence	2007	Aggravated homicide (partner or ex-partner)
Colombia	Law No. 1257, amending the Penal Code	2008	Aggravated homicide (for being a woman)
Guatemala	Decree No. 22-2008	2008	Femicide
Chile	Law No. 20,480	2008	Femicide
El Salvador	Decree No. 520	2010	Femicide
Argentina	Law No. 26,791	2010	Aggravated homicide
Mexico	Decree amending and expanding various provisions of the Federal Criminal Code, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, the Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration and the Organic Law of the Attorney-General's Office	2012	Femicide
Nicaragua	Law No. 779	2012	Femicide
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Law No. 348	2012	Femicide
Honduras	Decree No. 23–2013	2013	Femicide
Panama	Law No. 82	2013	Femicide
Peru	Law No. 30,068	2013	Femicide
Between Beijing+20 and the 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+25) (2014–2019)			
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Act amending the Organic Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence	2014	Femicide
Ecuador	Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code (COIP)	2014	Femicide
Dominican Republic	Law No. 550	2014	Femicide
Colombia	Law No. 1761, the Rosa Elvira Cely Law	2015	Femicide
Brazil	Law No. 13,104	2015	Femicide
Paraguay	Law No. 5777	2016	Femicide
Uruguay	Law No. 19,538, amending Articles 311 and 312 of the Penal Code	2017	Femicide

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online database] https://oig.cepal.org/en.

- **Target 5.3**: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Early and forced unions of adolescent girls are another manifestation of the gender inequality and rights violations that persist in Latin America and the Caribbean. The historical and cultural roots of child, early and forced marriages and unions in the region are such that they are often taken for granted or considered natural, resulting in the problem's invisibility. Adolescent girls who participate in these marriages and unions already suffer a series of vulnerabilities that lead many of them to see this as a strategy for escaping poverty. Moreover, such marriages and unions are often with older men who are more experienced, better educated and have better economic prospects, resulting in clearly asymmetrical power relations that subordinate the adolescent girls. A lack of autonomy can also limit women's educational, social and economic opportunities, making them dependent on their male partners and reducing their own options. As a result, married adolescent girls may be at greater risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections and HIV, or of having an unplanned or unwanted pregnancy, contributing to the region's high rates of adolescent motherhood. It is also common for these early marriages and unions to be characterized by gender-based violence in the private sphere of the home (UNFPA, 2019b).

Latin America and the Caribbean are the only parts of the world where child marriages have not declined over the last 25 years, and the region reports the second-highest number of teenage pregnancies in the world. In 2017, 23% of the region's women aged between 20 and 24 had already been married or in a union by the age of 18, and 5% by the age of 15. In Brazil, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, one out of every ten women aged 20 to 24 were married or cohabiting by age 15, and in several countries, more than one in four were cohabiting by age 18 (see figure 20).

Figure 20
Latin America and the Caribbean (23 countries): women aged 20 to 24 who were married or in a union at age 15 or 18, 2017
(Percentages)
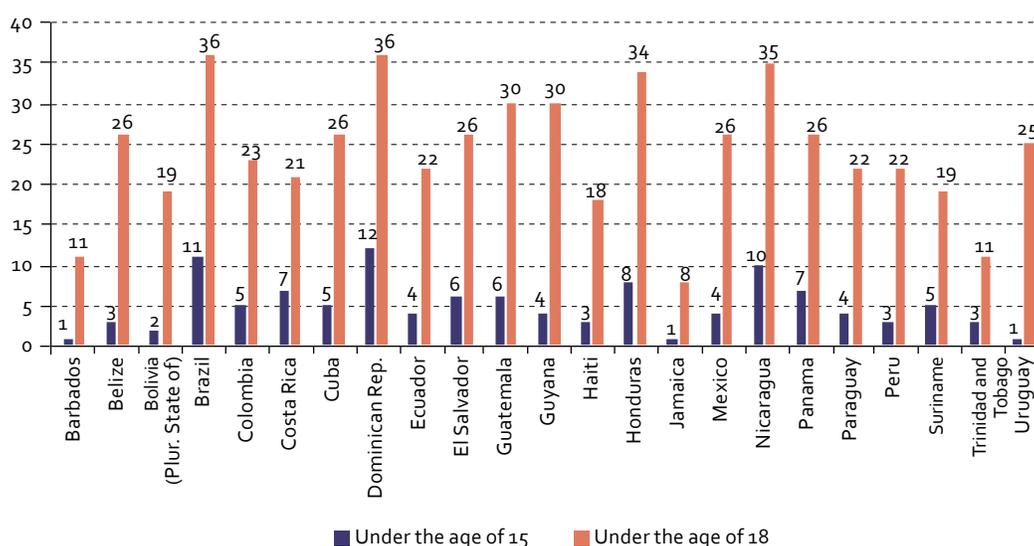
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory data repository [online database] https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.

Efforts to delay marrying ages must be redoubled. Since the majority of girls affected by early marriage come from disadvantaged backgrounds, this undertaking requires examining social and gender inequalities and increasing the opportunities available to vulnerable women. Because union or marriage is in some cases the result of adolescent pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health services for adolescent girls must also be strengthened so they can prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Box 5
Joint Inter-Agency Programme to End Child Marriage and Early Unions
in Latin America and the Caribbean

Since 2017, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have been jointly implementing a regional programme in Latin America and the Caribbean with the aim of ensuring that today's girls, who will be adults in 2030, have the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

The goal of this initiative is to promote regional and national actions to prevent child marriage and early unions by expanding girls' choices and promoting gender equality through access to key public services and the implementation of measures in the areas of education, protection and social inclusion. The programme also works for the design of policies, programmes and legislation aimed at ending the practice.

The initiative seeks to meet the needs of married girls and emphasizes reaching the most vulnerable, including those from indigenous, rural and low-income households.

Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "A commitment to end child marriage and early unions" [online] https://www.unicef.org/lac/media/4046/file/PDF%20Folleto%20Matrimonio%20infantil%20y%20uniones%20tempranas%20ING.pdf.

- **Target 5.4**: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

The current distribution of responsibilities for paid work and care work is highly unbalanced, with the latter falling mainly on women, most of whom perform those tasks on an unpaid basis. Despite its importance, care work continues to be invisible, underappreciated and neglected in the design of economic and social policies in Latin America and the Caribbean (UN-Women/ECLAC, 2020). This overload of unpaid domestic and care work limits the opportunities for adolescent girls and young women to engage in other activities: studying, paid work, socializing, acquiring other skills or, in general, pursuing their life plans.

The confinements and social distancing measures adopted to contain the spread of COVID-19 have led to a sharp reduction in formal and informal care arrangements (the former including paid domestic work and early-learning centres, caregiving and care for dependent persons, and the latter including support from relatives, neighbours and the like). In this context, the longer time spent at home and the greater number of activities carried out there have exponentially increased care work while maintaining the unequal distribution of the burden, which falls mainly on women (UN-Women/ECLAC, 2020). Information gathered by the United Nations from an online survey indicates that young people's participation in domestic work has increased: the highest proportion of people reporting an increase was among young women and those aged between 20 and 24 (see figure 21).

The COVID-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the central importance of care and has underscored the unsustainable way in which it is currently organized. Building comprehensive care systems, in addition to being a central factor in attaining gender equality and women's empowerment and autonomy, is a key element in promoting socioeconomic recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic (UN-Women/ECLAC, 2020).

Figure 21
Latin America and the Caribbean (39 countries and territories):[a] young people aged 15 to 29 responding that their involvement in household chores increased during lockdown, by age group and sex, 2020
(Percentages)
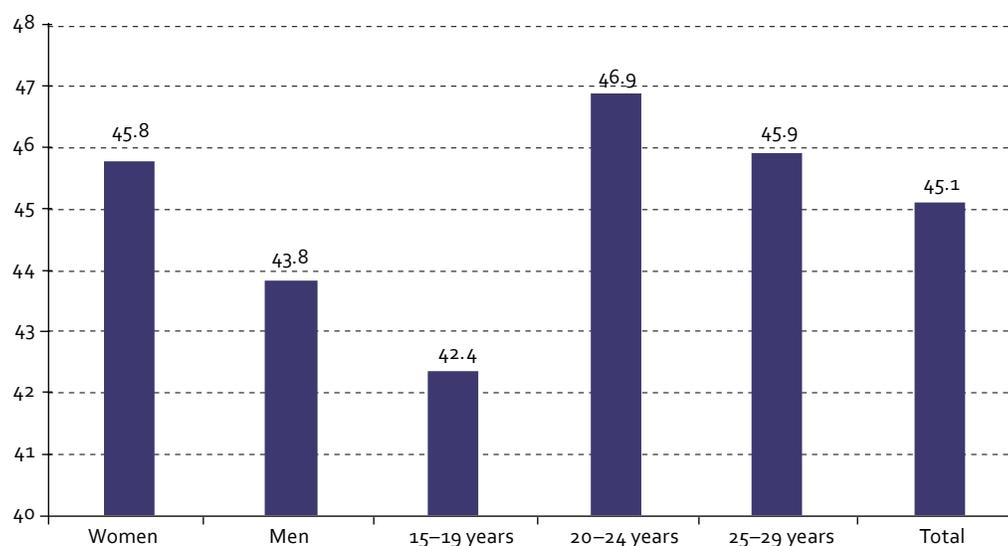
Source: Working Group on Youth of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean, *United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic* (LC/TS.2021/68), Santiago, United Nations, 2021.
Note: The question was "About your participation in domestic work in your house during confinement."
a   The countries and territories included are Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States Virgin Islands and Uruguay.

- **Target 5.6**: Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential for adolescents and young people to be able to develop without coercion, violence or discrimination, recognizing the body as a place of experience, activity and relationship. For more than a decade, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have been promoting laws and programmes to guarantee the provision of comprehensive health services. While significant progress has been achieved, the efforts made to date have not adequately addressed the needs of certain vulnerable adolescent populations (UNFPA, 2019c; UNICEF, 2016). These violations of young people's right to sexual and reproductive health can be clearly seen in the high rates of adolescent motherhood prevalent in the region, although some countries posted a marked decline between 2000 and 2016 (see figure 22). In most Latin American and Caribbean countries, the adolescent motherhood rate exceeds the global average (50 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19). In addition, this phenomenon is clearly stratified by ethnicity and race, geographical location and socioeconomic level. According to a report prepared by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2013), one cause for particular concern is that Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world where the number of girls under 15 giving birth increased between 2000 and 2016.

Figure 22
Latin America and the Caribbean (30 countries): adolescent fertility rate, 2000 and 2016
(Number of births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19)
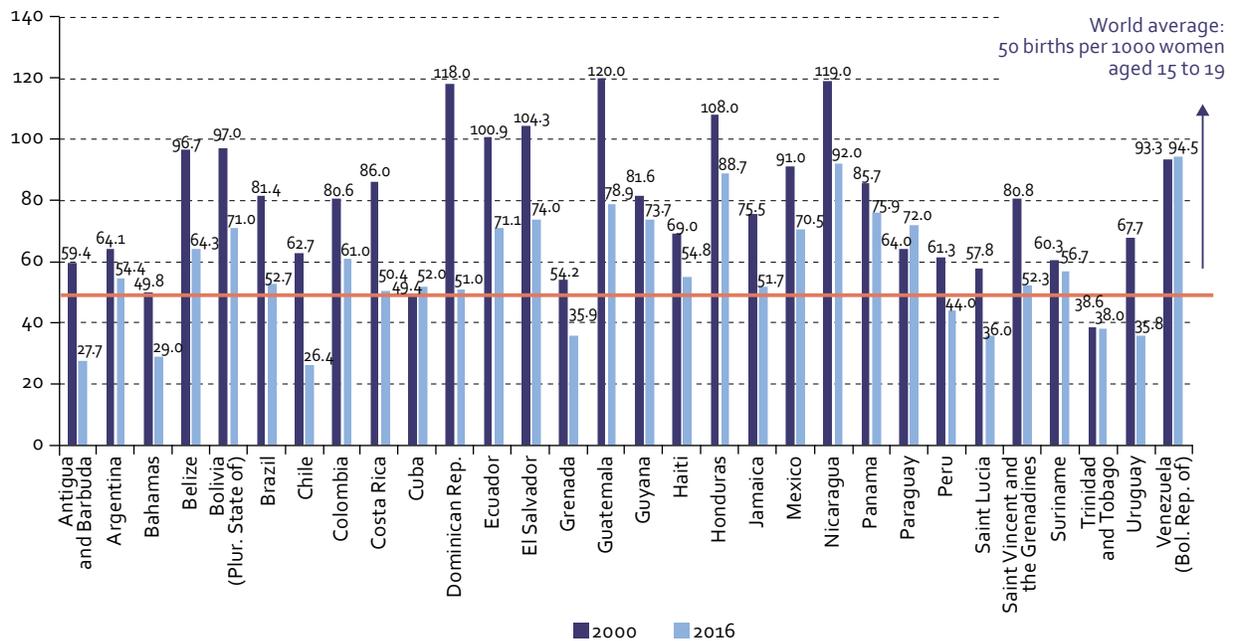
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory data repository [online database] https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy*, New York, 2013.

