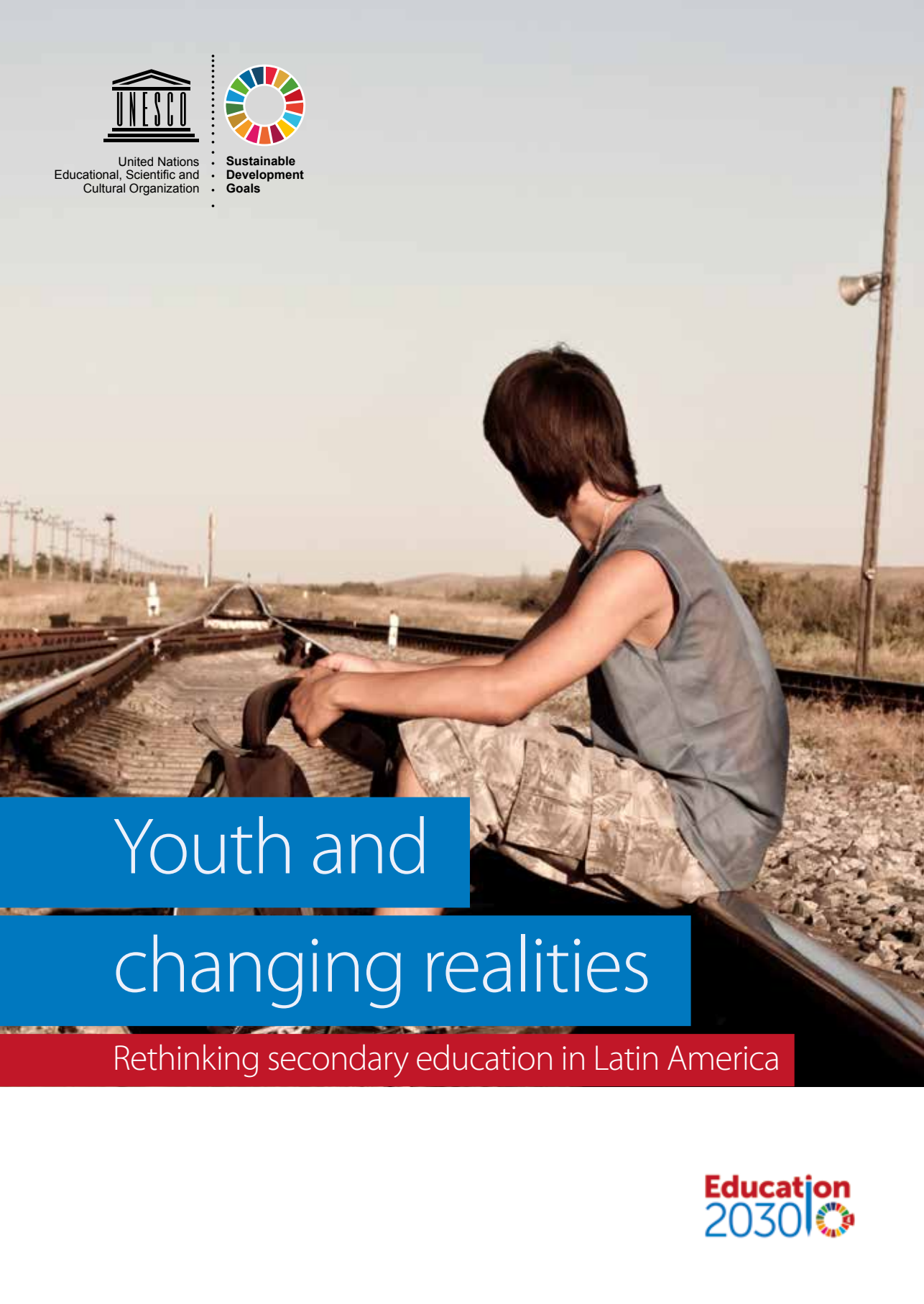




United Nations  
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Sustainable  
Development  
Goals



# Youth and changing realities

Rethinking secondary education in Latin America

Education  
2030 

# Youth and changing realities

Rethinking secondary education in Latin America

Néstor López, Renato Opertti and Carlos Vargas Tamez (eds)

