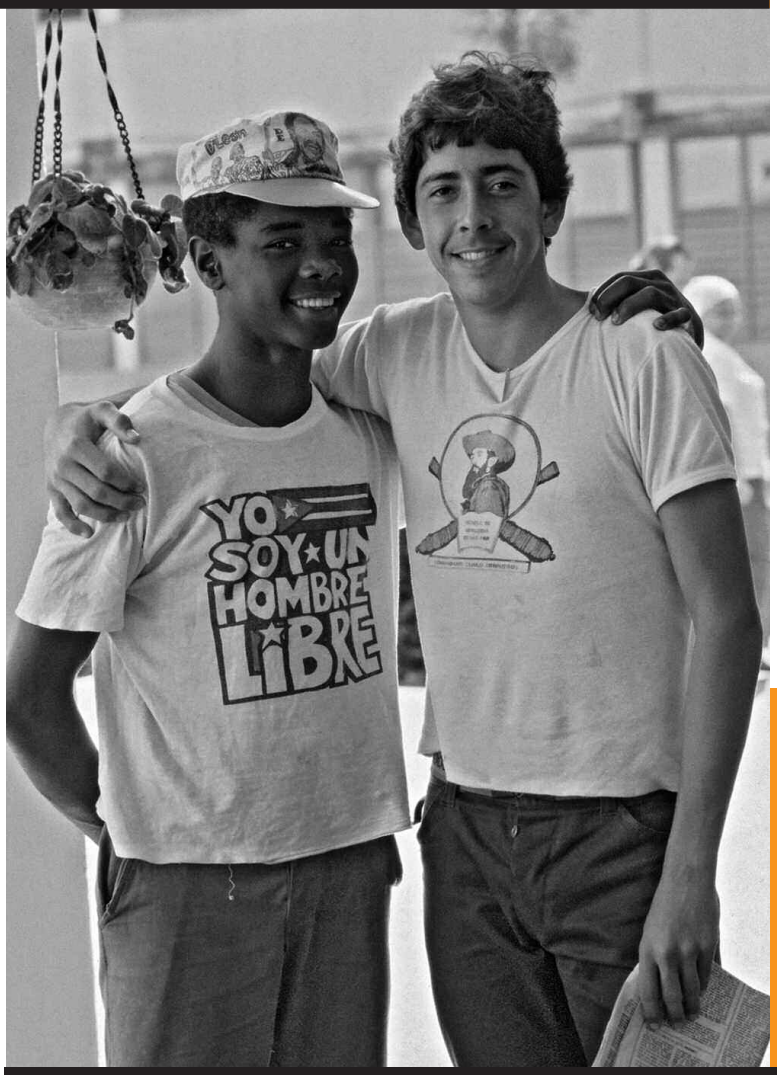
Chapter 2

Latin American YOUTH

in an era of socio-economic and political change



Latin America has undergone significant changes in the past 30 years. Most countries in the region adopted democratic forms of government in the early 1980s. The accompanying economic reforms and new approaches to development brought about important social transformations (Agüero and Stark, 1998; Garretón and Newman, 2001; Teichman, 2001). The region has also experienced major demographic shifts. These factors, taken together, have affected young lives in both positive and negative ways. They also appear to have played an important role in determining how young people perceive the political sphere and their role in shaping it. The present chapter reviews recent demographic, social and related trends affecting youth in Latin America and assesses their impact on young people's political and socio-economic participation. The chapter emphasizes that the apparent political apathy among young Latin Americans is not the result of conscious choice, but rather a product of the circumstances in which they live; youth who find it difficult to meet their essential needs in the areas of education, employment, health and social integration tend to attach less priority to political involvement.

CHANGING ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

The repercussions of economic change

The combination of economic recession and rampant inflation following years of both fiscal and external disequilibrium provided the impetus for the adoption of a new economic model in the region. One by one, most of the countries in Latin America abandoned the old import-substitution industrialization model, which aimed at achieving economic independence through the local manufacture of goods previously imported from abroad, and introduced market-oriented economic policies that significantly reduced State participation in the economy (Haggard and Kaufman, 1995). The repercussions of this shift were dramatic. Protected industries collapsed in the face of increased competition from abroad as tariffs were lowered and commercial barriers were lifted. State enterprises were privatized, and many of their workers were dismissed. Old labour codes were replaced with new ones that offered workers less protection. To fight inflation and narrow the fiscal gap, Governments reduced or eliminated State subsidies for various goods and services, including foodstuffs.

Although the new economic policies produced some of the desired results, including reduced fiscal deficits and lower inflation, they also gave rise to serious social dislocations that have been particularly detrimental to youth. Increases in income poverty, unemployment, and overall inequality have had a tremendous impact on young people's schooling, health, and social and economic welfare. Few among the poor have had the benefit of a full, high-quality education that might allow them to improve their socio-economic situation (Sáinz, 2007). Many youth have been unable to secure domestic employment and have sought relief through migration.

Changing population dynamics

The political transition and socio-economic crisis in Latin America coincided with important demographic changes. Higher levels of educational attainment, improved health coverage, and important medical advances contributed to a precipitous decline in fertility, morbidity and infant mortality and an increase in life expectancy. These trends had an impact on the age structure of the region. The proportion of youth in the total population peaked in the 1970s and began to decline thereafter; their share is expected to diminish further over the next several decades as people live longer and have fewer children (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2004a).

Despite this decline, youth remain a significant demographic and social group in Latin America. Young people between the ages of 15 and 24 currently number close to 100 million and constitute 18.5 per cent of the region's total population. This proportion is almost identical to that recorded in 1950 (see table 2.1). Although their demographic share is projected to decline in the coming decades, young people will continue to represent a major socio-economic group requiring adequate health, education, and other social services.

Table 2.1
Estimated and projected youth population in Latin America, 1950-2015

Region/Country	1950		2005		2015	
	Youth population (thousands)	Percentage of the total population	Youth population (thousands)	Percentage of the total population	Youth population (thousands)	Percentage of the total population
Central America	7 199.5	19.2	26 946.5	18.5	29 675.9	17.9
Belize	13.2	19.2	56.7	20.4	67.1	19.8
Costa Rica	165.4	17.1	856.4	19.5	850.9	16.8
El Salvador	379.6	19.5	1 260.4	18.7	1 411.6	18.3
Guatemala	630.3	20.0	2 559.8	20.0	3 337.8	20.4
Honduras	277.4	18.7	1 445.1	21.0	1 740.4	20.8
Mexico	5 330.3	19.2	19 004.8	18.0	20 336.7	17.3
Nicaragua	250.9	19.4	1 184.4	21.5	1 293.8	20.4
Panama	152.3	17.7	578.7	17.7	637.5	16.6
South America	21 307.9	18.9	69 894.5	18.5	70 431.6	16.5
Argentina	3 146.7	18.3	6 603.4	16.7	6 886.5	15.7
Bolivia	523.8	19.3	1 779.4	19.3	2 159.8	19.7
Brazil	10 420.4	19.3	35 348.3	18.7	33 595.6	15.7
Chile	1 104.3	18.2	2 785.3	16.8	2 817.1	15.3
Colombia	2 326.2	18.5	8 395.1	18.5	8 999.3	17.5
Ecuador	601.9	17.8	2 513.7	19.0	2 697.7	18.2
French Guiana	4.2	16.5	32.7	16.9	44.7	18.4
Guyana	75.6	17.9	128.6	17.2	134.9	18.6
Paraguay	282.0	19.1	1 224.5	20.6	1 363.5	19.2
Peru	1 432.9	18.8	5 320.1	19.3	5 653.7	18.1
Suriname	39.0	18.1	88.8	19.5	79.0	16.4
Uruguay	394.8	17.6	497.1	14.5	519.3	14.5
Venezuela	955.8	18.8	5 177.1	19.2	5 479.9	17.3
Latin America	28 507.5	18.9	96 840.9	18.5	100 107.4	16.9

Source: United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision*, Extended Dataset, CD-ROM edition (New York: 2007).

The young people of Latin America constitute a tremendously important but largely underserved segment of the population. While many countries have become more responsive to the development needs of youth, young people continue to encounter serious obstacles in a number of areas, giving rise to marginalization, frustration, political dissent and, for some, the active pursuit of better opportunities elsewhere.

Education: continued exclusion despite major gains

Overall, Latin America has made impressive progress in providing young people with educational opportunities; it has been observed that the constituent countries are showing "some signs of breaking with the political and social history of education-based mechanisms for exclusion" (De Ferranti and others, 2004, p. 179). The region's net primary enrolment ratio of 95 per cent is much higher than the developing world average of 85 per cent, and several countries have achieved universal primary enrolment or are close to doing so. Participation in secondary and tertiary education is also growing, though access to the latter remains limited (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2006).

Progress in education has varied from one country and socio-economic group to another. Since the early 1990s, educational gains have been made among urban youth in virtually all of the Latin American countries listed in table 2.2. In some countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala and Peru, the average period of education increased by 1.5 years or more. In other countries, such as Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, the educational gains were more modest (one year or less). In Costa Rica the average number of years of education fell slightly, declining from the relatively high level of 9.1 to 9.0. Though disparities still exist, the decline in the standard deviation (the difference between the average number of years of education for each country and the regional mean) suggests that the region's youth are becoming more educationally homogeneous.