Box 6
Comprehensive sexuality education

Comprehensive sexuality education is an approach to sex education that is based on human rights and gender equality and involves pedagogical interventions both in and out of school. It aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to acquire a positive view of sexuality as part of their emotional and social development (UNFPA and others, 2018).

Comprehensive sexuality education fosters the acquisition of life skills that enable informed and healthy decision-making and contributes to the promotion of critical thinking, active citizenship that respects human rights and the construction of a more egalitarian society.

The implementation of comprehensive sexuality education involves a process of teaching and learning based on a curriculum designed according to the age and development of the target group, as well as to the institutional, socioeconomic and cultural context in which it is deployed.

The scientific evidence about comprehensive sexuality education provided both in and out of school suggests that it has multiple positive effects on young people. On the one hand, it helps increase adolescents' knowledge about different aspects of sexuality, to reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections and to improve sexual and reproductive health by promoting thoughtful and informed decisions that lead to a delayed start of sexual activity or to greater use of contraceptives. On the other hand, it also contributes to the construction of more egalitarian attitudes, behaviours, norms and knowledge in relation to gender and to the prevention of gender-based and intimate partner violence (UNESCO, 2015 and 2018).

Source: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and others, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-informed Approach*, Panama City, 2018; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "How data and ICT can be effective allies to prevent youth violence in the Northern Central American countries", *Policy Briefs UNESCO*, Montevideo, 2018; *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives*, Paris, 2015.

Discussions on teenage pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean and how to address this challenge require a broader examination of gender equality and of educational and employment opportunities for young women from vulnerable households. In turn, while the phenomenon of adolescent motherhood obeys a range of factors, including socioeconomic and cultural considerations, the lack of comprehensive education about sexuality and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services also plays an important role. Accordingly, the high percentage of married or cohabiting adolescents who do not use modern contraception methods may increase the rate of unintended pregnancies (see figure 23). In fact, nearly one third of young women wishing to avoid pregnancy do not use any method of birth control to prevent it (UNFPA, 2013).

Figure 23
Latin America and the Caribbean (19 countries): modern contraceptive use among married or cohabiting women aged 15 to 19, 2008–2018
(Percentages)
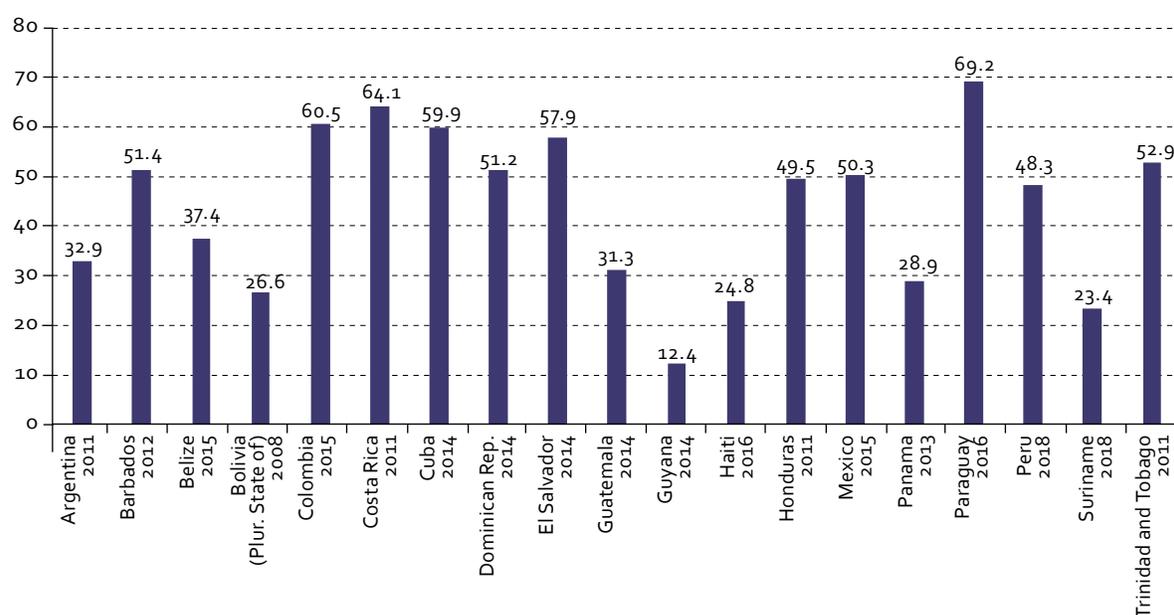
Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory data repository [online database] https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main; Health Equity Monitor [online database] https://www.who.int/data/gho/health-equity.

It is important to bear in mind that some groups of young people are particularly excluded from and unable to access sexual and reproductive health education and services, including LGBTQI youth, young people living with HIV, young persons with disabilities, young migrants, young people outside the education system and young people living on the streets.

In conclusion, this section has cast light on the situation of the region's young people with regard to gender gaps in different areas. Measures to protect women and girls from violence clearly need to be strengthened. To this end, the causes of their vulnerability must be addressed, together with the manifestations of that vulnerability that could deepen their exclusion, such as teenage pregnancy, lack of sex education, marriages and unions during childhood, or the overload of domestic chores that can prevent women from performing paid work and perpetuate their situation of vulnerability.

Box 7
Legislation and policies for gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women

The most recent comprehensive review of the region's legislation and policies for gender equality and female empowerment, including young women and girls, was carried out on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Within that framework, national reports on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were produced in 27 of the region's countries. Based on those 27 national reports, ECLAC and UN-Women prepared and published the *Regional report on the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin American and Caribbean countries, 25 years on* (ECLAC, 2019c).

The regional report identifies a series of priorities on which the region's countries have focused their efforts to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, taking into account their different social, political and economic contexts. Specifically, the following national priority areas were identified: (i) the elimination of violence against women and girls, with reference to non-discriminatory legislation, access to justice and progress in the formulation and adoption of laws and regulations criminalizing femicide, (ii) women's political participation and representation, as well as women's participation in the exercise of power and decision-making, and (iii) women's involvement in the economy, especially as regards their labour rights and the redistribution of care work as an integral part of the design of social protection systems.

The report recognizes important progress in those three areas, but also important gender gaps. Moreover, those gaps are even more pronounced for groups of women in the region who face multiple forms of discrimination and inequalities, particularly indigenous, rural, Afrodescendent, migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, on the move and disabled girls, adolescents and young women, together with other groups such as LGBTQI people. Those inequalities and discrimination must be addressed from a cross-cutting perspective; hence the vital importance of creating and analysing indicators that are disaggregated by a set of variables to allow the situations of women facing intersecting forms of discrimination to be determined. Producing and systematizing those disaggregated indicators is necessary to improve the design of public policies and make progress with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Regional report on the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin American and Caribbean countries, 25 years on* (LC/CRM.14/4), Santiago, 2019.

F. Goal 6: access to basic services is an outstanding debt owed to young people in poor households and rural areas

The environment and physical surroundings in which the region's young people live are a key determinant of their physical and mental health. Air quality and access to clean water and sanitation are fundamental to the development of human capabilities, as they promote health and good nutrition, which can in turn have a positive impact on school attendance, increase productivity and promote well-being.

- **Target 6.1**: By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.

Disparities in access to safe drinking water can exacerbate inequalities in the right to health and adequate nutrition, in addition to income gaps, rural-urban imbalances and gender inequalities, since the task of fetching water often falls on girls, adolescent girls and young women, which constrains the time they have for other activities. In the context of the pandemic, the availability of and access to water, sanitation and hygiene services has proved critical to combating the virus and preserving people's health and well-being.

Between 2002 and 2018, adequate access to safe drinking water increased among young people in both urban and rural areas. The pace of improvement stalled after 2014, however, particularly in urban areas and, according to 2018 data, one out of every four young people in rural areas still lack adequate access to drinking water (see figure 24). In addition to young people in rural areas, a greater proportion of those living in informal settlements in peri-urban areas, those living on the streets, migrants and refugees may also lack adequate access to drinking water.

Figure 24
Latin America (17 countries):[a] young people aged 15 to 29 with adequate access to drinking water, by area of residence, 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
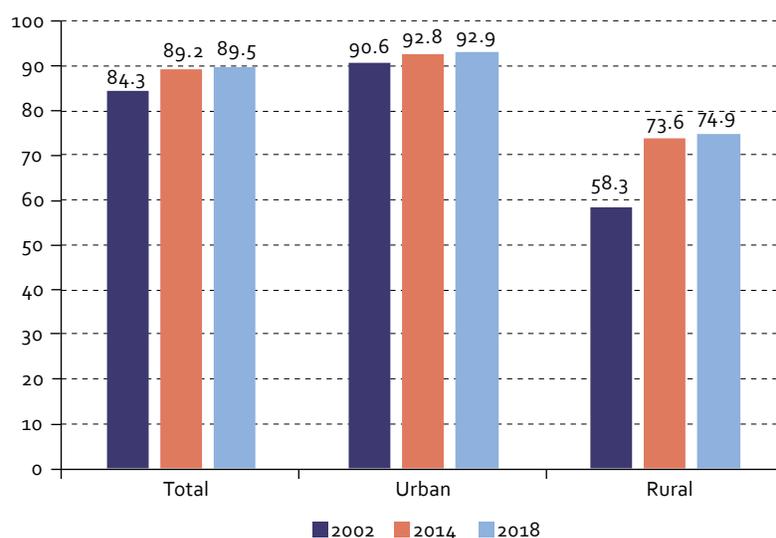
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a]   The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay. In the case of Argentina and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the data correspond only to urban areas, and the same is true of the Uruguay data for 2002. The 2002 figures do not include data for Colombia.

- **Target 6.2**: By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

In addition to drinking water, access to sanitation is an essential service for the population's healthy development. The period from 2002 to 2018 also saw improvements with this indicator: in 2002, just over half of the region's young people had adequate access to sanitation, but by 2018, the proportion had risen to three out of every four. The increase was particularly noticeable among young people in rural areas: the proportion rose from just over two out of ten to over six out of ten. Between 2014 and 2018 the pace of progress slowed, however, and there is still a long way to go to reach the target of universal access set by SDG 6 (see figure 25).