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## Foreword

Youth are central to UNESCO's mandate. The more than one billion youth and adolescents in the world today hold the key to our shared future. At UNESCO, we believe that education can promote the full and effective participation of young people in the process of personal, social, civic, economic and political development, and can thus contribute towards the achievement of the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To empower our youth, not only should education and learning opportunities be available and accessible to all but these should be responsive to the changing realities of youth today. The young women and men from 159 Member States that participated in the 9th UNESCO Youth Forum in October 2015 agreed that education – particularly national curricula for secondary education – should not be defined unilaterally by education authorities and teachers but should incorporate youth voices and allow learners to explore other sources of knowledge. They also concluded that schools should not be seen merely as structures but as communities and safe places for personal development where creativity and critical thinking are stimulated.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action adopted by the global education community in May 2015 calls for youth, learners and their organizations to be full partners in the implementation and realization of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4); to determine their requirements for improved learning; to encourage governments and other stakeholders to respond to their needs and aspirations; and to help shape relevant policies. It also appeals to Member States to guarantee 12 years of free, publicly funded, inclusive, equitable, quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes as a basis to access affordable and quality tertiary education.<sup>1</sup> However, this represents a major challenge as 90 per cent of the world's adolescents live in the Global South, where a significant portion have not completed upper secondary education. Further, there is little information on the situations, habits, hopes and aspirations of these youth.<sup>2</sup>

1. See UNESCO. 2015. *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656e.pdf>
2. See UNICEF. 2012. *Progress for Children. A report card on adolescents*. Number 10, April 2012. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/media/files/PFC2012\\_A\\_report\\_card\\_on\\_adolescents.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/files/PFC2012_A_report_card_on_adolescents.pdf)

The present study aims to enrich the debate on youth disengagement from secondary education – focusing on the Latin American region – to provide recommendations for policy-makers and identify future lines of enquiry on the road to SDG4-Education 2030. Specifically, it seeks to enhance knowledge on the relevance of secondary education and curricula, especially for youth, and addresses the need to regain young learners’ trust in education and to arrive at more positive social constructions of youth among educators, parents and education authorities. In so doing, this study explores the subjective dimension of youth identity – their disengagement in particular – in an effort to supplement available data on the structures, coverage and effectiveness of national education systems. It also looks at how educational experiences shape youth cultures and identities as well as their attitudes toward education and its potential to improve individual and collective well-being.

This is the first in a series of regional studies on youth disengagement from secondary education. It has been initiated by UNESCO’s Education Sector - Section of Partnerships, Cooperation and Research within the Division for Education 2030 Support and Coordination – and is undertaken jointly with UNESCO’s International Institute for Educational Planning Buenos Aires and the International Bureau of Education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Q. Tang', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Qian Tang, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

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# Introduction

## Néstor López and Carlos Vargas Tamez

We live in an increasingly contradictory and complex world, one in which an unsustainable economic growth model constantly exacerbates ecological pressure and climate change. It is a world of greater wealth but also of progressive vulnerability, inequality and exclusion. While it is becoming ever more interconnected and interdependent, growing levels of tension and violence are undermining social cohesion (UNESCO, 2015b). In this context, the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development designates sustainable human and social development as its main concern. Thus it places education at the centre of the agenda through Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations, 2015). In essence, it views education through a humanistic lens as a human right and a common good.

SDG4 is much more ambitious than that included in the Millennium Development Goals for 2015, which concentrated exclusively on access to and completion of primary education (see *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*). SDG4 goes beyond the focus on the right to basic education, which was at the heart of the Education for All movement, and undertakes to ensure non-discrimination in access to post-basic learning opportunities. Beyond the commitment made to guaranteeing a full cycle of 12 years of primary and secondary education for all and universal literacy for young people by 2030, the goal also

commits to ensuring equal learning opportunities through technical and vocational education at the secondary and post-secondary level or through university studies. This goal targeting post-basic education reflects a renewed interest in guaranteeing equitable access to opportunities during the entire period of youth and beyond.

This global concern over education and training policies for young people is not surprising as world unemployment rates are on the rise and young people continue to be disproportionately affected by the lack of job opportunities and compelled to undertake more informal and precarious work. However, the more than a billion youth currently living in the world constitute a huge demographic potential and are a strategic asset for social, economic, cultural and scientific development. The advances achieved in expanding access to basic education over the past two decades have stimulated a strong demand for upper secondary education; technical and vocational education; and tertiary education. At the basic education level, for example, enrolment has doubled worldwide since 2000. With roughly 90 per cent of young people linked to some social network, we have today the most educated, informed, active, connected and mobile generation in the history of humankind (UNESCO, 2015). This new networked reality is changing many facets of our day-to-day experience and giving rise to new forms of identity construction, communication as well as social, civic and political engagement among young men and women.