Table 2.2
Average number of years of education completed by different age groups in urban areas, selected Latin American countries

	Earlier census Age group (years)		More recent census Age group (years)	
Country (census years)	15-24	25-59	15-24	25-59
Argentina[a] (1990, 2004)	9.0	8.8	10.5	10.5
Bolivia (1994, 2002)	10.0	9.3	10.1	9.2
Brazil (1990, 2003)	6.6	6.2	8.4	7.5
Chile (1990, 2003)	10.1	9.7	10.9	11.1
Colombia (1990, 2002)	8.5	8.2	9.8	9.3
Costa Rica (1990, 2002)	9.1	9.6	9.0	9.4
Dominican Republic (2000, 2003)	9.4	8.9	9.6	9.1
Ecuador (1990, 2002)	9.4	8.9	9.7	10.1
El Salvador (1997, 2003)	8.8	7.9	9.2	8.6
Guatemala (1989, 2002)	6.7	5.6	8.2	7.4
Honduras (1990, 2003)	7.0	6.4	7.9	7.5
Mexico (1989, 2004)	8.7	7.5	10.0	9.4
Nicaragua (1993, 2001)	7.0	6.4	7.9	6.9
Panama (1991, 2002)	9.6	9.6	10.2	10.8
Paraguay[b] (1990, 2001)	9.3	9.0	9.6	9.6
Peru (1997, 2003)	9.0	10.1	10.6	10.6
Uruguay (1990, 2002)	9.2	8.3	9.6	9.7
Venezuela (1990, 2003)	8.4	8.2	9.0	8.6
Regional average	8.65	8.25	9.45	9.18
Standard deviation	1.10	1.34	0.91	1.24

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Panorama Social de América Latina 2005* (LC/G.2288-P/E); adapted from tables 33 and 34 of the statistical appendix.

Note: Population census years are shown in parentheses next to the name of each country. All averages are simple averages.

[a]Greater Buenos Aires.

[b]Asunción.

Gender disparities in literacy and educational attainment are relatively small in Latin America. The literacy gap is less than two percentage points for most countries. In Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela, literacy rates are higher for young females than for young males. A similar situation prevails with regard to gross tertiary enrolment in both Central America and South America. Argentina has the highest gross tertiary enrolment ratio in the region, with more than three quarters of its young women and slightly over half of its young men pursuing higher studies (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007). At the country and regional levels there appears to be little gender discrimination in terms of educational opportunities; however, national

statistics often mask high illiteracy and low school participation rates among females from indigenous groups. In Bolivia, for example, more girls than boys are in school, but more than half of the indigenous girls drop out before the age of 14 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2006).

While educational gains have been impressive, much remains to be done to address substantial and enduring inequalities in access. Statistics for 2002 indicate that only 68 per cent of Latin Americans between the ages of 20 and 24 had completed the primary cycle, and that roughly a third (32.7 per cent of young men and 36.6 per cent of young women) had obtained a secondary education (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud, 2004).

Serious educational deficiencies persist even in urban areas. In 1990, urban youth between the ages of 15 and 24 had completed an average of 8.7 years of formal education; by 2002 that figure had climbed to 9.5 years (see table 2.2). This represents a respectable gain, but the fact remains that the majority of Latin American youth are not even close to finishing secondary school.

School attendance is strongly influenced by household income (see table 2.3). Across Latin America, urban youth from the poorest households are consistently less likely than their wealthier counterparts to attend school. The difference is especially pronounced among those aged 20-24 years, and poor young women seem to be particularly disadvantaged. In all the countries featured in table 2.3, with the exception of El Salvador and Mexico, attendance rates for 13- to 19-year-old females from the richest quintile are higher than the corresponding rates for males in the same age group and income quintile. In 10 of the countries, however, teenage women from the poorest households are less likely than young men from similar households to attend school. Statistics suggest that educational opportunities remain inadequate for a large proportion of urban youth; young people in rural areas tend to have even less access to formal schooling and are often effectively excluded from secondary and tertiary education.

Table 2.3
School attendance among urban youth in Latin America by sex, age group and per capita household income quintile, 2005*

		Percentage in school Quintile 1[a] (lowest income)		Percentage in school Quintile 5[a] (highest income)	
Country		Age group (years)		Age group (years)	
		13-19	20-24	13-19	20-24
Argentina	Both sexes[b]	75.1	22.4	90.0	62.7
	Men[b]	75.6	22.2	87.9	59.5
	Women[b]	74.7	22.6	91.7	65.7
Bolivia	Both sexes	83.5	28.2	90.6	64.8
	Men	82.3	33.6	89.9	61.4
	Women	84.6	23.3	91.2	68.5
Brazil	Both sexes	73.6	17.4	89.8	53.9
	Men	74.1	17.4	88.7	53.7
	Women	73.2	17.4	90.9	54.1
Chile	Both sexes	81.4	18.9	94.1	67.8
	Men	82.9	16.8	93.7	69.1
	Women	79.7	20.5	94.5	66.3
Colombia	Both sexes	70.1	11.6	89.2	56.6
	Men[c]	70.7	13.5	88.7	58.7
	Women[c]	69.5	10.1	89.6	54.4
Costa Rica	Both sexes[s]	78.4	26.4	93.4	67.5
	Men	79.9	33.3	92.0	63.5
	Women	76.7	21.5	95.1	72.0
Ecuador	Both sexes	70.2	21.4	88.9	52.0
El Salvador	Both sexes	67.5	14.5	90.2	43.6
	Men	72.7	19.7	90.8	43.7
	Women	62.6	10.3	89.6	43.6
Guatemala	Both sexes	63.3	11.1	78.3	43.9
	Men	70.2	15.4	76.7	44.9
	Women	58.1	8.1	80.0	42.9
Honduras	Both sexes	55.8	13.3	83.6	53.0
	Men	54.0	10.6	82.9	53.1
	Women	57.4	15.5	84.2	53.0

		Percentage in school Quintile 1[a] (lowest income)		Percentage in school Quintile 5[a] (highest income)	
Country		Age group (years)		Age group (years)	
		13-19	20-24	13-19	20-24
Mexico	Both sexes	60.5	14.4	87.1	48.7
	Men	61.9	14.5	88.1	49.7
	Women	59.4	14.3	86.0	47.9
Nicaragua	Both sexes	61.5	15.4	79.2	52.1
	Men	58.3	14.6	74.2	47.5
	Women	65.1	16.2	83.2	56.8
Panama	Both sexes	76.4	20.8	94.4	52.5
	Men	74.0	17.6	93.6	50.4
	Women	79.1	23.3	95.1	55.0
Paraguay	Both sexes	70.7	10.4	88.2	57.2
	Men	68.9	13.0	87.3	55.5
	Women	72.2	8.1	88.9	59.2
Peru	Both sexes	74.3	24.4	77.0	61.0
	Men	76.9	23.6	73.8	72.6
	Women	72.0	25.0	81.9	49.6
Uruguay	Both sexes	66.4	14.1	96.2	72.5
	Men	63.9	10.8	95.9	68.6
	Women	69.0	16.8	96.7	77.2
Venezuela	Both sexes[d]	74.4	34.3	80.6	60.4
	Men[d]	72.3	30.4	78.1	55.9
	Women[d]	76.3	37.3	83.3	65.2

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean 2006* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E/S.07.II.G.1).

Notes: *Data are for the years closest to 2005.

[a] Household income is classified by quintile, based on per capita income; quintile 1 is composed of the poorest 20 per cent of households, while quintile 5 corresponds to the richest 20 per cent.

[b] Twenty-eight urban agglomerations.

[c] Municipality capitals.

[d] National statistics.

Table 2.4 highlights different aspects and indicators of educational performance in Central America and the Dominican Republic, but the assessment is in many ways representative of the challenges faced by the region as a whole. Nine basic areas are evaluated on a scale ranging from "very poor" to "excellent". Arrows indicate whether progress, deterioration, or no visible change occurred between 2000 and 2005, as assessed by the Task Force on Education Reform in Central America. The "very poor" rating on equity issues is significant, given the considerable progress achieved by the region in educational provision.

Table 2.4
Educational "report card" for Central America and the Dominican Republic, 2007

Subject	Grade	Tendency	Comments
Test scores	Poor	↔	Student scores on national tests remain low. Very few students have adequate reading comprehension and problem-solving skills.
Enrolment	Good	↑	Although enrolment continues to increase, fewer than half of boys and girls attend pre-school, and only four in ten attend secondary school.
Staying in school	Poor	↔	Repetition is still high, especially in the first grade, and many students drop out prematurely. Average years of schooling remain low, and the situation has not improved in recent years.
Equity	Very poor	↔	Wide gaps persist between rich and poor, between those living in urban and rural areas, and between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Girls repeat grades and drop out less often than boys.
Authority and accountability at the school level	Average	↔	Several countries have been pioneers in increasing school autonomy and community involvement, but only in certain areas. Little progress has been made in recent years, and there are signs of reversal in some countries.
Investment in primary and secondary education	Poor	↔	Few countries in the region have increased public spending to the recommended 5 per cent of GDP. Public spending per pupil remains very low, and resources are not used efficiently.
Teaching profession	Poor	↑	Although some progress has been made, only three quarters of teachers have the minimum training required by their countries. Little social value is given to the profession, and wages are unrelated to performance.
Standards	Average	↔	Several countries have drawn up standards establishing what students should learn. These standards, however, are neither broadly disseminated nor broadly applied, and they are not yet linked to assessment, teacher training, textbooks, and other classroom resources.
Assessment systems	Average	↑	Most countries have continued to test what students learn, but most systems are still not fully consolidated. Test results are not widely disseminated and are seldom used.