Figure 25
Latin America (17 countries):[a] young people aged 15 to 29 with adequate access to sanitation, 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
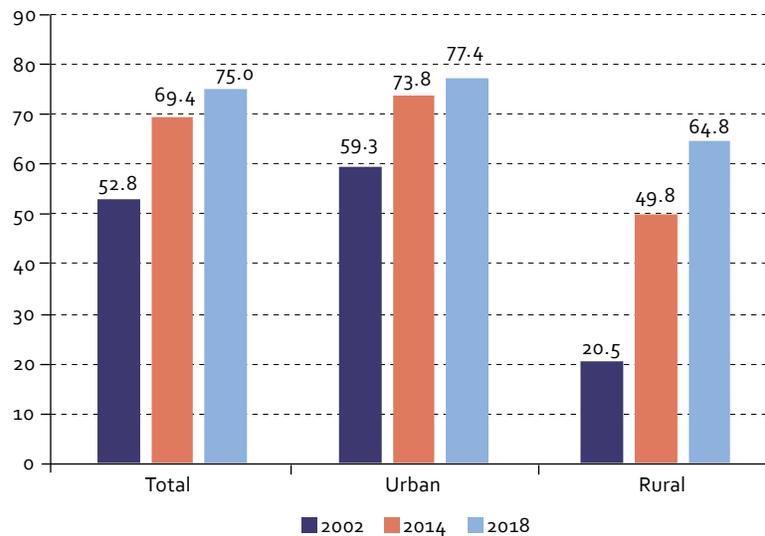
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a] The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay. In the case of Argentina and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the data correspond only to urban areas, and the same is true of the Uruguay data for 2002. The 2002 figures do not include data from Colombia, Costa Rica or Mexico.

G. Goal 8: decent work is one of the keys to building inclusive paths ahead for young people and has a long-term impact that transcends generations; however, there are obstacles that could be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic

Decent work is one of the keys to the inclusion of young people, as it facilitates access to social protection and stable incomes that allow basic needs to be met, while at the same time promoting autonomy and the construction of upward trajectories of social mobility. Work is also associated with the construction of identity and can be a source of self-esteem and a venue for acquiring socio-emotional skills.

- **Target 8.5**: By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

In general, although young people have higher levels of education than older persons, they report worse labour market indicators in terms of incomes, job stability, access to social protection and informality. For instance, according to ILO (2019), informal jobs account for 67.5% of youth employment. This dissonance between educational attainment and labour market outcomes is particularly evident among young women, whose educational attainment is now superior to that of their male peers but whose unemployment rates are markedly higher: in 2018, one out of every four young women aged 15 to 19 was unemployed and, among young women aged 20 to 24, the figure was close to one in five (see figure 26). In addition to women, other specific youth sectors face different challenges in securing decent employment: those with disabilities, for example, and those facing other types of exclusion and discrimination, such as young people living with HIV and indigenous, Afrodescendent and LGBTQI youth. After the steep drop reported in youth unemployment between 2002 and 2014, there was an increase in 2018 that is likely to worsen during and after the pandemic.

Figure 26
Latin America (18 countries):[a] unemployment rates by sex and age group, 2002, 2014 and 2018
(Percentages)
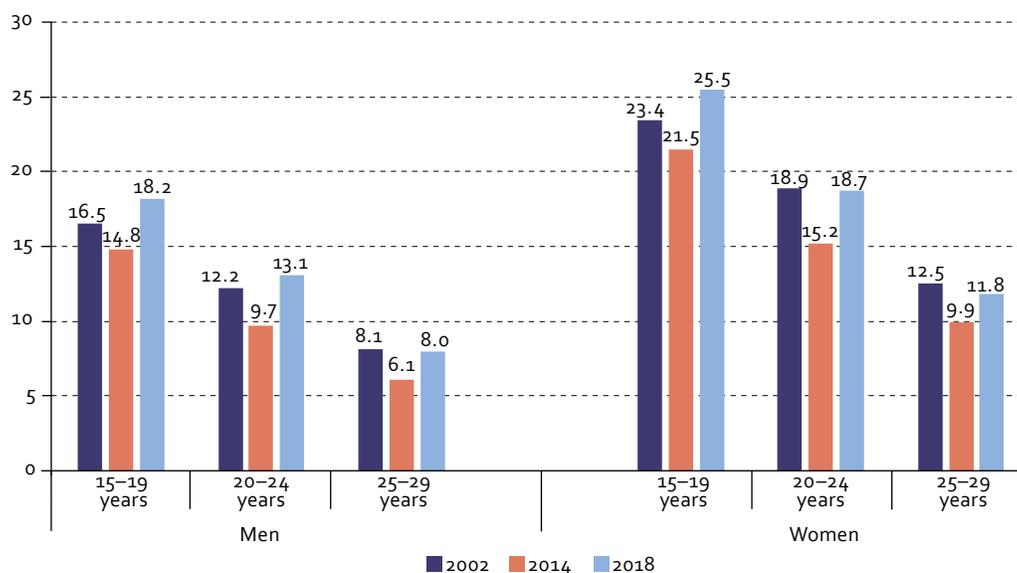
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a] The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

The employment challenges that young people face are also pronounced in rural areas. Young people —and, most particularly, young women— account for the largest group of rural dwellers who are outside the workforce. In second place are agricultural workers, mostly men and wage earners, closely followed —with only a few percentage points difference— by those working in a wide range of non-agricultural subsectors, many of whom are waged. Most agricultural job opportunities occur in the informal sector (especially for women), are of short duration (seasonal or harvest work, for example) and do not allow upward career paths. Job prospects in rural areas are therefore very limited and many young people want to migrate to the cities because of the lack of options. However, a review of the few programmes aimed at rural youth and rural youth groups' demands reveal that they are focused on self-employment, essentially in agriculture (which is related to the demand for land) and on non-agricultural (micro-) business ventures, notably those linked to agricultural processing and marketing or tourism (FAO, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly escalated into an unprecedented economic crisis with a devastating and disproportionate impact on young workers. According to ILO, the pandemic will have a triple negative impact on young people: not only is it destroying their jobs, but it is also disrupting their education and training and placing major obstacles in the way of those seeking to enter the labour market or change jobs (ILO, 2020). The precariousness of young people's work is also likely to push many into informality, particularly those in vulnerable situations, which may permanently alter their employment paths. According to the results of the online survey, 16% of the respondents said they had lost their jobs or had their contracts temporarily suspended or their working hours reduced. Among young people, almost all the employment losses caused by COVID-19 are due to rising inactivity rather than unemployment: many young people who were looking for work stopped searching, or those who were about to enter the labour market delayed their decision to do so (ILO, 2021).

• **Target 8.6**: By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

SDG 8 also makes explicit reference to young people not in the labour market, education or training. It recognizes the difficulties involved in making the transition between education and work, as well as the multiple exclusions that this poses for people in that situation and the lost opportunities for a country's progress that this entails.

Changes in the lives of the region's young people have made the transition from education to employment more complex and less linear than in the past. The diversity of situations and characteristics of young people and their environments generates a diversity of trajectories and transitions in which young people frequently enter and exit the education system and the labour market, or sometimes are in both at the same time. Some factors influencing these transformations are related to changes in fertility patterns and family structures, as well as to the fact that the coverage of education systems has expanded considerably and that demand from productive sectors has become more dynamic and global, requiring ongoing training processes (ECLAC, 2019b).

The phenomenon of people who neither work nor study is considerably more common among young women than among their male counterparts (see figure 27). In 2018, the percentage of women in this situation was more than double that of men at all stages in life, despite the fact that since 2002 the indicator has been falling for women and rising for men.

This gender gap, which is reproduced throughout the life cycle, is largely explained by the absence of care policies and systems, by teenage pregnancy, by the unequal distribution of unpaid and care work between men and women, by the failure to recognize the economic value of this type of work and by the barriers that this imposes on women's entry into the labour market and thus on their economic autonomy. In this context, responses must be devised to young people's need to reconcile work, studies and family and personal life by strengthening policies and integrated care systems.

Figure 27
**Latin America (18 countries):[a] people neither studying nor employed in the labour market,
by age group and sex, 2002, 2014 and 2018**
(Percentages)
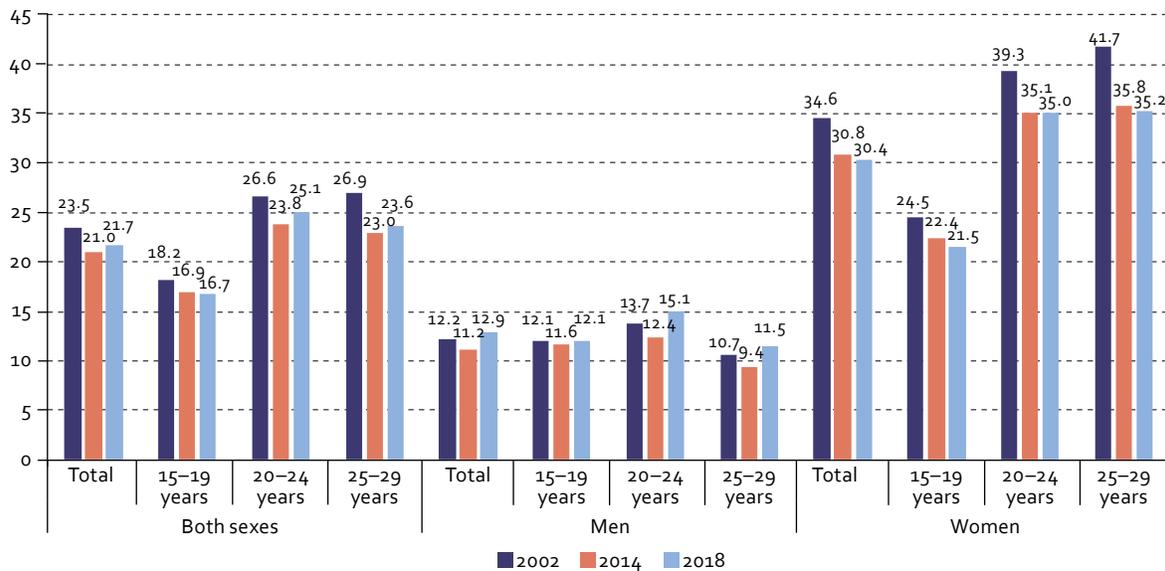
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).
[a]   The countries included are Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

In Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole, young people who are neither in education nor employed in the labour market account for approximately 58.1% of rural youth outside the workforce (Dirven, 2016). This situation is also more common among young people of African descent than among their non-Afrodescendent counterparts (ECLAC, 2020c), and young indigenous women are also particularly affected (ECLAC, 2017).

Thus, an analysis of SDG 8 and of some of its targets highlights the need to continue adopting further measures for the gains obtained by broadening educational opportunities to translate into a real improvement in young people's quality of life. This requires establishing conditions that allow them access to decent work and placing special emphasis on the most excluded groups, such as women and rural youth.

H. Goal 10: the inequalities affecting youth are unjust, concatenate throughout life and have an intergenerational impact

Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest levels of income inequality in the world (UNDP, 2019), and many young people in the region are excluded from progress and systematically left behind. Their potential to exercise their rights and live in safety and dignity continues to depend largely on where they live, their household income, and their race, ethnic or national origin, disability status or gender (UNFPA, 2019c). As illustrated throughout this chapter, these inequalities are multiple and interlinked throughout the life cycle, resulting in long-term experiences of exclusion that are reproduced across generations.

- **Target 10.2**: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

The 2030 Agenda's call for no one to be left behind on the path to development is an acknowledgement that millions of people, including many young people, have been left behind, even at times of economic expansion in the region. At this complex and uncertain juncture, this call is of even greater relevance and centrality for recovery efforts, as youth is a time when gaps in inclusion that have been carried over from childhood can be closed. If this is not done, without active policies aimed at breaking down the barriers that affect certain groups of young people —such as those from poor or poverty-vulnerable households, those in rural areas, indigenous and Afrodescendent people, those living with HIV, migrants, LGBTQI people and those with disabilities— those gaps can deepen and inequality can be transmitted across generations. Consideration must also be given to the intersection between exclusion and discrimination, and to the multiple and simultaneous experiences of those phenomena that affect, for example, young indigenous women in rural areas or gay men in marginalized urban areas. Attention must also be paid to how those experiences alter life trajectories.