Historically, the growing complexity of human and social development has been reflected in the gradual extension of the duration of compulsory education cycles. Up to 2009, for example, the world average for compulsory education was 9.3 years. This average stood at 7.4 years in sub-Saharan Africa, 8.8 years in the Arab world and 10.5 in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-UIS, 2011). Many countries have adopted, or are striving to achieve, the expansion to the full 12 years of the cycle for compulsory schooling. However, together with these advances in the legislation of the various countries, a worrying process of disengagement from schooling at the secondary education level can be observed.<sup>3</sup> This trend raises a fundamental question on the relevance of secondary education in light of the changing realities of young people in a world becoming ever more complex and uncertain. Indeed, it has been observed how current education systems are to a great extent incapable of linking the methods and content of learning to the everyday experiences of youth. This disconnect sparks the perception that a formal education is not as relevant, both as a basis for handling the present as well as facing the future or as a vehicle to ensure upward social mobility. The International Labour Organization notes a degree of frustration since these calls for relevance are still not being translated into improvements in the standard of education (ILO, 2015). The decreased labour force participation rates worldwide are the result not only of an ageing population but also of the growing disenchantment of young people and their lack of expectations.

In Latin America, the debate on education policies – especially on the relevance of secondary education – has been intense over the last two decades. A series of reforms carried out during this period is indicative of this growing concern. Nine of the

general education laws presently in operation were approved in the past 15 years and some countries, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Venezuela, had already reformed their standards during the previous decade. In the development of each of these laws, the state, civil society and other stakeholders have consulted, mobilized, made contributions and taken a particular stance.

In those debates, two core approaches have gained a certain degree of consensus and, at present, are shaping education policies in the region. The first involves making education a fundamental human right and, consequently, making the state a guarantor of that right. The second is to make secondary education part of the compulsory schooling cycle. Almost all countries in the region are proposing a schooling cycle spanning from the pre-primary education level (children aged three, four or five years, depending on what each country stipulates) through to the completion of secondary education, which, in most cases, is until the age of 17. These transformations, implemented in the regulatory frameworks of the region, represent one of the greatest challenges to education policy of recent decades. The main challenge is to shift the perception of secondary education as a privilege, hinging on clear mechanisms of selection and discrimination, towards another vision based on inclusive education conceived as a right.

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of young people are linked to some social network. We have today the most educated, informed, active, connected and mobile generation in the history of humankind.

3. See Scott, C. 2015. *The Futures of Learning 1: Why must learning contents and methods change in the 21st century?* UNESCO Education Research and Foresight Working Papers, Paris. [ERF Working Papers Series, No. 13]. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002348/234807E.pdf>

This structural change in public education policies places the secondary school learner at the centre of the debate. Young people from different backgrounds engage with schools, bringing together their own experiences, identities, views and sense of belonging. Individuals for whom the state must guarantee the right to a quality education are given recognition and a voice. Who are these young people? What are their daily realities and living conditions? What is the most suitable education policy for meeting the needs of such a heterogeneous group? What part do, or should, they play in the organization of education? There are plenty of questions and, for the moment, the answers are few and far between.

The uncertainties in this field prompts us to approach the phenomenon using several frameworks and different perspectives. One central aspect – particularly in Latin American countries – is the need to take into account the structural dimension that focuses on the living conditions of families, young people and their strategies to obtain a decent level of well-being.

At present, the aim of all the education systems within the region is for all girls and boys to access pre-primary education during their first years of life; that they remain enrolled at least until completion of the secondary level; and that, during that experience, they acquire socially relevant and significant learning outcomes for their personal, family and community-based projects. This route requires a considerable effort on the part of each learner and his or her family. Going to school every day for 12 or 13 years, gaining access to the necessary materials and placing a priority on study over other activities is a challenge that is only feasible if one has a reasonable level of well-being. In the case of young people, the situation is still more complex since their continued school attendance presupposes that their families can bear the opportunity cost of foregone earnings. Universalizing secondary education requires

strategies that successfully combine education policies with social security and the welfare of the population.

A second aspect that should be taken into account when seeking to strengthen the role of governments as guarantors of the right to education is the subjective dimension. Who are these adolescents and young people who are expected to stay in the education system? What are their expectations and their life plans? The success of an education policy guided by human rights considerations depends to a great extent on how firmly that policy is embedded in the projects and expectations of learners, and the ways it can shape and empower them. Furthermore, its success will depend on dialogue and free-flowing communication based on mutual respect and recognition between teachers and learners. To achieve this aspect, a better understanding of the identities of these young people is needed as well as how to start a productive dialogue with them to design education policy.