Grading scale	Excellent Good Average Poor Very poor	**Tendency**	↑ Improving ↔ No change

Source: Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas, *A Lot to Do: A Report Card on Education in Central America and the Dominican Republic* (Task Force on Education Reform in Central America, 2007).

Rising unemployment and declining wages

For young people, the employment and income situation is worse today than it was 15 years ago. In the early 1990s, Rodríguez and Dabezies (1991) described the labour situation of Latin American youth as being characterized by instability, inadequate remuneration, and limited access to social security. Although isolated gains have been achieved in some areas, the overall situation has deteriorated since then. During this critical period in their lives, when they need to be acquiring skills and job experience, a significant proportion of Latin American youth are neither in school nor at work; in 2002, about 18 per cent of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 found themselves in such circumstances, and the same was true for around 27 per cent of 20- to 24-year-olds (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2004b).

Recent data indicate that youth unemployment was higher in 2002 than in 1990. Rates of joblessness rose for all three age groups highlighted in table 2.5, but the increase was less pronounced for adults than for young people. In 2002, unemployment among 15- to 19-year-olds was roughly twice that for 25- to 29-year-olds. In urban areas, rates of unemployment were higher for youth than for the labour force as a whole (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2005).

Table 2.5
Gender-disaggregated unemployment rates for selected age groups in Latin America

	Males		Females	
Age group (years)	1990	2002	1990	2002
15-19	15.6	19.8	22.1	27.0
20-24	11.2	14.5	16.7	21.5
25-29	7.3	9.0	11.7	14.8

Source: Adapted from Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Panorama Social de América Latina 2004* (United Nations publication, Sales No. S.04.II.G.148), graph III.14, p. 169.

Young people who are employed often work in family-owned businesses, small companies with low productivity, the domestic service industry, or the informal economy. Such employment offers very little in the way of wages or benefits. Table 2.6 shows the proportions of Latin Americans from different age groups engaged in low-productivity activities; this category includes self-employed workers, unpaid workers with no technical or professional training, employees of companies with fewer than five workers, and domestic workers. The figures indicate that more young people were employed in low-productivity occupations in 2002 than in 1990.

Table 2.6
Proportions of workers engaged in low-productivity occupations in Latin America, by age and sex

Age group (years)	Sex	Year		Difference
		1990	2002	
15-19	Both sexes	63.3	69.1	9.2
	Males	59.7	67.3	12.8
	Females	68.6	72.0	5.1
20-24	Both sexes	46.8	49.4	5.5
	Males	45.3	48.5	6.9
	Females	48.6	50.5	4.0
25-29	Both sexes	42.7	45.1	5.7
	Males	41.2	43.7	5.9
	Females	44.1	46.9	6.2
30-64	Both sexes	48.9	51.7	5.7
	Males	45.2	48.2	6.7
	Females	54.9	56.6	3.2

Source: Taken from Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud, "La juventud en Iberoamérica: tendencias y urgencias" (LC/L.2180) (Santiago, October 2004), p. 222.

More than two thirds of young people between the ages of 15 and 19 begin their working lives in environments that offer few or none of the labour protections or benefits typically available to other workers. Low-productivity employment declines after this entry phase, but the proportions remain high for all groups, hovering around 50 per cent. It is evident from table 2.6 that, throughout their lives, women are more likely than men to be engaged in this type of work.

The employment situation in Latin America is particularly problematic for young women, who have a harder time finding work, are paid lower wages, and are less likely than their male counterparts to participate in the job market. In 2004, about 62 per cent of young men and 42 per cent of young women were part of the labour force (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2005). Some argue that the rise in unemployment among young women is the product of intermittent increases in their labour force participation; more females are competing for a limited number of jobs, and the share of those who are unable to secure employment is growing (Duryea, Jaramillo and Pagés, 2003).

The educational gains achieved by females in Latin America have not translated into an improved labour market position. The widening gender gap in employment at the regional level derives largely from the dramatic deterioration in the job situation for young urban women in several countries as a result of the 2001 economic crisis. In Argentina, unemployment among female youth in urban areas doubled between 1990 and 2004, and in Uruguay, the increase in unemployment was linked to the severe crisis in neighbouring

Argentina. In Venezuela, high inflation and economic recession seriously affected job prospects for young urban women. The substantial increases in unemployment among young women in Brazil and Colombia were related to the higher rates of female labour force participation in those countries (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2005).

There are a number of important factors to consider in connection with unemployment among female youth in Latin America. Reproductive responsibilities and other family obligations interfere with labour market entry for many young women. The relatively high probability of unemployment may compel some young women to continue their education. Unemployed female youth with little education are more vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, personal frustration, substance abuse, and the threat of HIV/AIDS.

This section has highlighted the challenges faced by Latin American youth in their pursuit of gainful employment. As a group, young people are at a relative disadvantage in the labour market, but those between the ages of 15 and 19 are especially vulnerable. Teenagers (especially females) who abandon their studies often find it extremely difficult to secure employment, and those who do are likely to be paid very little for their efforts.

The prevalence and severity of poverty

Poverty and inequality remain key issues in Latin America, and they have a profound impact on young people's education, employment opportunities, access to essential services, and overall well-being. Among the Latin American countries for which relevant data are available, Bolivia, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru have the highest proportions of youth living in absolute poverty. In 15 of the region's countries at least one in four residents live below the poverty line, and in seven of these more than half of the population is poor (United Nations Development Programme, 2004a). Almost a quarter of those living in Latin America subsist on less than US$ 2 a day (United Nations Millennium Project, 2005).

Poverty levels vary from one age group to another. Children under the age of 14 represent the poorest segment of society, followed by young people between the ages of 15 and 19. In 2002, about 45 per cent of 15- to 19-year-olds were considered "poor" (with incomes of less than twice the cost of a basic food basket), and 17 per cent were considered "indigent" (living on incomes lower than the cost of one basic food basket); the corresponding figures for those aged 30 years and above were 33 and 12.5 per cent respectively (see table 2.7). Youth aged 20-24 years fared slightly better than their younger counterparts; poverty rates were significant for this group but were closer to the figures recorded for adults. Gender-based income disparities were greatest among older youth and young adults; only in their twenties were females more likely than their male peers to experience poverty, reflecting the precariousness of the labour situation for young women.

Table 2.7
Poverty and indigence among selected age groups in Latin America, by sex (percentage)

	Percentage poor		Percentage non-indigent poor		Percentage indigent	
Age (years)	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-14	56.8	56.9	30.7	30.9	26.1	26.1
15-19	45.0	45.3	27.3	27.6	17.7	17.7
20-24	35.4	39.6	23.2	25.3	12.2	14.3
25-29	35.6	39.8	23.0	24.9	12.6	14.9
30 and above	33.5	33.5	21.0	20.9	12.5	12.6

Source: Adapted from Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud, "La juventud en Iberoamérica: tendencias y urgencias" (LC/L.2180) (Santiago: October 2004), table III.7, p. 118.

Note: Statistics are based on the most recent available data.

Aggregate poverty estimates often hide significant disparities between groups and may also mask pockets of extreme poverty. In Latin America, poverty averages tend to obscure the dire situations of slum-dwelling youth, rural youth, and youth of African descent, many of whom are not reached by social services. Indigenous youth and their families are more likely than non-indigenous groups to experience poverty. In Mexico, for example, 81 per cent of indigenous residents live below the poverty line, compared with 18 per cent of the general population (United Nations Development Programme, 2004b).

Non-monetary dimensions of poverty

Poverty is linked to income insufficiency but is also manifested in the inaccessibility of basic necessities such as clean water, sanitation, and health and other social services. It is believed that many households in Latin America face serious water deprivation; statistics indicate that more than 10 per cent of the young people living in Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Guyana, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela do not have access to clean water.

For many young women, early pregnancy and parenthood and the scarcity of reproductive health services seriously interfere with the transition to independent adulthood. Early motherhood contributes to intergenerational poverty, largely because young mothers tend to complete fewer years of schooling than other women their age. High rates of maternal mortality persist in some parts of the region. In Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Panama and Venezuela, adolescent fertility rates exceed 17 per cent. In Chile and Uruguay, more than 5 per cent of 15-year-old girls have given birth (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2004b). Early pregnancy and motherhood are strongly correlated with socio-economic and geographic factors. A rural 17-year-old female living in relative poverty is 4 to 10 times more likely to have a child than a young urban woman at the other end of the socio-economic spectrum (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2004b).

According to UNAIDS, an estimated 1.6 million individuals (or 0.5 per cent of the population) between the ages of 15 and 49 were living with HIV in Latin America in 2005; the corresponding rates for male and female youth were 0.5 and 0.3 per cent respectively (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006b). Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras have the highest rates of HIV prevalence in the region, but Brazil has the largest number of cases in absolute terms; a national prevalence rate consistent with the regional average obscures the fact that one in three people living with HIV in Latin America resides in Brazil. Because one third of Brazilian youth are sexually active before the age of 15, there are serious concerns about the rapid spread of HIV among young people (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006a). The country's efforts in the provision of treatment have greatly reduced rates of death from HIV/AIDS. Youth in high-risk groups such as injecting drug users, sex workers and men who have sex with men require urgent attention, with interventions tailored to their specific needs.