Young people experience the inequality of our societies on a daily basis, and so it is not surprising that they feel they live in an unjust society. Thus, their negative perception of income distribution in their countries is unequivocal: almost three out of every four young people in the region say that income distribution is unfair or very unfair (see figure 28). In some countries —such as Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile and El Salvador— the figure exceeds 80%.

Figure 28
Latin America (18 countries): opinion of young people aged 15 to 25 regarding how fair income distribution is in their countries, 2018
(Percentages)
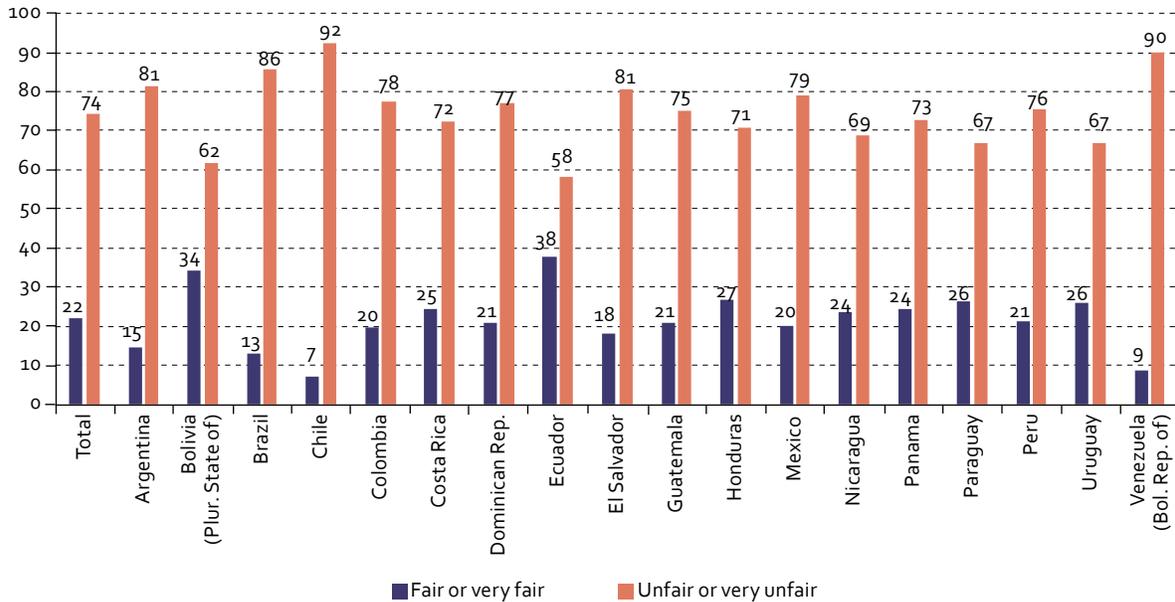
Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of Latinobarómetro Corporation, *Informe 2018*, Santiago, 2018.
Note: The figures given do not add up to 100% because "Don't know" or "No answer" responses were not plotted.

Young people's negative perceptions of income distribution are not only their way of acknowledging the culture of privilege that prevails in the region and the unequal opportunities they have when it comes to implementing their life plans; they also reflect something much deeper: feelings of social malaise that corrode the fabric of societies and weaken institutions and democracy. If governments are unable to contain the economic and social impact of the pandemic, or to strengthen or modernize the functioning of institutions to rebuild with greater equity and include young people by providing them with opportunities to express themselves, participate and influence public policies, these feelings of unease and injustice may swell and become a destabilizing factor.

I. Goal 16: peace, justice and security are necessary conditions for youth inclusion and development; eradicating violence against young people is essential for progress towards sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda offers an opportunity to promote, in a holistic way, the integration and prioritization of youth in a context of peace, justice and security. This is set out in SDG 16, which promotes inclusive and accountable democratic governance.

Against that backdrop, the region's current peacebuilding and peacekeeping agenda addresses such issues as the inclusion of women and young people, and the incorporation of an intersectionality approach in conflict prevention, humanitarian action, situations of human mobility, climate change, disaster risks, public health problems (Security Council, 2020) and the fight against organized crime and human trafficking, as well as the creation of safe and enabling environments for women and youth working to build and maintain peace and to defend human rights (Security Council, 2019). Latin American and Caribbean youth inhabit societies marked by various forms of violence that impact the possibilities for

inclusion, development and collective construction that would enable them to transform their realities. That violence is the legacy of historical processes such as colonization, the slave trade, wars and civil conflicts, authoritarian governments and a male-dominated culture: all phenomena in which violence has become assimilated as a mechanism for domination and conflict resolution. Violence is a complex, multidimensional and multicausal phenomenon based on power dynamics and hierarchies. It is exercised in various forms and places and has both objective and subjective expressions; thus, it is difficult to quantify and summarize the situation of violence affecting young people with a limited set of indicators (ECLAC, 2020c).

Box 8
Security Council resolutions and youth

On 9 December 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2250. In that resolution, for the first time ever, young people are recognized as key actors who should be involved in peace and security processes, highlighting the positive role they can play in conflict resolution, violence prevention, and peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

Subsequently, and as a result of an inclusive and participatory research process, the report *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security* was presented in early 2018. This study, which was mandated by resolution 2250, sets out a series of recommendations for harnessing and supporting young people's contributions to peace (UNFPA, 2018).

On 6 June 2018, the Security Council adopted resolution 2419, which calls for increased inclusive representation of young people in conflict prevention and resolution, including in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements, and recognizes the role of youth in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance and dialogue between cultures and religions in order to discourage their involvement in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination.

Resolution 2250 is based on resolution 1325, on women, peace and security, which was adopted on 31 October 2000. The two resolutions establish common basic commitments in the areas of prevention, participation and protection. In addition, resolution 2250 deepens and broadens the call for the inclusion of youth in peace and security processes. Hence, the youth, peace and security agenda proposed in that resolution is also the agenda for young women working for and towards peace.

On 14 July 2020, resolution 2535 was adopted, reaffirming the important and positive contribution youth can make to efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the prevention and resolution of conflicts, urging States to facilitate an inclusive, safe, enabling and gender-responsive environment in which youth actors, including youth from different backgrounds, are recognized and provided with adequate support and protection to implement violence prevention activities and support social cohesion, and recognizing that young people's meaningful engagement in humanitarian planning and response is essential to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and that young people play a unique role in strengthening national, local and community-based capacities in conflict and post-conflict situations to prepare for and respond to increasingly frequent and severe weather events and natural disasters, as well as to public health challenges that affect young people's life and their future, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: G. Simpson, *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), New York, 2018.

Youth involvement in situations of violence is due to socioeconomic polarization, neglect by the State (infrastructure, public services), frustration with job opportunities, a lack of a sense of belonging, institutional disengagement and other factors (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015). Notwithstanding the range of factors that expose young people to situations of violence, whether as victims or perpetrators, exclusion is the one common denominator. In some contexts, participation in criminal groups can be an alternative form of inclusion that provides young people with a sense of belonging and identity in societies that are already divided, that reject and exclude them, that lack mechanisms to channel their demands and interests and that do not offer economic opportunities or empowerment (United Nations, 2020a).

 "The pandemic in Brazil did not start in 2020. Between 2001 and 2018, around 140,000 children and adolescents aged 19 and under were killed with firearms in Brazil, and 70% of them were black. Today, according to UNICEF data, my country has the highest child and adolescent homicide rate in the world. So, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, we were already facing a pandemic of homicides in Brazil defined by colour, class and age."

Source: Renata Brasileiro, member of ¡Juventudes YA!, remarks at the side event "Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean: the key for recovery and achievement of Agenda 2030", fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, March 2021.

In the digital age, the violence that affects young people can take other forms. According to the latest data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), nearly 70% of the world's young people have an Internet connection, accounting for a quarter of the total number of Internet users (ITU, 2018). In the Americas, 65.9% of the population are Internet users, and 88.4% of them are young people between the ages of 15 and 24 (OAS, 2018). Digital environments undoubtedly provide venues for violence (sexting, grooming and cyberbullying, for example) but, at the same time, they offer forums for the production and exchange of knowledge, as well as for youth participation and empowerment. Digital technologies can be a tool for preventing youth violence if they are used to design and manage prevention policies, to implement application-based strategies and awareness-raising campaigns and, of course, to foster the acquisition of skills for training and labour insertion. Achieving this requires tools to prevent violence and promote security within a framework of respect for human rights (UNESCO, 2018).

- **Target 16.1**: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

Lethal violence against young people can occur in the context of a continuum of violence, and it represents the culmination of various forms of the phenomenon to which young people may be exposed in different settings (UNODC, 2019). Globally, the highest youth homicide rates are found in the Americas (UNODC, 2019): 67 adolescents are victims of homicide every day, five times the global rate.[2]

The high homicide rates among young men in Latin America and the Caribbean must be interpreted in the light of several factors, including gang-related violence and organized crime, both of which are prevalent in the region and —notably, but not exclusively— in Central America: in Brazil, this situation has a particular impact on young people of African descent (see PRVL (2017)).

The proliferation of gang-related lethal violence affecting young people has become a growing problem over the past two decades, particularly in certain Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras). The data show that the youth homicide rate in the countries of the region has evolved unequally: in some countries it has increased, while it has declined in others (see figure 29). Particularly notable are some of the Caribbean islands and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, where there has been a significant increase in youth homicide rates over the past decade.

In the case of young women, domestic and intimate partner violence can culminate in femicide, which is often linked to violence from intimate partners or family members, organized crime, public insecurity, unsafe migration by women and structural discrimination against women and girls. The data on female homicides, however, show two major differences from the trend observed among men. First, homicide rates among young women are markedly lower, which indicates that meeting the ideal of masculinity results in greater violence among young men. Second, with the exception of Mexico, there was little change in the homicide rate among young women during the period under review, even in the countries that lead the table for young male homicides (see figure 30). Despite this, the Latin American and Caribbean region accounts for 14 of the 25 countries with the highest number of femicides in the world. While not all cases of gender-based violence result in femicide, which is its most extreme expression, it is estimated that one out of every three women in the world suffers sexual or physical violence, and that situation has worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNFPA, 2020).

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[2]   See: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "End violence: Protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse" [online] https://www.unicef.org/lac/poner-fin-la-violencia.

Figure 29
Latin America and the Caribbean (25 countries): homicide rate among men aged 15 to 29,
around 2007 and around 2017
(Number of deaths per 100,000 inhabitants)
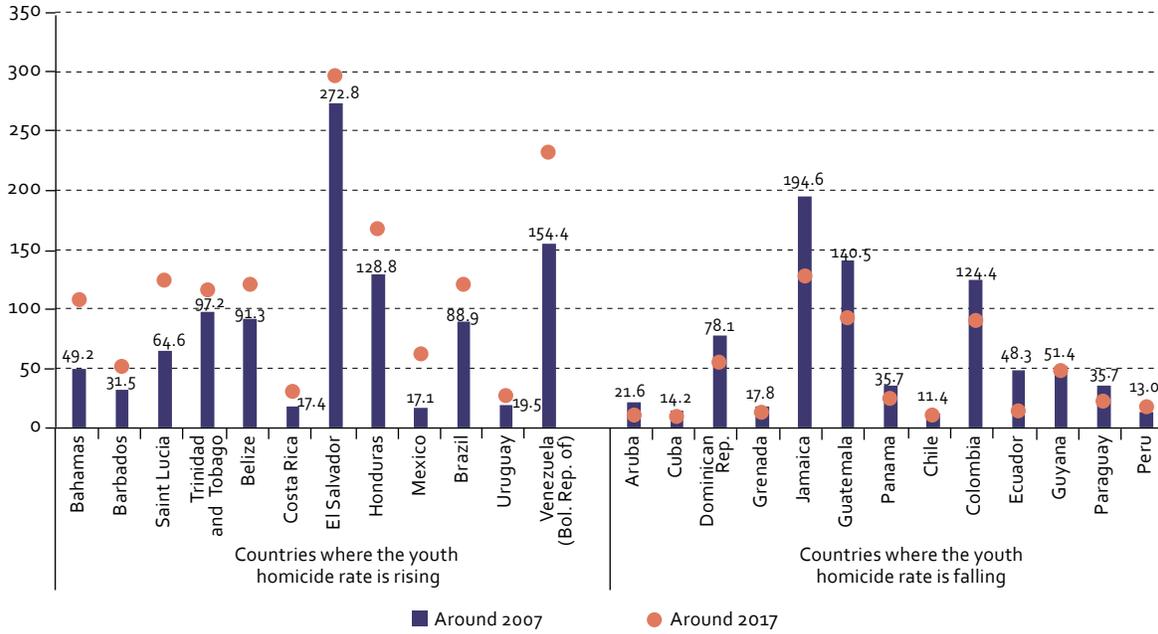
Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), DATAUNODC [online database]
https://dataunodc.un.org/.