It is clear that both dimensions – the structural and the subjective – are closely interrelated. The context of one's birth and upbringing shapes the identity of the individual, their point of view and their appreciation of the world around them as well as their projects and expectations. Likewise, the possibility of rewriting their identity and enhancing their daily lives – particularly, through education – also has a bearing on the adolescent's viewpoint. This implies that the material and identity-based dimensions interlock, conferring on the individual a place of their own and specific action in the social field.

One of the major challenges of consolidating secondary schooling as a right is redefining the link between the institution and young people. In the past, when secondary school was viewed as an institution that mainly classified and selected learners, the onus was on the students to adjust to the format stipulated by the institution. In the new

scenario, where the school's mission is educational inclusion as well as equity and quality in the learning processes, this relationship is inverted. Given the heterogeneous universe of adolescents and young people of various social backgrounds and from different cultural and identity-building matrices, the school has to generate a variety of policies to recognize such diversity among learners. This strategy is fundamental to guaranteeing the right to education for the young people concerned. The institutional dimension then becomes positioned as a highly relevant third dimension to be approached directly when devising activities intended to guarantee quality and inclusive education.

Nevertheless, in addition to the goals described above and the challenges of political will to provide a full secondary education to the entire population of young people, there is also a need to guarantee equitable access to effective and relevant learning processes. What do we know about young people's expectations for secondary education? What are the objective conditions that limit the participation of youth in this education cycle? What are the realities and perceptions of young people that shape their education trajectories?

To gain answers to these questions, this study focuses on secondary education in Latin America, taking into account the indices of youth leaving school at this stage. In an attempt to better understand these phenomena, perspectives are adopted that focus on the objective dimension, which could explain the interruption of compulsory education among youth and a more subjective dimension linked to youth identities and cultural practices. Equally important are perspectives that capture the perceptions of teachers and that focus on the generation gap. These perspectives are viewed within the paradigm of inclusive secondary education – understood as the right to access and enjoy a relevant and appropriate education that is both equitable and of good quality.

In the first chapter of this study, Vanesa D'Alessandre analyses the situation of secondary education from a perspective of what she calls 'protected educational trajectories'. She presents data on the structure of education systems within the region and on the perceptions that young Latin Americans have of their lives, their expectations and desires for the future along with the role education plays in their lives. The work then centres on identifying which factors allow progress towards effective school trajectories and which interrupt them. Using this approach, she concludes that the most significant causes of school disengagement are the early entry of young people into the labour market and their implication in domestic care tasks. These factors inevitably prompt reflection on the family dynamics in homes that are the most economically disadvantaged.

In the second chapter, Daniel Contreras and Miguel Lafferte present an innovative approach to assessing secondary education, placing the emphasis on the subjective processes underlying school disengagement. Along these lines of thinking, the authors analyse the expectations and representations of youth in education along with the school experiences that mould their identities and their points of view. Based on a review of the literature, the authors analyse young people's educational practices and identity formation, specifically in the era of globalization and interconnectivity. The study also highlights elements that are often absent from analyses about youth and education, thus complementing the more traditional analytical approaches on the subject.

In the final chapter, Renato Opertti takes as a reference framework UNESCO's publication *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?* (2015) and observes that, if education is to be regarded as a global common good, it will need to go beyond the gradual universalization of educational programmes that are promoted through standardized measures and take into

account the needs and aspirations of young people in their specific contexts. In the analysis of secondary education, these ideas promote young people regaining confidence in education; a positive, informed and hopeful vision of youth on the part of the teachers, benefiting from the participation of parents and the community; and the renewed conviction of political authorities regarding education as a comprehensive policy that covers economic, social and cultural aspects.

This publication is situated to contribute to the debate on social and educational policies in Latin America. The aim is not to provide answers to the initial questions and present recommendations. Instead, the chapters seek to identify and describe some of the current-day certainties in this developing field of exploration and public intervention, and identify what other challenging questions should be posed.

The three chapters, in one form or another, focus on the state. The first shows how, at present, there is still a lack of adequate strategies to support families so that youth may fully exercise their right to education and suggests what features are needed to make this a reality. The second chapter clarifies for policy-makers the identity of the secondary level stakeholder and invites policy-makers to promote activities based on recognizing the identity and expectations of youth. In this way, the text

proposes ways in which public action can foster a genuine model of inclusive education. The third chapter illustrates the challenges Latin American countries face as they strive towards inclusive education and sets out the various conceptions of inclusion drawn upon by countries when they implement the political and social changes they consider necessary.