The transmission of HIV between female sex workers and their clients contributes significantly to the spread of the disease in Latin America. In Honduras, which has a prevalence rate of 1.5 per cent and is one of the worst-affected countries in the region, one in twelve female sex workers in the capital city tested positive for HIV; though the data do not indicate the ages of the sex workers, most are believed to be relatively young. Similar trends are observed in Guatemala, where the prevalence rate is 0.9 per cent. In Guatemala City, HIV prevalence was found to be 15 per cent for street-based sex workers and 12 per cent for men having sex with men (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2006a).

There is a high incidence of violence among young people in Latin America, often in connection with youth gangs (pandillas). It is contended that much of this violence derives from the intense resentment and frustration bred by inequities in society and by the failure of adults to address youth concerns. In an era of weakening family and community ties, many young people find the companionship and support they crave and are able to establish peer relationships based on loyalty and trust through membership in antisocial and often criminal groups (Merkle, 2003). The violence perpetrated by young gang members represents a serious threat to society and to the youth themselves. In Colombia, 62.5 per cent of males who die between the ages of 15 and 24 are murder victims, and homicide is the leading cause of death for young males in Brazil (42 per cent), El Salvador (46.1 per cent), and Venezuela (38.3 per cent) (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2004b).

In many areas, urban violence has become so widespread that it is rightly considered a major impediment to development, weakening the social fabric and jeopardizing the health and well-being of the population. Levels of violence vary considerably according to age and gender. In most settings, males are far more likely than females to be both the main perpetrators and the main victims. In Brazil, for example, the homicide rate among young men 15 to 24 years of age was 86.7 per 100,000 in 1999, compared with only 6.5 per 100,000 among young women in the same age group. Even in countries with much lower levels, the incidence and intensity of violence among juvenile males is increasing (Moser, 2005).

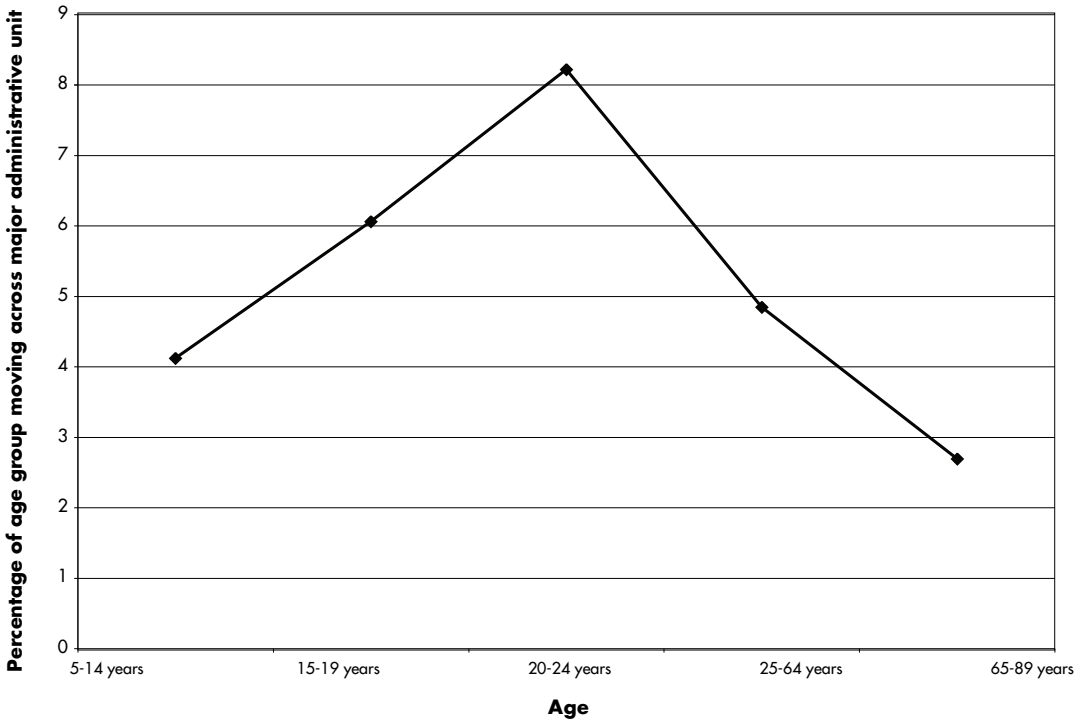
ON THE MOVE: MIGRATION AS A COPING STRATEGY

Migration has allowed large numbers of young people with limited opportunities to explore other alternatives. An upward trend has been observed in recent years as traditional rural-urban migration has been supplemented by increased migration to other Latin American countries and to Europe and the United States.

Internal migration

Young people are more likely than adults to relocate within their own countries (Rodríguez Vignoli, 2004). Figure 2.1 shows the proportions of Latin Americans in different age groups living in a state, province, department or other major administrative unit different from the one they were living in five years before the census was taken. The figure indicates that youth between the ages of 20 and 24 are most likely to migrate from one administrative unit to another, followed by youth aged 15-19 years. Progressively fewer residents migrate within their countries after the age of 25.

Figure 2.1
Rates of internal migration for different age groups in selected Latin American countries



Source: Based on data from the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center, Database on Internal Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (CELADE/MIALC) (available from http://www.eclac.cl).
Note: Statistics are based on the most recent available data.

Table 2.8 indicates that among the 12 Latin American countries for which recent data are available, five (Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay) have recorded internal migration rates of at least 9 per cent for young people aged 20-24 years. Rural-urban migration gained considerable momentum in the 1950s and 1960s and has continued to expand in many parts of the region. Youth have always represented a significant share of internal

migrants and are now underrepresented in rural areas and overrepresented in the cities (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2002); the dramatic shift in the demographic balance has played a critical role in the transformations occurring in countries such as Bolivia, Panama and Paraguay.

Table 2.8
Age distribution of internal migrants in selected Latin American countries (percentage)

Country	5-14 years	15-19 years	20-24 years	25-64 years	65-89 years
Argentina	2.6	3.0	5.5	3.5	1.8
Bolivia	4.2	8.1	10.3	3.2	2.6
Brazil	3.3	3.7	5.2	3.2	0.7
Chile	5.0	6.4	10.3	5.8	2.7
Costa Rica	5.3	5.6	7.6	5.6	3.0
Dominican Republic	3.5	5.0	6.5	4.0	2.5
Ecuador	4.1	7.2	9.0	4.9	2.8
Honduras	3.2	5.9	7.0	4.0	3.5
Mexico	4.0	5.1	6.5	4.4	1.9
Panama	4.0	7.6	10.7	6.7	3.5
Paraguay	5.8	9.2	12.7	7.6	4.4
Venezuela	4.4	5.9	7.3	5.0	2.8
Mean	4.1	6.1	8.2	4.8	2.7

Source: Based on data from the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center, Database on Internal Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (CELADE/MIALC) (available from http://www.eclac.cl).
Note: Statistics are based on the most recent available data.

There are a number of reasons for these trends. As might be expected, employment and education are the main drivers of internal migration, especially among the young. In Paraguay, more than 68 per cent of recent migrants cited work, education and undefined "family circumstances" as the three most important reasons for migration (Molinas Vega, 1999).

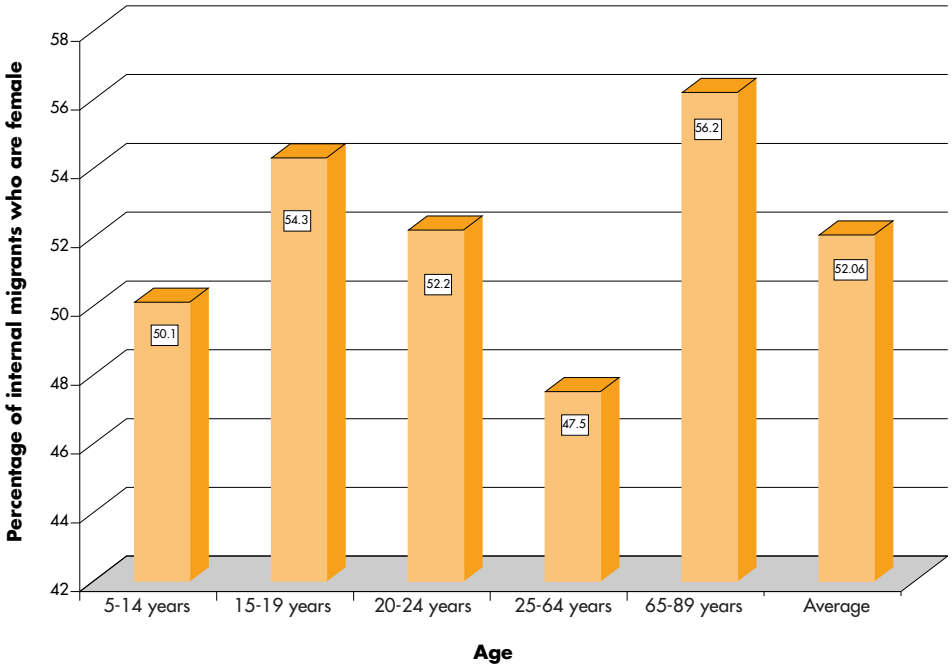
In some countries, internal migration is also triggered by humanitarian crises caused by internal strife or natural disasters. Forced displacement was once a significant problem in many parts of the region but today is largely limited to Colombia. By the end of 2002, an estimated 2.2 million Colombian residents had been forced to leave their homes as a result of political violence (International Organization for Migration, 2005); many of the displaced were of indigenous origin, and around half were under the age of 18 (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

Internal migration rates for youth tend to be lower in Central America than in South America, perhaps because young people in the former are geographically better situated to take advantage of international migration opportunities. Many Central American youth migrate to the United States, but a significant number move to countries such as Mexico and Costa Rica, which have solid economies and attractive educational opportunities.