Figure 30
Latin America and the Caribbean (23 countries): homicide rate among women aged 15 to 29,
around 2007 and around 2017
(Number of deaths per 100,000 inhabitants)
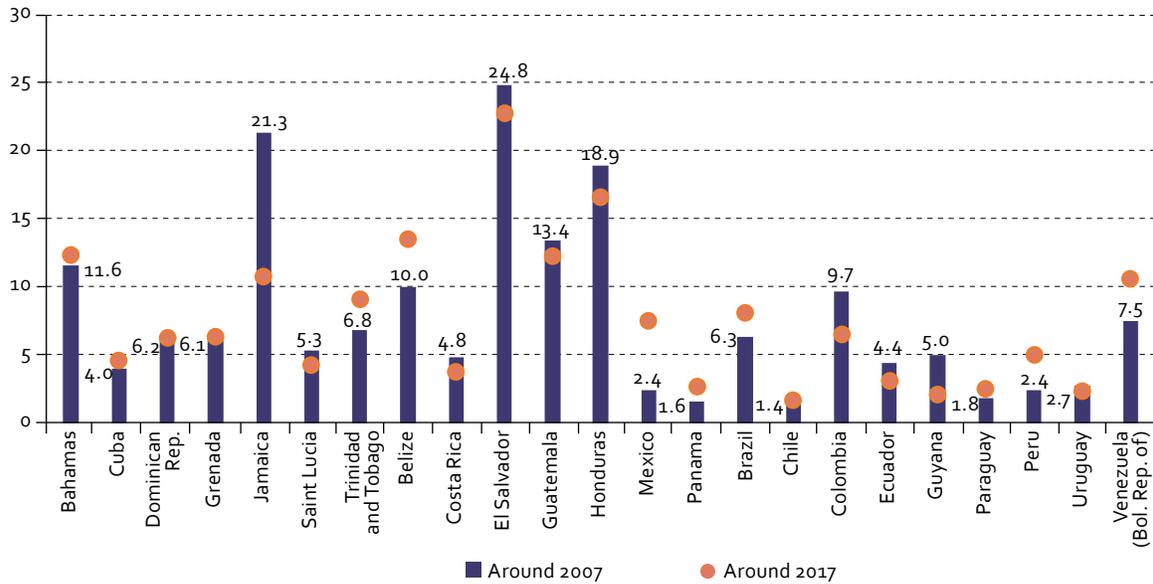
Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), DATAUNODC [online database]
https://dataunodc.un.org/.

Over and above the differences by sex, the region's homicide rates are an alarmingly clear indicator of the intersection of racial, age and gender inequalities. The high rates of violence against young people of African descent in some of the region's countries are clear expressions of racism; and, in turn, the concentration of some manifestations of this phenomenon among young men reflects the prejudices and stereotypes that characterize them as violent individuals, when in most cases they tend to be the victims (ECLAC, 2020c).

Addressing this complex phenomenon requires adopting a holistic perspective that takes into account the various economic, political, sociocultural, educational and public health dimensions that underlie it. Multidisciplinary community-based programmes must be implemented that aim to limit the availability of firearms and promote the integral development of young people by providing educational and mental health support opportunities and promoting initiatives to improve their prospects for education, training and employment. In the Latin American and Caribbean context, mention must be made of the work that women's and youth organizations have pursued in the areas of disarmament, arms control and the transition from military spending to social investment.

The challenge is enormous, since violence conditions civic participation: not only because of what it means to live in contexts where life is at risk on a daily basis, but also because the fear that breeds in such environments prevents the strengthening of social cohesion and therefore hinders the construction of the collective dimension on which participation is based. Hence, the prevalence of safe spaces conducive to a culture of peace and integral personal development is one of the determinants of effective democratic governance. When people grow and develop in safe spaces throughout the life cycle, the principles of coexistence and respect for others are structured in natural forms of relationship and consolidate a culture in which peace is recognized and valued, and this then leads to forms of social interaction and civic expression that favour sustainable development. Accordingly, violence attacks one of the principles of democratic governance, and efforts must be made to publicize those experiences in which youth sectors themselves have been involved in conflict resolution and to learn from them.

> "What do we mean when we talk about participation? Despite the context and the stigma, young people are driving social and transformative changes in our environments, our communities and our municipalities throughout the country and the region. The region's youth is at the forefront of innovative entrepreneurship initiatives, promoting new ways to ensure participation by all and the construction of societies that leave no one behind to and make progress towards a more just, sustainable and egalitarian world."
>
> Source: Eliany Barralaga, Concausa Network, remarks at the side event "Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean: the key for recovery and achievement of Agenda 2030", fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, March 2021.

Volunteerism plays a crucial role in promoting justice, protection and conflict prevention. Volunteers raise awareness about peace and development, work on peaceful conflict resolution and can be strong advocates for the social cohesion that leads to community reconciliation. Evidence shows that as part of efforts to maintain peace and prevent conflict, volunteerism can contribute to building trust and social cohesion in communities. In Colombia in 2016, the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) implemented the "Volunteering for Peace" initiative to strengthen the capacities and awareness of youth volunteers and activists regarding the peace process, peace education and reintegration (UNV, 2016). According to the online survey referenced above, 35% of young people reported having taken some action in the context of the pandemic, such as organizing online activities, making donations or participating in civil society activities. Of the survey respondents, 15% said they had personally served as volunteers.

Box 9
Fighting violence in Colombia and on its border

In recent years, the region's young people have pursued numerous efforts and initiatives aimed at preventing violence and promoting peaceful conflict resolution through dialogue. In Colombia, in the framework of the project "Territorial model of guarantees of non-repetition and empowerment of women and young victims of sexual violence and enforced disappearance for their effective access to the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR)", designed with the support of the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), actions have been carried out in the areas of training, advocacy and access to the mechanisms of the Comprehensive System, which was established as part of the implementation of the General Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace in Colombia.

Thanks to the project's training actions, 206 young women and men have acquired deeper knowledge about the mechanisms of citizen participation and the institutional architecture for peace, with a special focus on the entities of the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (the Truth Commission, the Search Unit for Missing Persons and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace). Their skills and leadership have been used to replicate their knowledge at the local level, enabling the consolidation of the youth and peace agendas of the Territorial Development Plan, follow-up on commitments and the promotion of participation by women and young people in development and peacebuilding. Throughout the process, elements have been put in place to promote the participation of women and youth in transitional justice mechanisms.

The "Protective Communities" binational inter-institutional project between Colombia and Ecuador —funded by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and implemented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN-Women— has enabled the strengthening of mechanisms for the prevention and protection of children, adolescents and young people against the dynamics of violence, in order to promote the stabilization of the Colombia–Ecuador borderlands. The project involves 1,500 families, comprising 4,063 women, 3,062 men, 8,250 children, and 5,300 adolescents, most of whom belong to indigenous and Afrodescendent communities.

Notable among the main results of the intergenerational peacebuilding work is the launch of entrepreneurship seedbeds that are connected with local governments and permanent training centres. In addition, a bi-national work methodology called *Recorriendo Caminos* has been designed to promote the empowerment of children, adolescents and young people, as well as their meaningful participation in community development affairs and in the definition of their life projects, away from violence and within a framework of constructing citizenship, coexistence and peace. The basis of the methodology was the best protection experiences that the three agencies identified above had carried out in both countries.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Box 10
A look at youth exposed to violence in Northern Central America, from an approach based on human vulnerability and resilience

This study, published as part of the Infosegura Regional Project, focuses on identifying family, school and community risk factors that significantly limit the capacities and development of young people in Northern Central America, together with protective factors that encourage the development of young people's capacities and their deployment in contexts of resilience. The objective is to determine what factors need to be addressed by public policies in order to put an end to the violence and insecurity that young people experience in their families, schools and communities, to bolster their protection and to eradicate the conditions of vulnerability they face as a result of insecurity and lack of opportunities.

As regards the risk factors, the study notes that "young people living in the countries of Northern Central America face a wide range of adverse events. In addition to aggressions affecting people's physical integrity, which constitute the most lethal expression of violence, there are other types of aggression, such as sexual crimes, robberies or sundry violent acts, which can take place in family, school or community environments" (UNDP/USAID, 2020, p. 11).

The study indicates that according to the data collected, out of a total of 50 protective factors studied, 13 are related to achieving greater resilience. On the basis of those protective factors, targeted public policies can be designed that meet the following requirements:

- Constitute comprehensive interventions of targeted action.
- Are based on detailed analyses of the conditions in each age group and each community, as a basic tool for targeting actions, formulating effective public policies and adequately monitoring and evaluating results.
- Promote systemic and comprehensive actions aimed at the family, the school and the community, involving the participation of multiple actors at different levels.
- Include measures in which the school and the community are considered the main venues for action for promoting change, recognizing that through those areas transformations can be brought about in the most private setting, that of the family.
- Implement measures aimed at achieving short-, medium- and long-term goals in communities affected by violence and insecurity.

Source: United Nations Development Programme/United States Agency for International Development (UNDP/USAID), *Una mirada a las juventudes expuestas a violencia en el norte de Centroamérica desde un enfoque de vulnerabilidad y resiliencia humana*, Panama City, 2020.

II. Looking to the future: youth participation and investment in young people

This final section will review two key issues related to encouraging youth participation in the recovery process and the inclusion of youth in that undertaking: the first part will look at measures to promote youth participation, while the second will analyse regional public spending investments in youth.

The interconnections among the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals paint a complex picture, and its achievement poses multiple challenges. Economic and social gaps are affected by the crisis of governance, the lack of trust, the various forms of violence affecting the region and, above all, the effects of climate change that threaten to break the intergenerational pact. The poverty, inequalities and lack of participation opportunities that affect young people and shape their circumstances pose a major obstacle to achieving sustainable development in which no one is left behind.

Overcoming this demands progress with integrated actions and policies that focus on promoting recovery by adapting production and consumption patterns, protecting ecosystems and promoting inclusion. Only if the different actors (state, social and private) adopt determined measures will it be possible to pursue a recovery agenda that fosters a transformation aimed at creating better conditions than those that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young people are therefore key actors because, whether through education, technology or new forms of organization and social interaction, youth sectors are using their skills and ideas to propose concrete alternatives to achieve the SDGs. Young people are generally more educated and environmentally aware than previous generations and, in addition, they are also familiar with —or less reactionary towards— innovation and new technological processes. These are important tools in implementing a new development model in which income creation and good living conditions are combined with increased resilience to climate change. The task of creating the conditions for effective youth participation must involve the work of state actors, civil society and the private sector. From the point of view of public policy, initiatives must be promoted to transform the stigmatization of young people so that they are no longer seen as victims but as subjects of change and holders of rights. To this end, public policies must open up venues for youth participation and provide material, financial and political means for young people to pursue their projects. In many cases, volunteering provides evidence that young people are taking action: determining their own priorities, setting their own agendas and cooperating with other young people or other actors. Volunteering can be a catalyst for engagement in the political arena and also a powerful means for addressing youth unemployment.[3]

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[3]   See: United Nations Volunteers (UNV), "Youth and volunteering" [online] https://knowledge.unv.org/theme/youth-and-volunteering.