In short, this study offers a set of reflections around youth education in Latin America to enhance the on-going debate, identify future lines of research and provide inputs for those working in the field of education policy in the region.

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Chapter 1.

Young people in relation to extended compulsory education



# 1. Young people in relation to extended compulsory education

**Vanesa D’Alessandre**

## 1.1 Introduction

In its political dimension, the education provided in schools plays an important role in shaping societies. Education systems are mechanisms that enable the steady incorporation of new generations into public life. Hence, the actual form they adopt in each historical period reveals the expectations of those preceding them.

The present relationship that children and young people establish with education systems is part of a gradual and sustained process of extending the duration of compulsory schooling to the completion of upper secondary education. In Latin America, at the beginning of the new decade, practically all boys and girls aged 6 to 11 years and eight out of ten adolescents aged 15 to 17 years were attending school. In terms of access, analysis of recent trends in the schooling of boys, girls and adolescents points to considerable progress towards the expansion of the right to education. Indeed, in the last decade, access to the secondary level increased by around 15% and the proportion of young people qualified at this level rose by about 26%.<sup>4</sup>

The formalization of this new expectation with regard to the right to secondary schooling represents a radical shift from the way in which

the relationship between the state, youth and their families was traditionally conceived. Clearly, secondary school was not originally designed to be inclusive of all children. On the contrary, its initial function was to select and train only those who would shortly be joining the country’s professional and ruling social strata (Tenti, 2014). In the past, the job market and domestic life were the institutional spaces designated for the socialization, disciplining and incorporation into public life of young people from families with a low social status who would be de facto excluded from the schooling process.

Given this dynamic, the establishment of compulsory secondary schooling in education legislation and policies of the countries in the region affirms how schooling is beginning to be perceived as a powerful social mechanism for access to and enjoyment of a core of fundamental rights – both in the present and the future. In this scenario, the reorganization of the secondary level, governed by the principle of inclusion, designates the state as the duty bearer of this new right and redistributes responsibilities between stakeholders and social institutions, fostering a new pact of educational inclusion at the secondary level.

One of the immediate effects of the new pact of educational inclusion at the secondary level – which this chapter will discuss – is that it brings together the criteria that regulate the institutional

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4. A selection of household surveys from Latin America were used for the preparation of this text.

spaces where young people will pursue their upper secondary education. The pact implies that all adolescents and youth need to display solid and extensive educational trajectories, dense in relevant learning at least up to completion of secondary education. Hence, universal education policy makes interrupting a young person's schooling – on the basis of his or her social status, for example – unacceptable.

In light of the pact, the material and symbolic conditions that facilitate or impede young people's schooling become an inherent concern of public policies seeking their inclusion at the secondary level. In this way, the pact of educational inclusion prompts governments to display, in principle, two major types of policies. Firstly, there are policies intended to tackle material barriers to education – namely, to guarantee that all youths can count on having the necessary resources to continue their schooling until the completion of the compulsory cycle. This entails removing the bases of the exclusionary matrix behind secondary education from the outset (Terigi, 2015). It involves the development and legitimation of strategies for inclusive teaching and curriculum as well as institutions that prioritize school as an inevitable space for developing the potential of children, adolescents and young people, based on the recognition of the special features of these learners and sustained by the offer of high-quality educational services.

This chapter discusses in greater detail 'the material dimension of schooling processes' and, within the process, school access and the retention of youth. In particular, it focuses on family dynamics in which the educational trajectories of young people are situated, employing the premise that the family is one of the fundamental spaces where material and symbolic resources that influence the schooling process play out. The goal is to identify and characterize the interactions that families and youth establish with their environment to gain their subsistence and the way in which the internal

distribution of tasks between the members of the household facilitates or hinders the pursuit of educational trajectories that are solid, extensive and dense in terms of meaningful learning.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first provides a broad overview of the actual educational trajectories of children, adolescents and youth in the region and their accompanying evolution over the last decade. This exercise will aid in the effort to propose a typology characterizing some distinctive aspects unique to the functioning of Latin American education systems. The second section explores the discord between young people and their schooling, examining the possible motives underlying the process of institutional disengagement. The third section presents information relevant to devising a possible characterization of family dynamics to model the processes of youth schooling, considering the distribution of tasks for producing well-being among the various members of the household and what impact those activities have on the educational trajectories of the youngest members. In essence, the chapter reflects on the main challenges facing the Latin American countries in their endeavour to fulfil a new pact of educational inclusion, which extends compulsory education to the upper secondary level.