Panama has one of the highest rates of internal migration in Central America, which may have something to do with the fact that it is geographically most distant from the United States but is probably more directly related to the domestic construction boom and the growing demand for service jobs in the cities.

Young women in rural areas are often compelled to move to the cities because they have fewer opportunities than their male counterparts in their places of origin. Combined statistics for 12 Latin American countries indicate that young women between the ages of 15 and 24 constitute an average of 52-54 per cent of all internal migrants (see figure 2.2) Some female youth relocate to take advantage of secondary or tertiary educational opportunities, but a substantial number of young rural women travel to the cities in search of employment, especially domestic work (Rodríguez Vignoli, 2004).

Figure 2.2
The proportion of female internal migrants in 12 Latin American countries, by age group



Source: Based on data from the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center, Database on Internal Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean (CELADE/MIALC) (available from http://www.eclac.cl).
Note: Statistics are based on the most recent available data.

International migration

Internal migration may be undertaken in search of better educational or employment opportunities or in response to serious humanitarian crises. International migration occurs for the same reasons, though the costs and benefits are potentially much greater. Those who move to other countries within or outside the region may be vulnerable to exploitation, especially if they lack the proper legal documentation, and many find the integration process difficult. In spite of such risks, Latin American youth are increasingly seeking new

opportunities and the promise of a better future beyond their own borders (Guarnizo and Díaz, 1999; Mahler, 2000; Lopes Patarra and Baeninger, 2006; International Organization for Migration, 2005).

For those migrating to other Latin American countries, Argentina, Costa Rica and Venezuela appear to be the most popular destinations. Young people comprise around 18 per cent of the population in Latin America and about 17 per cent of all intraregional migrants. (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and Organización Iberoamericana de Juventud, 2004). Young women make up a significant proportion of intraregional migrants. In Chile, for example, young Peruvian females outnumber their male counterparts by nearly two to one (Stefoni, 2002), and a similar situation prevails in Argentina with Bolivian migrants. For many young women, intraregional migration is associated not with the chance for personal or professional development but rather with the perpetuation of their traditional roles. Young female migrants are increasingly being engaged to perform household chores and to provide care for children and senior citizens. They are locked into occupations with long workdays and low income and face the discrimination and risk of abuse that tend to go hand-in-hand with low economic status and persistent gender inequalities. The substantial participation of young women in intraregional migration in Latin America is consistent with the feminization of migration globally (United Nations Population Fund, 2006).

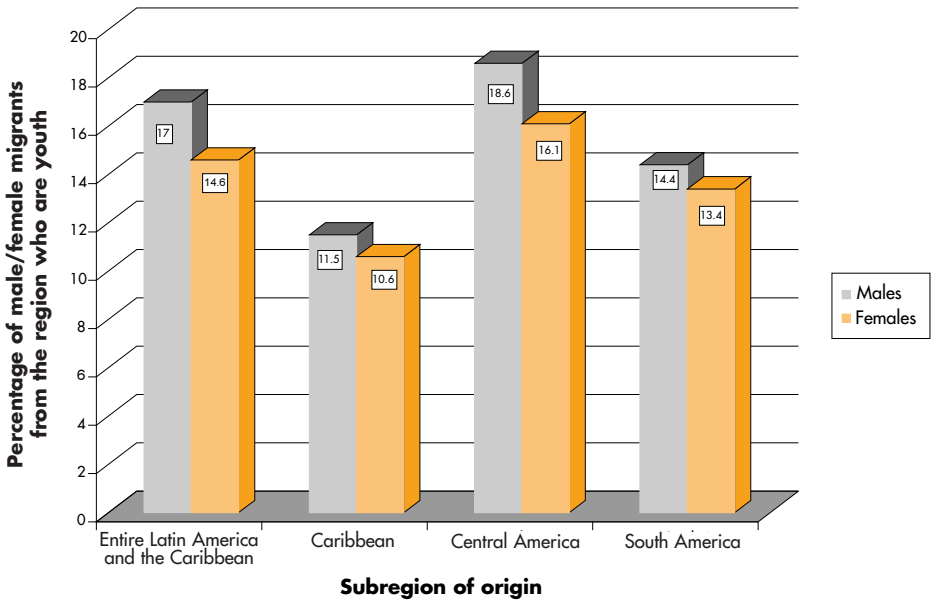
Massive numbers of Latin Americans have migrated to other regions; in 2001, an estimated 21 million were living in OECD countries. The United States represents the primary destination, followed by Spain, Canada, and the Netherlands (International Labour Office, 2005).

Latin American migration to the United States has increased dramatically over the past two to three decades. Between 1980 and 1990 the number of Latin American immigrants living in the country rose from about 4.4 million to 8.4 million, and by 2000 the figure had reached 14.5 million. In 2004 the United States Census Bureau placed the Latin American migrant population at about 18 million; approximately 2.9 million (16 per cent) were between the ages of 15 and 24, and the vast majority of these youth (2.5 million) were from Mexico or other countries in Central America. By 2005, the number of young Latin American migrants residing in the United States exceeded the total number of youth living in Chile and was equal to about half the youth population of Peru.

The sharp increase in Latin American migration to the United States in recent years represents a response to challenges and opportunities on a number of levels. In many Latin American countries, productive capacity has declined dramatically and opportunities for decent employment are seriously limited. More specific factors influencing youth migration include the desire to escape the stigmatization and victimization linked to gang activity and police efforts to repress it, the availability of better educational and job opportunities (not only for poor or disenfranchised youth but also for the sons and daughters of the upper-middle class), and cross-border family reunification policies. Migration to the United States is facilitated by long-standing linkages between the American Southwest and Mexico and by the extensive support networks available for newly arrived immigrants (Pizarro and Villa, 2005).

Young men are dominant in Latin American youth migration to the United States (see figure 2.3). Males constitute only a slight majority of young migrants from Caribbean and South American countries but are heavily overrepresented among Central American youth coming to the United States. One important consideration within this context is that migrants from countries closer to the United States are more likely to travel to the border and make the crossing on foot, and the extreme personal risks associated with such a journey may discourage some young women from migrating, or at least from taking this route.

Figure 2.3
Share of youth among Latin American and Caribbean migrants in the United States, by sex, 2004



Source: United States Census Bureau, "Foreign-born population of the United States: current population survey—March 2004" (Washington, D.C.) (available from http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/ppl-176/tab04-1.xls; accessed on 20 July 2006).

Migration from Latin America to Spain has gained considerable momentum in recent years. According to the national census, about 200,000 migrants from Latin America lived in Spain in 1991; various estimates place the total at between 840,000 and 1.2 million ten years later (Martínez Pizarro and Villa, 2005; Valls and Martínez, 2005). In 2001, around 15 per cent of these immigrants were between the ages of 17 and 24 (Martínez Buján, 2003). Latin American migrants living in Spain are predominantly female, with specific countries providing the bulk of this flow; there tends to be gender parity among migrants from Argentina, Chile and Ecuador, but women constitute an overwhelming majority of those coming from Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Peru. Latin Americans residing in Spain tend to work in low-skill occupations; some 40 per cent of the female migrants are domestic employees, and about 30 per cent of the males work in construction (Valls and Martínez, 2005).

The massive Latin American emigration to the United States and other OECD countries has raised concerns on both sides. Undocumented migrants, especially the young, are vulnerable to labour exploitation, often receive substandard health care, have fewer educational opportunities, and are reluctant to demand or assert their rights. Even legal migrants are facing increasing discrimination in an environment in which nativist sentiments are openly voiced and validated by various local and national politicians.

Human smuggling and trafficking constitute perhaps the most disturbing form of intraregional and interregional migration. The clandestine nature of such activity makes determining the precise magnitude of the problem next to impossible. However, Interpol estimates that 35,000 women are trafficked out of Colombia every year; between 50,000 and 70,000 women from the Dominican Republic are working abroad in the sex industry; about 500,000 girls are engaged in prostitution in Brazil; and some 2,000 girls, many of them migrants, work as prostitutes in Costa Rica (International Organization for Migration, 2005).

The report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization entitled *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All* calls for bilateral and plurilateral action at three levels to address the issues and problems associated with international migration. First, steps should be taken to build upon the foundations of existing instruments, revitalizing and extending multilateral commitments. Second, the "dialogue between countries of origin and destination on key policy issues of common interest" must be strengthened and made more productive. Finally, steps must be taken to develop a multilateral framework for governing the cross-border movement of people (International Labour Office, 2004, p. 99).

WEAK POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: APATHY OR THE ABSENCE OF AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT?