We are living at a time when effective governance —the governance that fosters the creation of opportunities for inclusion and guarantees the minimum institutional conditions that ensure access to rights and services and to genuine venues for participation that promote people's development without distinctions of any kind— is being questioned by citizens and political actors. Latin American youth is not unaffected by these developments, and young people tend to observe with a critical eye the exercise of forms of power and participation in which they feel neither recognized nor represented. For that reason, to strengthen social cohesion in the region, the new forms of political and social participation promoted by young people must be incorporated into decision-making processes: the questions they raise regarding the perspectives through which the main challenges of their countries and the region are traditionally understood and resolved must be taken into account.

This is directly related to several of the 2030 Agenda's targets that aim to design and promote new mechanisms for dialogue, advocacy, cooperation and financing for sustainable development. For example, with regard to environmental and climate issues, SDG 13, "Climate action", sets target 13.b in the following terms: "Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities" (United Nations, 2020a).

Youth sectors have occupied venues and taken the lead in making themselves actively heard in national, regional and global discussion platforms on environmental and climate issues. However, in order to capitalize on youth's innovative potential and transformative capacity, progress must be made with the implementation of mechanisms that incorporate the perspective of young people into all stages and instances, especially those where those matters are deliberated. One important element is that the inclusion of youth and the creation of venues for participation must not be restricted to specific consultation activities; instead, they must be extended to bodies where decisions are made and monitoring is conducted. Furthermore, those venues must be designed so that young people can not only participate, but also contribute and access the benefits and tasks in all stages of the process of building policies, programmes and actions that favour sustainable development and human rights. Youth participation in environmental issues is often restricted to parallel, thematic forums for dialogue, and young people are not effectively included at decision-making tables or throughout the entire process whereby public actions and policies are formulated, implemented and evaluated. Monitoring countries' legislation in this regard will always be a necessary tool to observe their deliberative mechanisms from the inside (see box 11).

Box 11
Institutional framework for youth

Most Latin American countries have general legislation dealing with youth. With the exception of Chile, Cuba and Uruguay, which were the pioneers in this regard, these institutionalization initiatives emerged from the 2000s onwards. The laws usually define the country's youth population, their rights and, many times, the type of public agency that will be responsible for overseeing youth policies (Martínez, 2019).

Strengthening the participation of young people is essential to make all decisions more relevant, sustainable and legitimate. However, the channels through which young people can play an active role in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation are insufficient and fail to capture the youth voice inclusively and effectively. Although there are some youth organizations that provide venues for participation, they generally lack resources, coordination among them tends to be weak or non-existent and, in some cases, their capacities for project design and implementation need to be strengthened. It is common for public policies not to encourage the participation of young people continuously throughout the implementation process, instead focusing solely on the final stages and ad hoc interventions. Moreover, these participation venues are only made available in the case of policies directly linked to the youth population and not to other areas (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015, p. 270).

One way of integrating civil society youth organizations into decision-making processes would be to formally incorporate them in the institutional framework. In most countries, there is some formal structure for this purpose, such as a council, an advisory network or an assembly. These entities offer different levels of participation: they can be purely consultative or they can wield real influence on decision-making. Thus, most of the countries' participatory bodies operate at the decision-making level, with some even enjoying co-management responsibility (Martínez, 2019, p. 267).

Box 11 (concluded)

Latin America (17 countries): institutional channels for youth participation, 2015

Country	Venue for youth participation in the design of public policies	Mechanism for electing representatives	Level of citizen participation	Level of representation
Argentina	Federal Youth Council (CFJ)	Appointment	Decision-making level	National/Intermediate
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Plurinational Youth Council (CPJ)	Appointment	Co-management level	National/Intermediate/Local
Brazil	National Youth Council (CONJUVE)	Election	Decision-making level	National/Intermediate/Local
Chile	No organization in which young people are directly involved.			
Colombia	National, departmental and local youth councils	Election/Appointment	Co-management level	National/Intermediate/Local
Costa Rica	National Public Policy Council for Young People	Appointment	Co-management level	National
	National Youth Advisory Network (RNCPJ)	Election	Decision-making level	National/Intermediate/Local
	National Assembly of the National Youth Advisory Network	Election/Appointment	Decision-making level	National
Ecuador	National Council for Youth Policies (CNPPJ)	Election/Appointment	Co-management level	National
	Local youth councils	Election	Decision-making level	Local
El Salvador	National Council of the Young Person (CONAPEJ)	Election	Co-management level	National
Guatemala	Youth Advisory Council (CAJ)	Election	Decision-making level	Intermediate/Local
Honduras	No organization in which young people are directly involved.			
Mexico	Citizen Council for the Follow-up of Public Policies Regarding Youth (CONSEPP)	Election	Consultative level	National/Intermediate
Nicaragua	National Youth Commission (CNJ)	Appointment	Decision-making level	National
Panama	Youth Public Policy Council (CPPJ)	Election	Decision-making level	National
Paraguay	National, departmental and municipal councils on children and adolescents	Appointment	Decision-making level	National/Intermediate/Local
Peru	National Youth Council (CONAJU)	Appointment	Decision-making level	National
	Youth Participation Council (CPJ)	Election	Decision-making level	Intermediate/Local
Dominican Republic	Municipal Youth Councils	Election	Co-management level	Municipal
	National Youth Council	Election	Co-management level	National
Uruguay	No organization in which young people are directly involved.			

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of R. Martínez, *Institutional frameworks for social policy in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ECLAC Books, No. 146 (LC/PUB.2017/14-P/Rev.1), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2019; D. Trucco and H. Ullmann (eds.), *Youth: Realities and Challenges for Achieving Development with Equality*, ECLAC Books, No. 137 (LC/G.2647-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2015.

Actions are underway to establish venues where young people's voices can be heard. There are programmes that have helped strengthen novel youth-led initiatives that empower them as protagonists in achieving the 2030 Agenda in the region through the promotion of human rights. The following are some examples of such programmes: *Comprometidos*, *Concausa*,[4] *Generación Sin Límites*,[5] Youth Now! (UNFPA, 2019d), the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (United Nations, 2020b), and the online course "Education for Global Citizenship: Youth, Human Rights and Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean" (UNESCO, 2021).

Another venue is the United Nations Youth Climate Summit, which provides a platform for young people from around the world to engage in discussions, offer solutions and set priorities to address the climate and environmental emergency. In 2014, at the United Nations Civil Society Conference, the young people in attendance adopted the Global Youth Climate Pact, which outlines specific actions for reducing the devastating effects of the climate crisis and adapting community mindsets and structures.[6] Young people have helped update nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and have participated in vital initiatives for the region: the Escazú Agreement, for instance, which aims to ensure public participation and access to environmental information and justice in environmental matters.

From the territorial to the global levels, there are several examples such as these from which lessons can be drawn on how to ensure youth participation and design capacity-building tools to ensure that their participation is qualified (see boxes 12 to 17).

Special attention should also be given to indigenous peoples and traditional communities, who are strategic partners in the protection of ecosystems. They must be recognized not only as rights holders, but also as custodians of the land and providers of traditional knowledge, social technologies and solutions for overcoming poverty, mitigating and adapting to climate change and sustainably managing natural resources (Correa, 2019).

Box 12
Toolkit for Young Climate Activists in Latin America and the Caribbean

The *Toolkit for Young Climate Activists in Latin America and the Caribbean* was created by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and a group of 45 young people concerned about the state of the planet and who, as activists, had faced many challenges in advocating and taking action. The toolkit aims to convey, in simple language, clear and concise information to explain the course of global, regional and national climate action, so that young people are prepared to participate in a full and informed way. The kit is available in English and Spanish and, to date, consists of five booklets with information to enable young people to understand the most important climate concepts and frameworks, such as climate governance, the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) and the Paris Agreement. They also contain a glossary and tools for climate action.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

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4   See [online] https://www.concausa2030.com/espanol/.
5   See [online] https://www.generationunlimited.org/.
6   See [online] https://www.globalyouthclimatepact.org/index.php/about.

Box 13
Towards sustainable lifestyles: Anatomy of Action toolkit
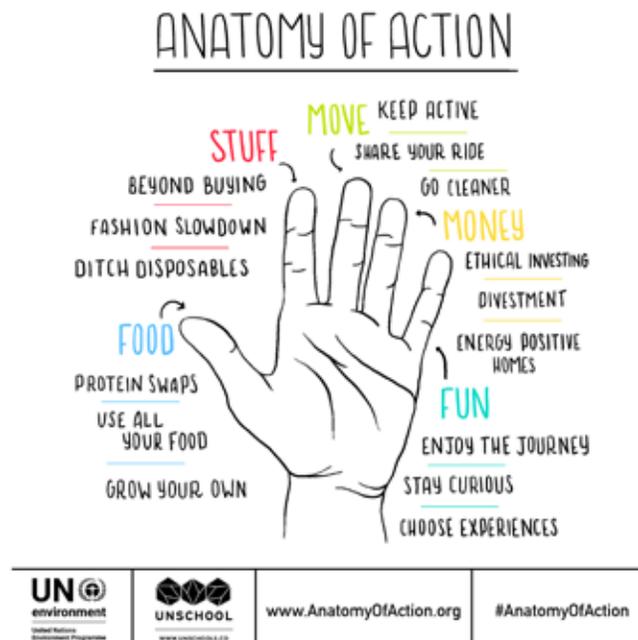
Anatomy of Action is a science-based toolkit that encourages making simple but effective changes in everyday activities in order to adopt more a sustainable lifestyle and combat climate change. The kit covers the five domains of action of sustainable lifestyles and makes direct reference to measures people can adopt as regards food, things, mobility, money and fun.

It was jointly developed in 2019 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UnSchool of Disruptive Design. The resources are available in English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The sustainable lifestyles community's activities and challenges can be followed on Instagram at @theofficialanatomyofaction.

Source: United Nations, "The Anatomy of Action (AoA)" [online] https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sustainable-lifestyles-and-education/anatomy-action-aoa-10.

Box 14
Good Life Goals: information on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Good Life Goals is a product of One Planet Network that aims to convey the SDG message in a simple and effective way. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Futerra, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and other partners helped find a way to engage people and translate the SDGs for a wider audience. Good Life Goals is a tool targeting children and young people that uses emoticons to help them understand and contribute to the SDGs in their communities.

Source: Futerra "The Good Life Goals" [online] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbrYODvkvGk.

Box 15
Promoting youth entrepreneurship in Guatemala

The repercussions of climate change in Guatemala include more frequent and abundant rains, violent storms and prolonged droughts, all of which pose a serious threat to the country's agricultural sector. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has developed the Integrated Country Approach (ICA) programme to boost rural employment in Guatemala and to promote entrepreneurial opportunities. The most successful initiatives from the project were ChispaRural.gt, a digital platform to connect young people, and a business laboratory, La Factoria. Rural youth can use the laboratory to access up-to-date information on sustainable agriculture and employment in rural areas. Information provided through the platform includes details on training and funding opportunities offered by different organizations, and on practical tools and success stories from young agricultural entrepreneurs in their communities. The La Factoria initiative, in partnership with the local NGO Asociación Grupo Enlace, has provided a three-month training course on entrepreneurial skills and local development to 75 young people. This training helped them access local markets, build alliances and formulate financially viable project proposals.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "Rural youth: protecting the climate through innovation. How FAO projects are encouraging youth to embrace technology and take the lead in the fight against climate change", Rome, 2019 [online] http://www.fao.org/fao-stories/article/en/c/1226659/.

Box 16
Trash Hack initiative

Trash Hack, an initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), aims to engage the world's youth in taking small actions to reduce waste and refuse, which can lead to big ideas for the planet. The platform provides a venue for sharing knowledge, tools and experiences created by the world's youth in order to inspire dialogue, exchange and collaboration.

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "About Trash Hack" [online] https://www.trashhack.org/about/.

The need to incorporate young people into the full public policy cycle is not restricted to the sustainability sphere. Their involvement in the security and justice sectors remains a pending challenge.

