



CONCEPT NOTE

REGIONAL BREAKOUT SESSION

Latin America and the Caribbean

ECOSOC Youth Forum 2016

2 February 2016

9.30 – 10.50 a.m.

United Nations Headquarters, New York

1. Background and context

The inclusion of youth in development processes is critical in order to advance towards more egalitarian societies and it is one of the most urgent challenges facing Latin American and Caribbean societies today. People aged between 15 and 29 represent over a quarter of the region's total population. In some countries, a large proportion of this population is extremely excluded and marginalized from the economic, political and social processes that are taking place due to the marked social and economic inequality that is prevalent in the region. This exclusion not only prevents Latin American and Caribbean youth from fully enjoying their rights, it also leads to fragmented and polarized societies, to increases in inequality, and it generates tensions that are manifested at the individual-, family-, community- and societal-level. Moreover, the invisibility and exclusion of youth are factors that are associated with the high levels of violence that exist in several countries of the region.

On the whole, the situation of youth in the region is mixed. Important gains have been made in secondary education, particularly among young women. On average, close to 60 percent of the region's youth aged 20-24 completed secondary education in 2012, compared to just 35 percent of 20-24 years olds a decade earlier. However, these improvements have not equated to gains in the labour market, as youth continue to experience higher levels of unemployment compared to adults. In fact, youth unemployment rates in the region are between two and three times higher than adult unemployment rates, a trend that has not changed over the past few decades. Moreover, youth employment is characterized by being unstable and in the informal market. Over one in five youth in the region, 29.7 million youth, are not involved in studies or in the labour market and youth in this group are often highly stigmatized and linked to vagrancy, violence, and drug consumption. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that a majority of youth in this group are young women who are responsible for domestic and care tasks within the home. In the area of health, persistently high adolescent maternity rates, substance abuse, and morbidity and mortality relating to injuries are of particular concern. Relating to this latter point, violence, in different forms and manifestations, has a profound



effect on the region's youth. Six of the 14 most violent countries in the world are in Latin American and the Caribbean and youth are affected by violence, both as victims and perpetrators. In terms of political participation, youth in the region express skepticism over traditional political institutions, and they question the ability of democratically elected governments to truly represent their interests. Nonetheless, a majority of them vote and they find new ways to organize and intervene in the political arena, sometimes with notable results – youth have protagonized a number of movements that have resulted in significant political and social changes in recent years.

This reality occurs in a context of marked inequalities – between countries and especially within countries. These inequalities in opportunity and in outcomes limit the ability of millions of youth in the region to fulfill their potential and contribute fully to their societies. Socio-economic situation, sex, racial/ethnic background, place of residence, migration status, disability, sexual orientation, and VIH status are some of the dimensions that shape the prospects for young people in the region.

Governments in the region have taken positive steps to advance the situation of young people by enacting national youth policies and youth-specific legislation, and other positive steps, such as the adoption of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development and its implementation guide, which has a strong focus on youth. However, challenges remain, including the effective implementation and monitoring of these policies, achieving greater articulation and coordination among entities that promote youth development at all levels, financing, and youth participation in these processes.

Most countries of the region still stand to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend due to their young age structure. However, in order for this to happen greater investments need to be made in youth and the positive potential of youth as strategic actors in development needs to be recognized, taking advantage of their higher levels of education, their mastery of technological tools, their more globalized worldview, and the innovative ways they find to make their voices heard.

2. Objectives

This breakout session will bring together diverse participants interested in various aspects pertaining to youth development in Latin America and the Caribbean. In a moderated discussion, breakout session participants will exchange views and engage in an open and candid discussion. In particular, the session will aim to:

- Consider the existing challenges and opportunities for youth development in the region;



- Reflect on youth engagement in the process leading to the 2030 development agenda and on the role young people in the region can play in implementing the 2030 agenda;
- Provide a space for information and experience sharing and knowledge building.

From this discussion key messages and recommendations on how to continue to advance youth development in Latin America and the Caribbean and how to further strengthen the youth focus and participation in the 2030 agenda will be distilled.

3. Questions

- What are the specific challenges facing Latin American and Caribbean youth, including in the areas of economic development, employment and decent work, health, equality, participation, peace and security?
- In light of the high levels of inequality in the region, how can governments and various stakeholders ensure inclusive and gender-sensitive youth development in Latin America and the Caribbean?
- What are some key mechanisms to guarantee meaningful participation among Latin American and Caribbean youth in implementing the 2030 agenda and how can youth themselves be proactive to ensure this meaningful participation?
- What measures can be taken to effectively implement the national youth policies that are in place in the countries in the region, increase investment in youth and strengthen articulation and coordination among public entities working to promote youth development?
- How can we involve youth ministries and regional and sub-regional youth mechanisms, such as the Ibero-American Youth Organization in monitoring the implementation of 2030 Agenda, or at least achieve coordinated work with foreign affairs ministries?

4. Suggested readings

CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe) (2014), Panorama Social de América Latina, 2014 (LC/G.2635-P), Santiago.

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Gontero, Sonia y Jürgen Weller (2015), ¿Estudias o trabajas? El largo camino hacia la independencia económica de los jóvenes de América Latina,

<http://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/39486-estudias-o-trabajas-largo-camino-la-independencia-economica-jovenes-america>

OIJ (Ibero-American Youth Organization) (2013), Agenda de Desarrollo e inversión social en juventud: una estrategia post 2015 para Ibero-América,

http://www.oij.org/file_upload/publicationsItems/document/20131008150827_61.pdf.

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PNUD (Programa de Naciones Unidas para el desarrollo) (2013), Participación Política Juvenil en la Gobernabilidad Local en América Latina,

http://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/es/home/library/democratic_governance/participacion-politica-juvenil-en-la-gobernabilidad-local-en-ame.html

Trucco, D and Heidi Ullmann (eds.), Juventud: realidades y retos para una inclusión con igualdad. Libros de la CEPAL, N° 137 (LC/G.2647-P), Santiago, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2015.

UNFPA/CEPAL (Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas/Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe) (2012), Informe Regional de Población en América Latina y el Caribe, 2011. Invertir en juventud en América Latina y el Caribe: Un imperativo de derechos e inclusión, <http://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/3130-informe-regional-de-poblacion-en-america-latina-y-el-caribe-2011-invertir-en>