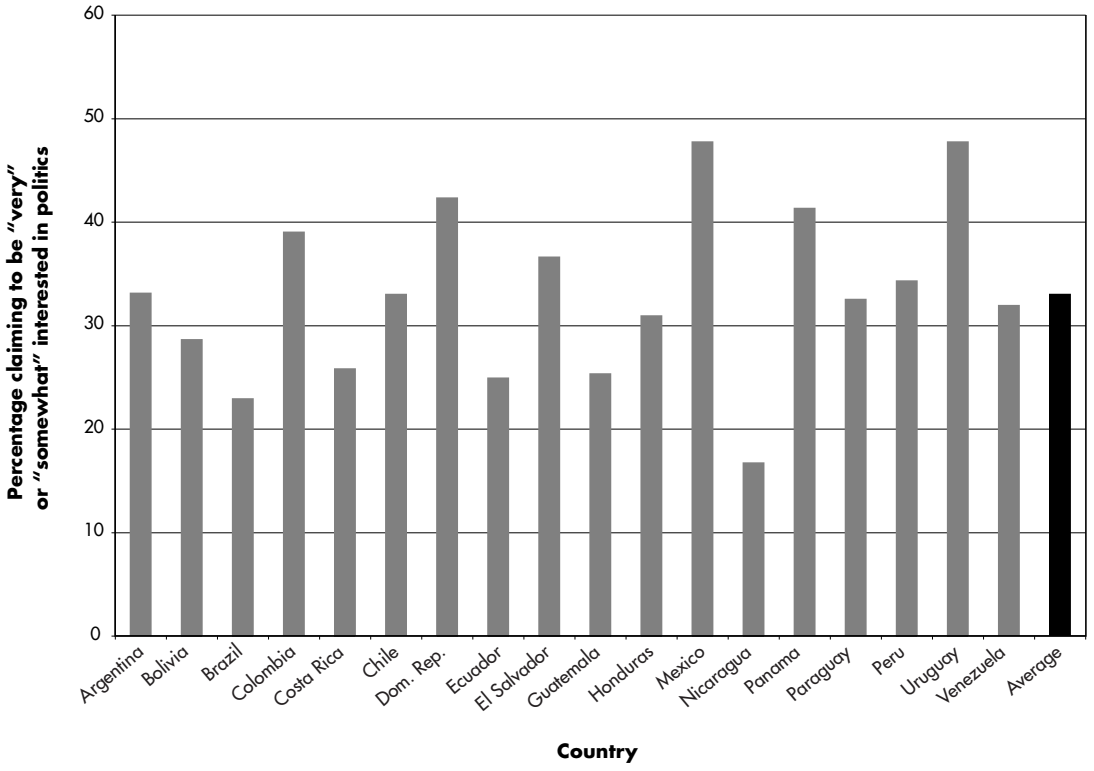
Many young people in Latin America have limited resources and struggle simply to survive. A substantial number migrate to other countries, seeking to escape enduring socio-economic pressures at home. Forced to concentrate on basic survival and lacking the conviction that the status quo may be successfully challenged, growing numbers of Latin American youth are withdrawing from the realm of political activism.

Young people in Latin America have a rich history of political engagement, and recent events demonstrate that committed youth still constitute an effective political force. The 2006 Penguin Revolution in Chile is one example of a powerful social movement started by young people demanding educational reform. An estimated 800,000 protesters, most of them secondary and tertiary students, came together to participate in the largest social movement since the end of the military dictatorship 16 years earlier, and their actions resulted in increased educational spending and placed education at the top of the political agenda (Reel, 2006).

Recent evidence of youth engagement notwithstanding, the results of a region-wide survey conducted by the Latinobarómetro Corporation in 2004 suggest that the political fervor characterizing many Latin American societies in the past may have diminished.1 When asked whether democracy was preferable to all other forms of government, whether in some circumstances an authoritarian system was preferable to a democracy, or whether no

single system was preferable to another, only about 60 per cent of the respondents favored democracy. Support for democracy averaged 56 per cent among youth in their late teens and early twenties,2 though national figures varied widely. In Uruguay, a country with strong democratic traditions, youth support for democracy exceeded 80 per cent, while in countries with weaker democratic histories, such as Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay, the corresponding figure was closer to 45 per cent. Only a third of the young people surveyed claimed to be "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in politics, though again, significant intercountry disparities were apparent (see figure 2.4). At least 40 per cent of the young respondents from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama and Uruguay expressed an interest in politics, while the same was true for only a quarter of the youth from Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. It should be noted that all of the countries in the higher-interest group, with the exception of Mexico, were in the middle of presidential campaigns in 2004.

Figure 2.4
Level of interest in politics among Latin American youth aged 18-24 years, 2004



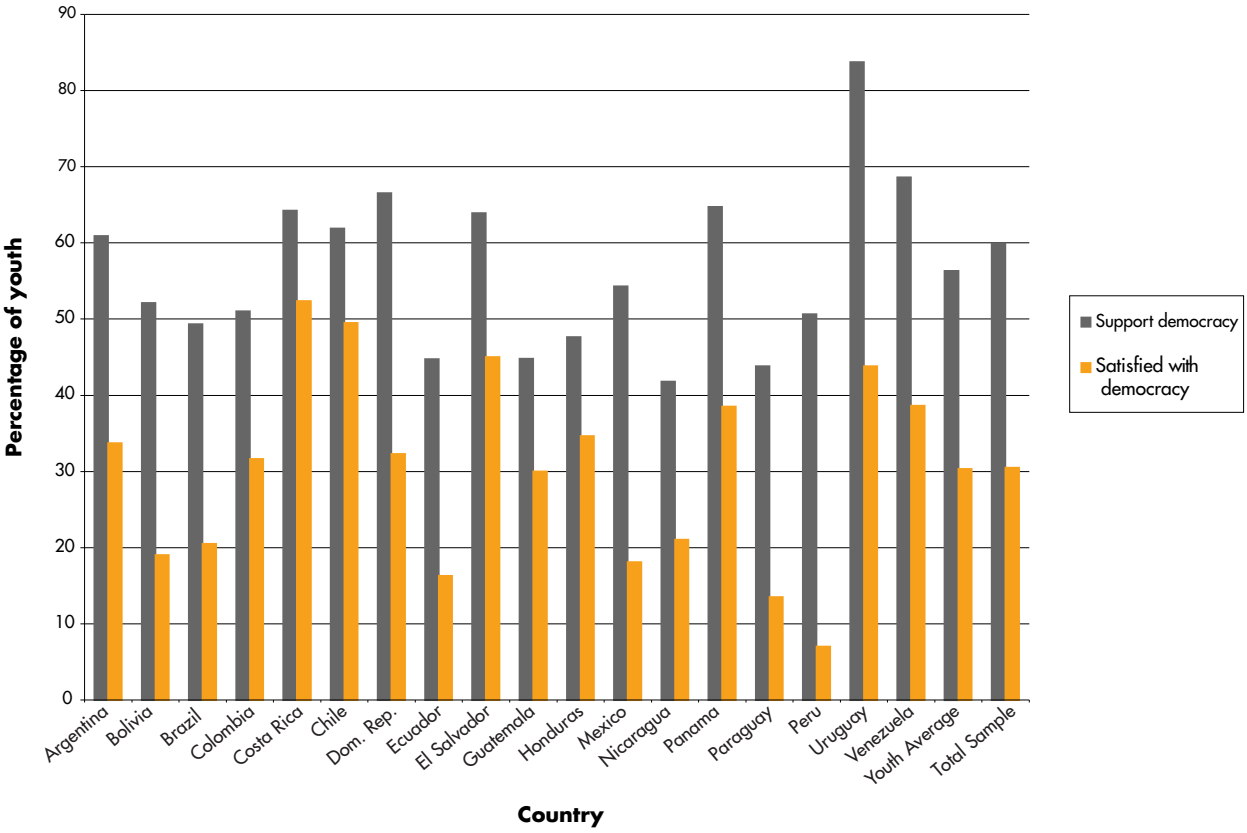
Source: Elaborated from Latinobarómetro, Banco de Datos: Latinobarómetro 2004, annual survey on politics and institutions (database available from www.latinobarometro.org).
Note: Brazil and Nicaragua: 16-24 years.

Why do young people in a region with a rich history of political activism seem to be growing increasingly apathetic? Does this trend reflect a genuine disinterest in sociopolitical participation on the part of youth or are there other factors at play? As noted previously, many young people are preoccupied with meeting their basic needs, but their political disengagement may have more to do with the changing nature of politics in their respective countries. Political structures are continuously evolving, and many of the overarching ideologies that once informed Latin American politics no longer dominate the political landscape. Elections are held more frequently, which is a positive development by any standard; however, voter fatigue may occur, and gains such as these can breed complacence. ICT developments have allowed the public to become better informed, and exposure to frequent political scandals and a growing distrust of political parties have fostered an anti-political attitude among many citizens, including youth.

It would appear that both socio-economic and political factors affect the capacity and willingness of young people to participate in the political process. In Latin America, these factors have fostered a climate in which young people are more likely to adopt non-standard approaches to participation that do not necessarily promote societal cohesion.

It is important to acknowledge the connection between young peoples' confidence in the political system and their decisions regarding political participation. Levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works largely determine the extent of support for democracy. Youth in Latin America were asked how satisfied they were with the exercise of democracy in their own countries, and less than a third indicated that they were "very satisfied" or "rather satisfied" with the efforts of the Government to apply democratic principles (see figure 2.5). Only in Chile were a (bare) majority of young respondents satisfied with the way democracy was working.