### 1.2 Young people's educational trajectories

Ensuring access to education is the first step towards completing the theoretical educational trajectory which, in keeping with the current education laws in each country, should begin between ages three and six years and completed between ages 15 and 18 years over a period not shorter than 10 years (see Table 1).

At present, primary education is compulsory throughout the region. The first phase of secondary education – or lower secondary according to UNESCO's International Standard Classification

**Table 1.** Equivalences between educational levels of countries in Latin America, the International Standard Classification of Education 97(\*) and compulsory primary and secondary education programmes

		AGE																	
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>Argentina**</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into daycare center (45 days to 2 years) and kindergarten (3 to 5 years)						Primary						Secondary (Basic Cycle)			Secondary (integrated cycle)		
<b>Bolivia (PS)</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into non-formal community education (1 to 3 years,) (NF) and formal community education (4 to 5 years)						Vocational community primary education						Productive community secondary education					
<b>Brazil</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Childhood education is divided into nursery (0 to 3 years) and preschool (4 to 5 years)						Basic education									Secondary education		
<b>Chile</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Early childhood education (in the second cycle, it is called 'transition' 1 and 2)						Basic education						Secondary education					
<b>Colombia</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Preschool						Basic primary education						Basic secondary education			Secondary education		
<b>Costa Rica</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Preschool is divided into maternal-infant cycle (0 to 3 years), interactive II (4 years) and transition cycle (5 years)						Basic education (divided into primary - od 2 cycles of 3 years each - and a first cycle of secondary)									Second cycle of secondary or diversified education		
<b>Cuba</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Preschool is divided into not institutional (0 to 1 years) and institutional (1 to 5 years)						Primary						Lower Secondary			Upper secondary		
<b>Ecuador</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into nursery 1 (0 to 2 years), infants 2 (3 to 4 years) and preparatory (5 years corresponding to the first grade of general basic education)						Basic education (divided into 3 cycles of 3 years each)									High school		

\*Note: The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is used by the *Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina* (SITEAL) to standardize information on various features of educational systems from household surveys in Latin America. SITEAL (Information System for Educational Trends in Latin America) is a space in which statistical information and analysis documents are made available and can be used to monitor educational inputs and outcomes of children, adolescents, youth and adults in the Latin American region. SITEAL was initiated by IIEP, UNESCO and OEI.

\*\*Note: In Argentina, the current National Education Act stipulates 14 years of compulsory education while the duration of each level varies from province to province.



		AGE																	
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
<b>El Salvador</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial				Early childhood education			Basic education								Secondary education		
<b>Guatemala</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial				Preprimary			Primary education					Basic secondary education			Diversified secondary education		
<b>Honduras</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial			Prebasic			Basic education								Secondary education			
<b>Mexico</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial			Preescolar			Primary					Secondary			Media Superior			
<b>Nicaragua</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial			Initial			Primary					Secondary						
<b>Panama</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial				Preescolar			Primary					Educación Premedia			Secondary education		
<b>Paraguay</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into two cycles: 0 to 3 years and 4 years				Preschool (is part of Basic Education)			Basic education								Secondary education		
<b>Peru</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into non-school-based (0 to 2 years) and school-based (3 to 5 years)						Primary					Secondary						
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into three cycles: 0 to 2 years, 3 to 4 years, 5 years						Basic education (divided into 2 cycles of 4 years each)								Secondary level			
<b>Uruguay</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Early childhood education			Initial			Primary					Lower secondary education			Upper secondary education			
<b>Venezuela (BR)</b>	Standardization																		
	National description of the education level	Initial level is divided into daycare center (0 - 2 years) and preschool (3- 5 years)						Primary					Secondary						

Source: SITEAL, based on the Education Acts of each country, other associated regulations and the UIS-UNESCO.

of Education (ISCED) – is compulsory in all Latin American countries except in Nicaragua, while the final phase of secondary education (i.e. upper secondary) is compulsory in 12 of the 19 Latin American countries.

At present, it is expected that all individuals gain access to and remain within the education system at least until completion of the secondary level. However, during the first years of the 2010s, there was a schooling deficit – understood as the gap observed between the theoretical and the actual school trajectory – corresponding to 2.5% among children aged 9 to 11 years; 21% among adolescents aged 15 to 17 years; 37% among youth aged 21 to 23 years; and around 46% among adults aged 31 to 33 years.