Latin American tradition has been to criminalize poor or diverse youth. Alongside that stigmatization, there has been a revival of punitive and heavy-handed policies and strategies, which also punish social protest. Instead of an approach based on inclusion and integration, the paradigm has been focused on lowering the age of criminal responsibility and increasing penalties.

This is further compounded by institutional practices that do not promote the recognition of young people as subjects of rights. Expressions of institutional violence directed at young people can still be found: police forces that repress young people from certain social sectors, detention centres (enforcement of measures), among others.

One key element in access to justice is ensuring that young people can access information related to their rights: this is as important as ensuring that they have access to justice services. Consolidating an approach that favours the structured integration of these issues continues to be a great challenge.

Other important issues include recognizing the contribution that civil society can make, in building and supporting the capacities of youth organizations and young people's networks, in creating national, regional and global forums for sharing experiences and learnings, in building consensus, and in fostering the sense of joint responsibility that is so valuable for the construction of fairer societies. All these activities must also involve academia, the private sector and the media. These venues are essential to strengthen identities, a sense of belonging, the recognition of diversity, and the promotion of coexistence and intra-generational dialogue, which are the basis for the construction of transformative collective action.

Box 17
Youth Now!: Latin American and Caribbean adolescents and youth participating
through diversity and inclusion

The Youth Now! strategy was launched in 2018 by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Latin America and the Caribbean to encourage youth participation in the region. It aims to achieve that goal by strengthening capacities for political advocacy, participation and recognition, calling on adolescents and young people in the region to get involved and lead in the implementation of the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals.

To date, more than a thousand adolescents and young people and their organizations from 26 of the region's countries have been involved in the strategy through various activities, ranging from national and regional leadership camps, youth innovation laboratories and training processes to participation and engagement in regional and global events to follow up on different development agendas, such as the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25.

Youth Now! is a strategy that, in addition to strengthening the capacities and promoting the participation of young people in the follow-up of population and development agendas, has become an example of inclusion without leaving anyone behind. The strategy promotes safe spaces that provide for the diversity of youth and their causes: from young people campaigning for sexual and reproductive rights, for youth rights, feminism, gender equality and peacebuilding, to adolescents and young people campaigning for the rights of indigenous, rural and Afrodescendent populations, those living with disabilities or the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and sexual diversity. It helps promote empathy, dialogue, solidarity and mutual support among youth sectors and their causes.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Box 18
Participation by young people in situations of mobility

Young refugees face many challenges in their search for lasting solutions. In the Global Refugee Youth Consultations organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from October 2015 to June 2016, among the most pressing difficulties identified were those related to obtaining legal recognition and personal documents, a lack of security and freedom of movement, and a lack of information about asylum, refugee rights and the availability of services: access to formal education, for example. The lack of opportunities for participation, involvement and access to decision makers was also highlighted as a challenge limiting the empowerment of these young people. Through the consultations, the young refugees identified seven basic actions that humanitarian actors should take, including empowering young refugees through meaningful participation; recognizing, capitalizing on and developing the capacities and skills of young refugees; and strengthening them as connectors and peacebuilders (UNHCR, 2016).

UNHCR has worked with young refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons to promote their participation in decision-making processes and in building inclusive participatory societies. In Honduras, UNHCR has placed its priority on working with young people, who make up the majority of the displaced population and are disproportionately affected by violence. The aim has been to promote youth participation in decision-making processes, at both the community and public policy levels. Protective spaces have also been strengthened, such as youth community centres and their community organizational structures, where young people have been empowered through a participatory approach that promotes the vision of young people as agents of change and protection in their communities. Through initiatives such as the UNHCR Youth Initiative Fund (2018), some young people's organizations in Honduras, such as *Jóvenes Contra la Violencia* ("Youth Against Violence"), have established a consultation process targeting youth from high-risk communities to gauge their perceptions of violence in order to counter the numerous reports in which young people are stigmatized. These consultations have generated proposals for mitigating the existing risk and have identified good practices for influencing local and national public policies.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, youth participation in building inclusive societies remains important despite the challenges posed by restrictions on movement and personal proximity. In Ecuador, some projects targeting young refugees have been adapted to ensure their continuity. With the support of UNHCR and local organizations such as the Fundación de las Américas (FUDELA) and Alternativas Latinoamericanas de Desarrollo Humano y Estudios Antropológicos (ALDHEA), young refugees have been able to use virtual platforms to move forward with entrepreneurship and community communication projects, such as the creation of digital safe spaces for adolescents and youth. These digital safe spaces, where young refugees are trained in community journalism, have enabled the beneficiaries to produce and share content on how to cope with the challenges they have identified. Also, through the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V), initiatives such as the U-Report *Uniendo Voces* help young migrants and refugees to access reliable information and amplify their voices in promoting their rights and improving their communities.

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "We Believe in Youth': Global Refugee Youth Consultations", *Final Report*, Geneva, 2016; Alternativas Latinoamericanas de Desarrollo Humano y Estudios Antropológicos (ALDHEA) [online] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYLWsPaU1ArQlwTWlSQ1hdw; U-Report Ecuador [online] https://ecuador.ureport.in/.

Of course, participation can only be effective when the mechanisms necessary for the economic empowerment of these young people are also guaranteed. One key factor in building an inclusive sustainable development agenda is providing youth projects and voices with material and financial support. Public social spending is therefore one of its main tools. Through a clear investment agenda focused on youth, States can promote young people's well-being and, at the same time, pursue strategies that position the sustainability agenda as an environmental, social and economic paradigm that, instead of being perceived as a limitation, is considered a fundamental and essential component of the creation of prosperous, resilient and sustainable models. Building back better and for greater equity and inclusion could mean, for example, capitalizing on the ecological awareness of youth to invest in green recovery, thereby encouraging sustainable investments to move towards an agro-ecological and energy transition.

One of the main tools for measuring the efforts of Latin American and Caribbean States in matters concerning youth is analysing public social spending from a generational perspective (for further information on this methodology, see ECLAC/OIJ (2014)). In the region as a whole, there has been a favourable evolution of investment in young people over the past two decades. According to the simple average of the 23 countries in the region for which information is available, in or around 2019, approximately 3.7% of regional GDP was spent on public policies targeting youth either directly or indirectly: in other words, on policies in which young people were the target population or part of it (direct), or on spending policies allocated by territory or targeting families with young members (indirect). At the beginning of this century, public investment in youth amounted to 2.4% of GDP, rising to 3.4% in 2010. The increase can also be seen when disaggregated by sector: spending on education, health, social protection, environmental protection, housing, community services, recreation, culture and religion increased steadily over the period observed in all the region's countries. Undoubtedly, education —accounting for an average of 90% of public spending on youth— is the main expense in which States incur for the benefit of young people. Spending on education per person aged between 15 and 29 nearly doubled between 2000 and 2019; the increase in spending per young person in other areas grew at a faster rate, but the amounts involved are much smaller; the exception to this is housing and community services, where the increase was slightly over 50% in just two decades.

Table 1 shows simple averages of social investment in young people in Latin America and the Caribbean at constant 2010 prices. It is estimated that, in 2019, the average annual investment per young person amounted to US$ 9,842. Among the countries that allocate the most resources to youth are Barbados (with a total of US$ 40,298), Chile (US$ 40,031), Costa Rica (US$ 18,810), Brazil (US$ 14,550), Uruguay (US$ 13,073), Cuba (US$ 11,370), Argentina (US$ 10,837) and the Bahamas (US$ 10,761).

At the same time, although the economic priority placed on public spending for young people has increased by 1.3 percentage points of GDP, to a large extent this occurred at the same time as a general increase in public social spending: while per capita spending on young people aged 15 to 29 increased by 93% between 2000 and 2019, per capita social spending on the population as a whole increased by 117%, with a greater share of spending on social protection. Around 2019, direct and indirect social spending on youth amounted to 31% of total public social expenditure. Given that this also increased with respect to total public spending, it can be said that both the fiscal and macroeconomic priority of youth spending increased significantly, with greater speed in the first decade of this century. Per capita spending on young people, on the other hand, increased at a faster rate in the second decade, which can be partly explained by the ageing populations in some countries where the window of opportunity that young people represent —in terms of taking advantage of their abilities and applying their skills— is closing.

Table 1
Latin America and the Caribbean (23 countries): social investment on young people by government function,
around 2000, 2010 and 2019
(In dollars per young person at constant 2010 prices)

Countries	Years	Sectors						Total	
		Environmental protection	Housing and community services	Health	Recreation, culture and religion	Education	Social protection	In 2010 dollars	As a percentage of GDP
Argentina	2000	5	493	381	62	4 682	71	5 694	3.70
	2010	21	970	585	90	8 100	43	9 809	4.78
	2017	29	1 136	717	107	8 784	64	10 837	5.60
Bahamas	2000	-	33	521	-	6 108	111	6 773	1.04
	2010	-	52	778	-	8 627	21	9 478	1.40
	2019	885	29	708	283	8 683	174	10 761	1.88
Barbados	2006	-	1 171	672	-	17 816	273	19 932	4.57
	2010	-	558	952	-	14 532	46	16 089	4.53
	2019	509	869	604	340	37 549	427	40 298	4.75
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2000	20	73	47	17	327	6	489	2.70
	2010	45	74	61	36	781	8	1 005	3.60
	2016	77	151	128	61	1 199	5	1 620	5.30
Brazil	2000	34	61	297	11	17 668	4	18 075	2.79
	2010	250	64	489	128	14 748	71	15 751	3.40
	2019	207	58	587	95	13 498	105	14 550	4.03
Chile	2000	28	106	253	46	7 426	2	7 861	2.16
	2010	39	179	454	98	19 503	11	20 284	2.90
	2019	64	221	846	123	38 753	24	40 031	4.22
Colombia	2000	15	21	67	8	4 198	3	4 312	1.37
	2010	19	119	119	29	5 386	25	5 696	2.12
	2019	18	152	242	46	6 247	96	6 800	2.62
Costa Rica	2000	0	379	347	37	3 616	4	4 383	3.67
	2010	28	623	515	55	11 050	49	12 319	5.88
	2019	54	1 037	764	74	16 832	49	18 810	7.09
Cuba	2000	-	379	208	195	5 450	31	6 263	5.65
	2010	-	747	674	920	9 587	31	11 959	10.69
	2018	-	398	957	660	9 321	34	11 370	7.44
Ecuador	2000	1	21	25	3	574	16	639	0.79
	2010	29	51	71	57	3 716	44	3 968	2.84
	2019	14	41	142	29	5 919	100	6 245	3.83
El Salvador	2002	4	329	57	92	1 718	5	2 205	3.08
	2010	11	318	85	18	2 343	41	2 815	3.77
	2019	7	376	103	18	2 759	42	3 305	3.76
Guatemala	2000	7	109	33	18	103	-	270	1.21
	2010	9	151	39	20	1 959	5	2 182	2.07
	2019	24	159	43	19	2 256	2	2 503	2.08

Table 1 (concluded)

Countries	Years	Sectors						Total	
		Environmental protection	Housing and community services	Health	Recreation, culture and religion	Education	Social protection	In 2010 dollars	As a percentage of GDP
Guyana	2004	-	166	56	13	2 660	8	2 904	2.33
	2010	-	347	76	36	1 587	2	2 047	3.19
	2019	28	148	153	41	2 956	52	3 378	3.29
Honduras	2000	-	-	46	5	1 318	1	1 370	1.95
	2010	18	10	64	1	2 286	1	2 380	3.05
	2019	9	5	54	-	1 937	3	2 008	2.21
Jamaica	2000	-	104	37	10	6 081	7	6 239	2.22
	2010	11	172	130	37	2 583	2	2 934	3.84
	2019	39	112	168	39	4 841	19	5 219	3.39
Mexico	2000	41	236	45	23	5 924	13	6 282	1.70
	2010	39	551	98	47	6 528	18	7 282	2.62
	2019	29	407	99	36	6 114	26	6 710	2.39
Nicaragua	2000	-	27	32	0	106	1	167	1.21
	2010	1	89	44	7	129	0	269	3.69
	2019	9	169	75	17	196	-	466	4.00
Panama	2000	-	230	102	-	3 462	6	3 800	2.61
	2010	125	683	167	56	4 422	7	5 459	2.92
	2019	188	833	224	78	4 952	12	6 286	2.57
Paraguay	2003	7	2	10	0	1 647	1	1 667	0.90
	2010	4	27	16	5	3 497	1	3 551	1.56
	2018	23	73	30	13	5 970	11	6 119	2.06
Peru	2000	-	9	50	-	810	2	872	1.18
	2010	201	46	82	60	2 953	7	3 348	2.10
	2019	318	114	183	125	5 556	14	6 310	2.92
Dominican Republic	2000	-	115	49	24	800	1	989	1.61
	2010	22	84	84	49	2 273	19	2 531	1.92
	2019	31	102	126	49	4 646	24	4 978	2.24
Uruguay	2000	5	154	180	50	3 404	69	3 863	1.95
	2010	8	248	300	77	7 239	44	7 917	2.54
	2019	28	384	636	149	11 796	80	13 073	3.61
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	2000	-	436	90	57	11 557	25	12 165	3.80
	2010	-	87	157	79	2 650	20	2 993	1.97
	2014	-	199	304	190	3 955	50	4 698	3.00
Latin America and the Caribbean[a]	2000	7	202	157	29	4 672	29	5 096	2.36
	2010	38	272	263	83	5 934	23	6 612	3.37
	2019	113	312	343	113	8 901	61	9 842	3.66

Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Database on Social Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] https://observatoriosocial.cepal.org/inversion/en.