Figure 2.5
Support for and satisfaction with democracy among Latin American youth aged 18-24 years, 2004



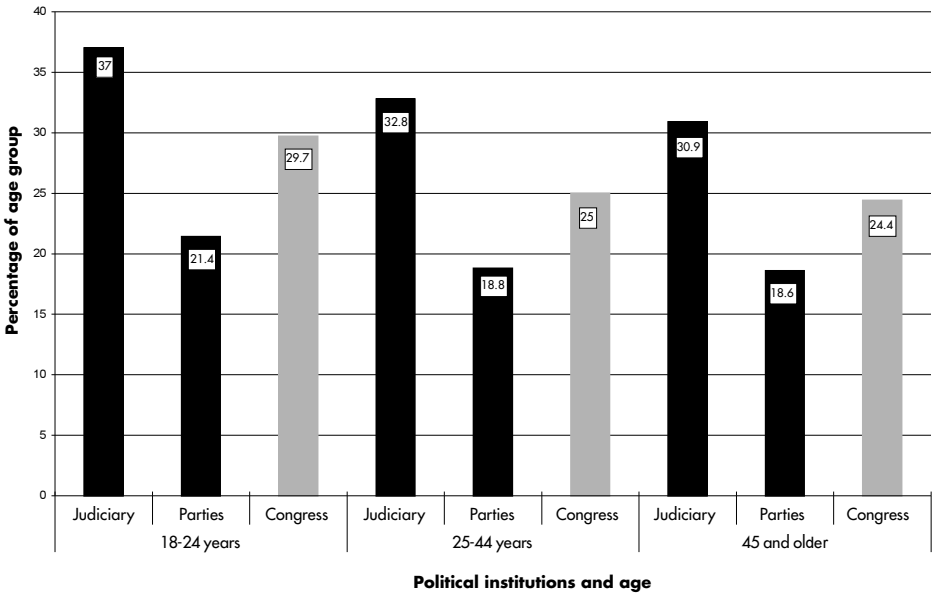
Source: Elaborated from Latinobarómetro, Banco de Datos: Latinobarómetro 2004, annual survey on politics and institutions (database available from www.latinobarometro.org).

Notes: For each country, the level of "support for democracy" reflects the percentage of respondents who chose the option "democracy is preferable to any other form of government", and the proportion of those "satisfied with democracy" derives from the combined percentages of those who said they were "very satisfied" or "rather satisfied" with how democracy was working.

Brazil and Nicaragua: 16-24 years.

In Latin America, the widespread dissatisfaction with the way democracy works coincides with very low levels of public trust in key institutions associated with democratic governance (see figure 2.6). Among those young people surveyed in 2004, only 37 per cent indicated that they had "some" or "a lot of" trust in the judicial system, and the corresponding levels of trust in the legislature and political parties were even lower, at 30 and 21 per cent respectively. The older survey respondents placed less faith in the efficacy of these institutions than did the younger group. The data in figure 2.6 suggest that political trust diminishes with age; these findings may simply reflect the expected gap between the idealism of youth and the growing realism that comes with adulthood and accumulated experience, but another possible explanation is that those youth most critical of their political institutions decided to "vote with their feet" and migrated in search of a better future.

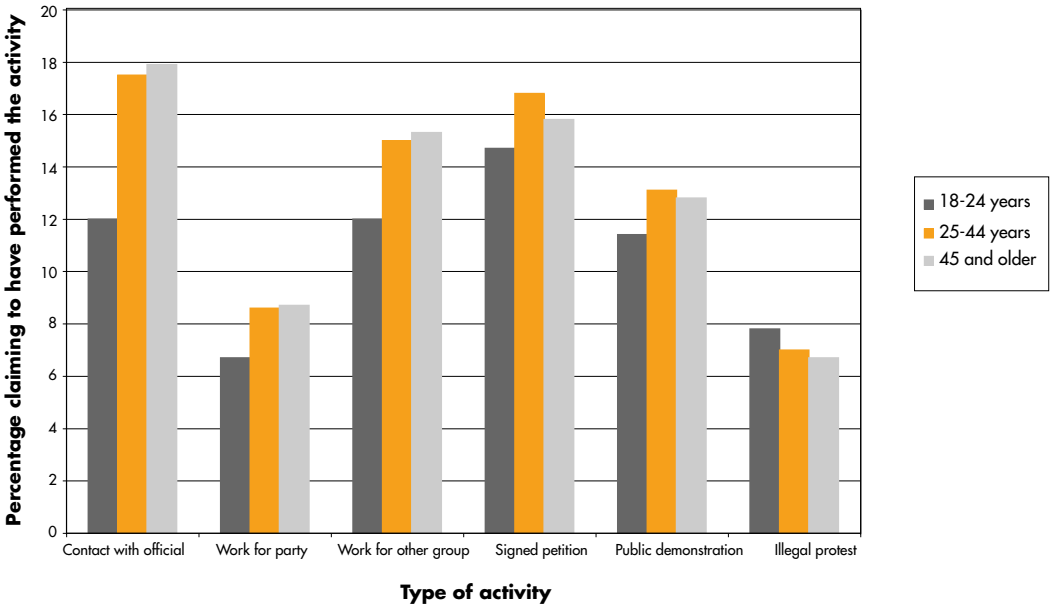
Figure 2.6
Level of trust in key political institutions by age, 2004



Source: Elaborated from Latinobarómetro, Banco de Datos: Latinobarómetro 2004, annual survey on politics and institutions (database available from www.latinobarometro.org).
Note: Brazil and Nicaragua: 16-24 years.

The results of the Latinobarómetro survey reveal a direct correspondence between the level of interest in politics and the level of political activism in specified areas. Figure 2.7 indicates that in all but one of the activities probed in the survey, rates of participation were lower among youth than among older respondents.3 Young people were more likely to sign petitions than to engage in any other political activity, but the only area in which their participation rates were higher than those of older groups was "illegal protests". The older respondents were far more likely to contact State officials than to participate in street demonstrations, but youth were almost equally likely to do either. The tendency to withdraw from politics is higher among Latin American youth than among their older counterparts, but when young people do participate, they are more inclined to engage in non-conventional forms of political activism. The prevalence of such behaviour may indicate the extent to which young people feel unrepresented by and unwelcome within the traditional political establishment.

Figure 2.7
Political participation in Latin America by age group, 2004



Source: Elaborated from Latinobarómetro, Banco de Datos: Latinobarómetro 2004, annual survey on politics and institutions (database available from www.latinobarometro.org).
Note: Brazil and Nicaragua: 16-24 years.

Gender disparities are evident in assessments of political participation in Latin America. Figures 2.8 through 2.13 clearly show that at all ages, men are more likely than women to be politically active. However, the gender differential is relatively small among youth, particularly the more educated segments. A number of factors discourage female political participation. Young people have more limited access to sociopolitical assets, fewer resources, and weaker ties within the social network than do older members of society, and young women are at a particular disadvantage. Females tend to have more domestic responsibilities, which limits the time they can spend on activities outside the home. Another important factor relates to gender roles and expectations; although the involvement of women in the public sphere is gaining greater acceptance in the region, traditional attitudes persist in some countries. Established customs and conventions keep women from participating in the political process, weakening the capacity of civil society to address the inequities females face in the region.

Educational gains are likely to contribute to improvements in most of the areas addressed above, with positive implications for political activism. Recent statistics indicate a positive correlation between educational attainment and political participation in Latin America (see figures 2.8-2.13). In a context of widespread political apathy, better educated youth generally have a greater awareness of their rights and are more inclined to assert them by engaging in political activism. Evidence suggests that education improves the quality of participatory democracy by encouraging greater involvement in public affairs.

Figure 2.8
Political participation in Latin America: percentage of respondents claiming to have contacted State officials, by age, sex and educational level, 2004

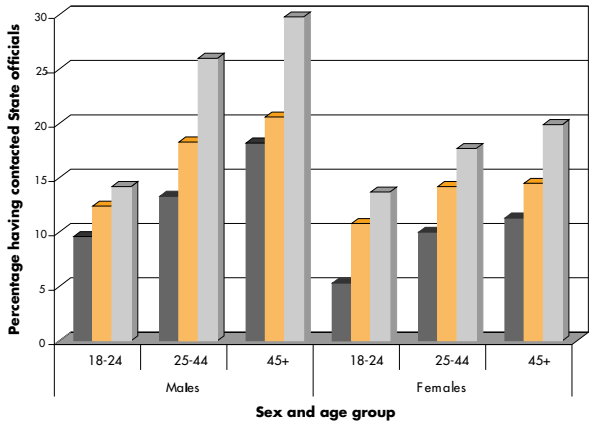


Figure 2.9
Political participation in Latin America: percentage of respondents claiming to have worked for a political party, by age, sex and educational level, 2004

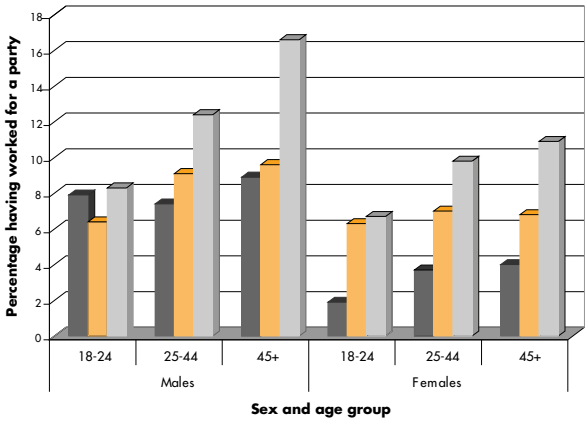


Figure 2.10
Political participation in Latin America: percentage of respondents claiming to have worked for or donated money to another group, by age, sex and educational level, 2004