Indeed, data show that 2.5% of boys and girls aged 9 to 11 years never entered the primary level or, in any case, do not attend school, with no considerable gender differences. In rural areas, this proportion is even higher. Yet, the biggest divide is associated with socio-economic levels, where the lack of schooling impacts the most underprivileged sectors hardest. The situation is most critical in Nicaragua, where this proportion rises to 8% and in Guatemala and Honduras, where more than 4% of the boys and girls are out of school.

Among young people old enough to attend secondary school, practically all of them have some school experience – generally, the proportion that never entered the formal education system is below 1%. Only two out of ten of them are not enrolled at this level – half of them never enrolled at the start of secondary school while the other half dropped out in the early years of study. Young males are three per cent more likely to be out of school at this level while the geographical divide shows that youths in rural areas are 16 percentage points more likely to be out of school. The schooling deficit among young men and women living in households counted among the most

underprivileged social strata<sup>5</sup> is 10 times greater than that of those belonging to the wealthiest families. In fact, the unequal distribution of the socially disadvantaged between the countries of the region gives rise to extremely diverse scenarios. In some of the countries in Central America – as in the cases of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – half of the boys and girls up to 17 years of age are not enrolled in secondary school. The vast majority of them were never enrolled.

**The schooling deficit among young men and women living in households counted among the most underprivileged social strata is 10 times greater than that of those belonging to the wealthiest families.**

Further examination of the figures shows that the schooling deficit among young men and women aged 21 to 23 years amounts to 36%. This group

5. An approximation was made of the 'social stratum' or 'socio-economic level' variable using the indicator for the educational capital of the household. The educational capital of the household reflects the social history of the referents of the household since it refers to its educational achievements. To construct the 'educational climate of the household' variable, the years of schooling of the members of the household aged 18 years or over were added up and this total was divided by the number of members of those ages. The members of the household with an unknown number of attendance years were excluded from both the numerator and the denominator. At the same time, the 'years of schooling of the population aged 18 or over' were calculated from the combination of the information provided by the variables 'educational level of the person attending' or 'maximum educational level of the person attending' and 'last grade or year passed'. Finally, the boys, girls and adolescents were classified according to the educational characteristics of the households in which they live. In accordance with the 'educational climate of the household' indicator, three types of household were distinguished: (a) households with low educational capital (those in which the average number of years of schooling of the members aged over 17 years living in the household is fewer than six); (b) households with medium educational capital (those in which the average number of years of schooling of the members aged over 17 years living in the household is between 6 and under 12 years); (c) households with high educational capital: those in which the average number of years of schooling of the members aged over 17 years living in the household equals or exceeds 12 years.

includes some 14% of young people who never attended secondary school, about 22% who did not complete it and a small proportion still in secondary school. Assessing the lack of schooling among adults, 46% of them have no secondary school qualifications, 25% never attended secondary school and 85% never entered upper secondary. In addition, 20% of them interrupted their schooling at the secondary level and a small proportion of them are trying to complete it.

The persistence of a high proportion of young people not enrolled in secondary education shows that youth who dropped out of school in their adolescence are unlikely to resume their studies during their youth. The lack of a statistical breakdown of the process of accumulation of the schooling deficit, beginning in the early years of adolescence, can be observed in the widening of the educational gaps between the various countries in the region – at the extremes (in Chile and Guatemala), this gap exceeds 55 percentage points.

It is possible to analyse the actual performance of the educational trajectories of young men and women in the countries of the region. This type of research brings us closer to understanding the functioning of Latin American education systems as well as indicating the different possibilities for reaching similar qualification levels. In light of this diversity of trajectories, we can identify a few educational scenarios, which are discussed next.

**Scenario 1: Solid and extensive educational trajectories.** In this scenario, two subgroups are clearly differentiated. The first is made up of the countries recording the firmest and most extensive educational trajectories in the region (Chile, Bolivia and Peru). This achievement is owing to their education systems that combine a high level of access and high retention rates at the level under consideration. The second subgroup shows extensive educational trajectories but with a lower qualification level. This performance is due

to a high degree of access but accompanied by lower retention rates than in the case of the first subgroup. In some cases, the opposite is true – performance is due to a lower level of access paired with higher retention (as in the cases of Argentina, Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia).