[a] Simple average for each country. Instead of figures for 2000, data from 2002 were used for El Salvador, from 2003 for Paraguay, from 2004 for Guyana and from 2006 for Barbados. Instead of figures for 2019, data from 2014 were used for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, from 2016 for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, from 2017 for Argentina and from 2018 for Cuba and Paraguay.

III. Conclusions

The 2030 Agenda provides a relevant and necessary road map as a starting point for action towards building more democratic, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable societies. The need for action in this direction has been precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated the exclusion of the most vulnerable groups, the challenges related to governance and the pressing need to devise a recovery model focused on environmental protection in order to achieve a sustainable form of development.

Much has been said about the crisis representing a chance to rethink the global development model. For that to actually happen —for this crisis to represent an opportunity and not to amplify the region's pre-existing difficulties— decisive and coordinated action is required in all sectors: the State, the private sector and civil society.

This document contributes along those lines by identifying three main areas of action —inclusion, environment and governance— and highlighting their interconnections and synergies and calling for coordinated action. Based on the analysis of the challenges and opportunities in each of these areas, the following paragraphs offer a series of recommendations to guide the policies adopted to further the pursuit of the SDGs.

Thus, the first recommendation addresses the need to understand the challenges faced by the region's youth as difficulties that fall simultaneously into those three dimensions, since analysing only one of the three can result in a partial and fragmented understanding of this group's situation in relation to the SDGs. It is therefore necessary to understand that, despite the progress the region has made over the past 30 years with various economic and social indicators, today's young people continue to face significant dynamics of exclusion that deny them access to the benefits that development has brought to their countries, and that this exclusion will probably be felt even more intensely in the future if appropriate measures are not taken. For example, while poverty and undernutrition have fallen, malnutrition has increased and physical activity has decreased. Educational coverage has increased, but the quality of its content remains low, which limits young people's access to quality jobs and constrains their participation in the social and political life of their communities. The population's living conditions have improved, yet levels of violence and perceptions of insecurity remain high and young people are overrepresented in many violence-related indicators: young men, for example, are overrepresented in homicide rates, and young women are overrepresented in gender-based violence statistics. Health has improved, but young

people have difficulty accessing quality comprehensive sexuality education and effective methods to prevent pregnancy, to name but two issues. Progress has been made in ensuring access to energy, water and sanitation, but at the cost of environmental degradation. New channels of participation have opened up for young people, but these are often non-binding in nature. The exclusions faced by young people fall simultaneously into all three dimensions (inclusion, environment and governance) and so addressing them requires complex and intersectoral action.

The second recommendation follows on from this: it must be borne in mind that the problems and challenges faced by young people in the region are marked by the intersectionalities inherent in their belonging to different social categories. Young people are young, but they are also women, indigenous, migrants or Afrodescendants and they live in rural areas, have diverse gender orientations, live with HIV or have a disability, among other factors. As seen throughout this document, belonging to any of these categories implies being exposed to dynamics of exclusion that are specific to each: for example, discrimination or violence due to gender identity, lack of opportunities or access to services in rural areas or lack of accessibility for young people with disabilities. These dynamics of exclusion overlap and increasingly distance people belonging to one or more of these categories from positions of social inclusion. The policies implemented for the recovery period must therefore take into account the existence of these intersectionalities and adopt measures with a holistic view of young people's situations. This also implies that concern for youth must be present in the design of any policy, whether or not it targets young people specifically. Indeed, a failure to incorporate a youth perspective may result in the adoption of policies that unintentionally reproduce the dynamics of exclusion and discrimination that they are intended to reverse.

The third recommendation is to examine these challenges according to a new paradigm in which they are seen as interrelated, interconnected and simultaneously present at the local, national, regional and global levels. This calls for forging multi-stakeholder partnerships and fostering international cooperation, but also for designing measures based on information that is updated at the speed of the changes that are occurring. Analysis of progress towards the SDGs among youth sectors is hampered by the lack of up-to-date data for the region as a whole. Many of today's decisions may be being made on the basis of data that no longer reflect reality, and this problem is compounded by the still unfolding effects of the pandemic. It is therefore necessary to invest in the creation and management of information systems in line with the complex nature of the changes currently underway.

This new paradigm also implies, as the fourth recommendation, no longer thinking of young people as passive subjects, but rather as protagonists of the actions that will lead them towards a better life.

The characteristics of the challenges faced today are too complex to be solved by simply applying government-designed spending policies. This is due to the changing and dynamic nature of those challenges, the fact that they are simultaneously embedded at the local, national, regional and global levels and the need for coordinated action between the State, the private sector and civil society. Given young people's characteristic ability to share and process information in real time, they and their communities know best where the challenges lie and what assets can be mobilized to resolve them. For that reason, opening up channels of participation for young people is not only an imperative for improving governance, but also a necessity so that the policies designed are more effective in actively involving their protagonists and providing solutions to which they have agreed.

> "We must put youth at the centre of the response. Young people are key. We must be included in decision-making, we must be included in implementation and we must ensure that we are not just included for the sake of compliance, or as data and statistics: we are real, we are 30% of the Latin American and Caribbean region, and investing in us now will mean reaping economic growth, maybe not tomorrow, but in a few years' time."
>
> Source: Michelle Belfor, Women Deliver Young Leaders Program, remarks at the side event "Youth in Latin America and the Caribbean: the key for recovery and achievement of Agenda 2030", fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, March 2021.

Young people do not necessarily feel recognized in democratic practice. The exercise of democracy must be rethought in a way that is much more open to the young population and youth leaders and that innovates and explores the use of new technologies. Other forms of participation and expression that young people are experiencing and building with their determined leadership must be recognized and valued, and efforts must be made to give them space and to connect them with formal systems of participation. To this end, intergenerational and multisectoral venues for dialogue and listening must be established, making it possible to share the current situation of the region's adolescents and young people and to listen to their voices and contributions. The long-term policies for achieving the SDGs and the short- and medium-term recovery policies will respond effectively to the needs of young people and make the most of their potential only when they are protagonists of their own agendas and are thought of no longer as passive subjects but as protagonists of the actions that will lead them towards a better life.

The contributions of young people in the context of the COVID-19 crisis must be emphasized. Young health professionals are risking their lives on the front lines of the pandemic, supporting the most vulnerable people in their communities. As shown by the United Nations survey on Latin American and Caribbean youth within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic's precautionary and physical distancing measures, one out of every three young people participated in online volunteering: in other words, they not only acted, but also took advantage of information and communications technologies to implement their solutions. Moreover, those most involved in the COVID-19 response were young people with disabilities (43%), as well as migrants or refugees (43%). This shows that volunteerism can be a powerful tool for reducing inequalities, as it enables different groups, especially historically excluded ones, to participate in the design and implementation of decisions that affect them. Making these initiatives a cornerstone of recovery policies will enable the region to tap into a pool of resources that has until now been invisible.

At the same time, significant progress has been made with the public and political recognition of youth. More resources are invested in youth today, although they are not necessarily invested better. The policies aimed at young people need to be made cross-cutting and comprehensive, transcending sectoral or overly fragmented approaches and incorporating a generational perspective into public policies as a whole. Policies must reflect the conviction that young people need to acquire skills, mobilize politically, protect themselves against the inherent risks at this stage of the life cycle and, above all, achieve smoother transitions from dependence to autonomy, especially in terms of their participation in the world of work. The efforts of a wide range of actors involved in youth programmes and policies have yet to be synchronized, and a broad range of actors still need to be brought together in a compact to improve investment and policies for young people. Institutional networks need to be further strengthened to prevent youth institutes or ministries from being the "poor relation" in government cabinets or a no-man's land between policies for women, children, older persons or formal workers.

The institutional framework and authority of public bodies working with young people should therefore be strengthened. This requires progress on several fronts: stepped-up work with civil society; more resources and budgetary autonomy; coordination with sectoral public agencies to develop plans and programmes that generate reciprocal synergies; a multisectoral internal approach (transversality of youth policy); and a convening and coordinating role for the State vis-à-vis organized (NGOs) and non-organized civil society and the private sector. Reaching out to young people in a way that promotes dialogue and their participation in the design and implementation of programmes requires greater territorial and institutional decentralization, as this helps to establish more direct ownership of those programmes and to offer differentiated responses to the tremendous heterogeneity of the youth population.

Finally, we need universal, comprehensive and sustainable protection systems built on a new social compact that includes young people. The new social compact is a political instrument based on broad and participatory dialogue aimed at promoting structural change. This requires redistributing resources and material opportunities for access to well-being, but also recognizing the identities and rights of

specific population groups that are excluded from or discriminated against in different spheres of social life (ECLAC, 2021). The pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the region's structural inequality gaps. At these current times of great uncertainty, the path towards overcoming and recovering from the crisis remains uncertain. It is clear, however, that the costs of inequality have become unsustainable and that rebuilding efforts must be based on equality and sustainability, aiming at the creation of a true welfare state in which young people must be protagonists.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the world's most unequal region. It is deeply affected by climate change and devastated by violence, distrust of institutions and low social cohesion. Today, those circumstances most harshly affect those on the margins of the system, those who do not have sufficient power to participate in decision-making about who has access to the fruits of development and who does not. In building inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies, it is not only growth that matters, but also the way in which the benefits are distributed in terms of the opportunities provided for the pursuit of life projects and for access to and effective enjoyment of human rights. A society in which that distribution is based on the systematic exclusion of certain groups —especially in the context of institutions that have little capacity to represent and channel diverse interests and to manage conflicts— is a breeding ground for social unrest. It is time to act to reverse this situation by addressing the challenges facing young people in a comprehensive, coordinated and complex manner, and by ensuring that they play a central role in the process.

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This document reviews the progresses towards the achievement of a selection of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as they affect the youth population of Latin America and the Caribbean and defines lines for future action for the promotion of resilient, sustainable and inclusive development among the region's young people. The analysis focuses on the challenges and opportunities in three major areas, namely: (i) inclusion, (ii) climate change and environmental protection and (iii) governance. Within this framework, the SDGs are analysed on the basis of the factors that are hindering or enhancing their achievement among youth sectors, and proposals are offered to strengthen actions aimed at accelerating progress towards their attainment. The document is the result of the joint work of entities of the United Nations system within the framework of the United Nations Regional Collaborative Platform for Latin America and the Caribbean.