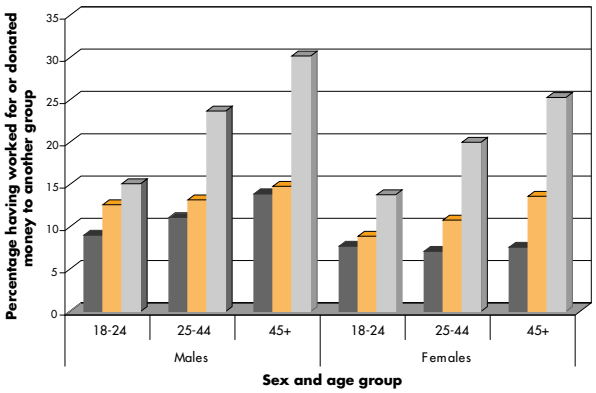


Figure 2.11
Political participation in Latin America: percentage of respondents claiming to have signed a petition, by age, sex and educational level, 2004

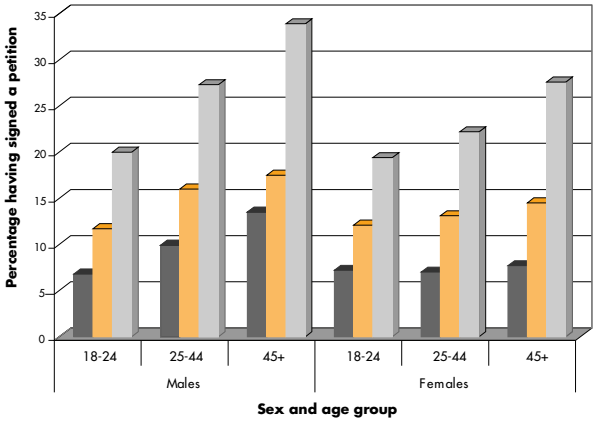


Figure 2.12
Political participation in Latin America: percentage of respondents claiming to have participated in a public demonstration, by age, sex and educational level, 2004

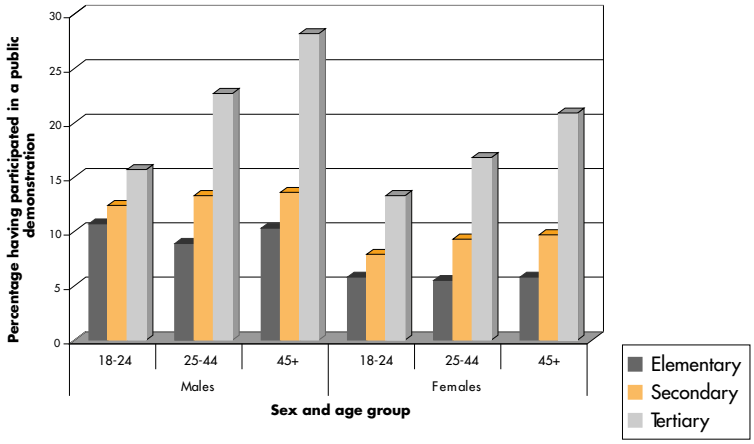
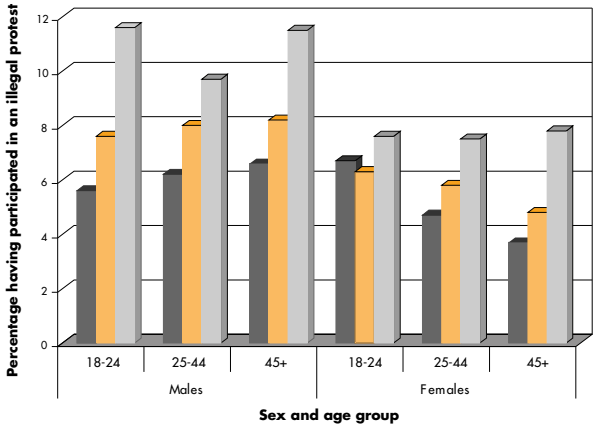


Figure 2.13
Political participation in Latin America: percentage of respondents claiming to have participated in an illegal protest, by age, sex and educational level, 2004



Source: Elaborated from Latinobarómetro, Banco de Datos: Latinobarómetro 2004, annual survey on politics and institutions (database available from www.latinobarometro.org).

Latin Americans of all ages appear to have little trust in their political institutions, are largely unsatisfied with the way democracy works in their countries, and are not as politically active as in times past. Political frustrations and disappointments seem to be shared by most of the region's residents, regardless of age; there are few factors specific to youth that might explain the high degree of political distrust and apathy among them. Young people exhibit many of the same political attitudes and tendencies as their elders but seem to be even more reluctant to become politically involved. The growing political indifference in Latin America is largely related to frustrations over the lack of opportunities for upward social and economic mobility, the high levels of inequality, poverty and social exclusion (United Nations Development Programme, 2004a), and the lack of accountability and responsiveness among political leaders and institutions. Young people struggling to transition successfully into adulthood are particularly vulnerable to the challenges arising in connection with these issues and feel powerless to halt the seemingly inexorable decline. If they are to overcome their sense of hopelessness and political disconnectedness, young people must be given more opportunities to contribute to the decisions that affect them and society at large.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Various structural factors effectively prevent Latin American youth from participating fully in society. Job creation for young people remains relatively limited in spite of improved economic growth in a number of countries, and younger professionals are being absorbed more slowly into the most dynamic industries and activities. Inadequate educational preparedness and professional training are problems for many young people trying to enter the job market, and those who are able to find work must often settle for lower pay and fewer benefits (particularly in the areas of social security and health care). Increasing numbers of youth are migrating to countries perceived as having more opportunities for participation, but cross-border movement often presents new challenges that must be overcome before youth can hope to benefit from these opportunities and build a better life for themselves. While these factors are difficult to change in the short run, it is critical that Governments and civil society establish stronger foundations and effective mechanisms for the integration of youth as a long-term strategy. Within this framework, it is necessary to begin with the fundamentals; changes in education, health care, and economic policies must be based on the supposition that youth will become tomorrow's leaders and will therefore be responsible for the future development of the region.

Well-educated youth generally have better prospects for social and economic success and are more likely to become contributing members of society. Action is required on multiple levels to enhance the quality of education and increase school retention rates, especially at the secondary level. Steps should be taken to improve teacher training and learning environments and to ensure that educational content is aligned with labour force requirements. While all young people require sustained educational support, targeted policies and programmes may be needed to expand access for specific groups, including rural girls, indigenous youth, and young people living in poverty. Youth from economically disadvantaged families are more likely to drop out of school and, lacking marketable skills, are unable to secure decent, permanent employment. Effective educational retention strategies ultimately improve job prospects and therefore represent a powerful tool for poverty alleviation.

Young people are often unable to find work in their own communities. Some youth accept low-paying jobs for which they are overqualified, and rural residents may seek employment in urban centres, while other young people move elsewhere within or outside Latin America. Those who migrate face a new set of challenges relating to both social and economic integration; immigrants may experience prejudice and are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Young women are especially at risk. Female youth have made greater educational gains than their male counterparts, but this has not translated into greater income security in the long run. In many areas the job market is limited for women. Those who find jobs are often poorly paid and work long hours doing menial labour; young women who migrate frequently work in the domestic service or sex industries and are regularly exploited.

In order to protect the rights of workers both domestically and internationally, minimum wage requirements and laws governing working hours need to be enforced where they exist and established where they do not. Global action must be taken within a collab-

orative framework to deal with human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Progress in these areas will benefit all of humanity but is especially important for youth (particularly young women), who tend to be among the world's most vulnerable citizens.

To encourage Latin American youth to remain at home and make a positive contribution to their own communities, Governments and civil society institutions must work to provide social support, educational and economic opportunities, and spaces for political activism and other forms of public participation. A certain level of migration is inevitable, however, and the Governments of host countries must acknowledge that immigrants can contribute significantly to society and the economy and should provide clear rules for granting permanent residence to those who wish to establish deeper roots in their adopted countries.

Latin Americans of all ages are largely dissatisfied with the political system, public institutions, and the way democracy is (or is not) exercised in their countries. Young people in the region were once well-known for their interest and involvement in public affairs, but the youth of today seem indifferent to politics, and relatively few are engaged in conventional forms of activism. For many young people, alienation from traditional politics appears to be a consequence of their social marginalization.

Young people are unlikely to have faith in their public institutions or to support the democratic process until the Government addresses its own shortcomings and takes decisive action to satisfy the needs of citizens in general and of youth in particular. Increased transparency and accountability in public administration, a more responsive political system, and greater attention to social, economic and cultural development priorities would have a positive impact on young people's attitudes towards the political establishment and would encourage more constructive involvement among youth in public affairs.

[1] All the data reported in this section have been elaborated from the original 2004 Latinobarómetro dataset.

[2] The Latinobarómetro survey included interviews with Latin American citizens eligible to vote—those aged 18 and above in all but two Latin American countries. In Brazil and Nicaragua the minimum voting age is 16, so the relevant survey information for those countries relates to youth between the ages of 16 and 24.

[3] Respondents to the Latinobarómetro survey were asked whether they had ever participated in any of the political activities listed in figure 2.7. Older people had lived longer and had thus had more opportunities for participation, so it is likely that the degree of political participation among youth is underestimated when compared with that of older citizens.

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