In the countries in the first subgroup, eight out of ten young people aged 21 to 23 years possess a secondary qualification. In Chile – much more so than in Bolivia and Peru – the high level of secondary qualification among young people is preceded by universal access to primary education. Practically all children aged 9 to 11 years in Chile gained access to primary education. In the large-scale transition from primary to the secondary level, only 2% of the boys and girls who complete their primary education in Chile do not continue studying. It is also noteworthy that both repetition rates and over-age enrolment are not significant in the course of secondary education. At the same time, secondary retention rates are high in the three countries – although slightly lower in the case of Chile.

Although access to secondary education in Bolivia and Peru is considerably lower than in Chile, the three countries achieve similar results since the proportion of students abandoning that level once they have entered is lower in these two countries. From a longitudinal perspective, considerable advances are observed in the three countries. The greatest variation, for example, can be seen in the transition from primary to secondary, especially in Bolivia. Particularly in Bolivia, and to a great extent in Peru, progress was made in increasing retention at the secondary level, resulting in a generalized rise in the proportion of young people completing it. In short, in these three countries, roughly half of the young people extend their educational trajectories up to the secondary level.

Studying the performance of the second subgroup, it can be observed that it shares the prominent traits of the first but that its achievements in

terms of qualification are less clear/strong. In these countries, seven out of ten young people completed the secondary level. In Argentina and Venezuela, access to this level is more generalized while in Ecuador and Colombia, a lower proportion enters the secondary level and hence a greater proportion graduates. Increased access to the higher level was thus particularly pronounced in the case of Ecuador. Venezuela and Ecuador also stand out on account of the considerable advances in broadening access to that level and of the student retention rate achieved in the course of secondary education – this being particularly notable in Venezuela.

**Scenario 2: Weakened educational trajectories. The consequences of restriction in access or the impact of low retention.** The proportion of young people completing the secondary level in Brazil and Panama is similar in that it is slightly lower than that of the preceding countries. Six out of ten young people aged 21 to 23 years have a secondary level qualification. However, the secondary level access so broadly generalized in Brazil is accompanied by low retention rates. In Panama, on the other hand, the opposite trend is observed. Brazil also suffers the effects of high repetition rates, resulting from 6% of youth aged 21 to 23 years being enrolled in secondary education outside the normal age bracket. In both countries, an increase is observed in the proportion of those graduating at the level under consideration, which is much clearer in Brazil, where a moderate advance can also be seen in the expansion of access to the higher level.

In the Dominican Republic and Paraguay, on the other hand, access to the secondary level is slightly lower than in the countries mentioned earlier but the retention rate is a bit higher, which results in a proportion of qualified learners similar to that of the countries making up the previous subgroup. Paraguay and El Salvador are two countries where access to the secondary level has expanded the most. However, unlike El Salvador, Paraguay also managed to increase its retention rate, which

resulted in considerable growth in the proportion of young people graduating from secondary school.

Costa Rica and Mexico converge in that half of their young people have completed secondary education. In Costa Rica, however, access to secondary schooling is markedly low so that those entering it are very likely to complete the course. In Mexico, on the other hand, access to secondary schooling is widely extended, although those who do enter that level find it very hard to complete their studies. Even so, considerable advances are observed in the proportion of young people managing to obtain their secondary qualification. In Mexico, this is mainly due to better retention rates while in Costa Rica, such performance is basically due to increased access to secondary education. Finally, it should be noted that 37% of young people in Costa Rica and 43% in the case of Mexico accessed the higher level.

In El Salvador and Uruguay, the traits distinguishing Costa Rica from Mexico are accentuated (i.e. a smaller proportion of students graduate from secondary level). In this case, only four out of ten young people finish their secondary education. In El Salvador, access to that level is seriously restricted and the retention rates are low. By contrast, in Uruguay (as in Mexico) access to the secondary level is broadly extended but it records the lowest retention rates in the region. Only four out of ten young people entering secondary school complete the course, which implies that the expansion of secondary education among youth in Uruguay is the lowest in the region. In El Salvador, the proportion of those with secondary qualifications grew relatively little during the decade yet it records the greatest expansion in the transition from primary to secondary. However, secondary education supply was unable to respond adequately to that increase since its retention capacity fell by 31 percentage points. In the region, Uruguay is where secondary access and completion have expanded the least. Finally, in El Salvador, two out of every ten young people and three out of ten in Uruguay progressed to the higher level.

### Scenario 3: Weak and brief educational trajectories. Restricted access and low retention.

In Nicaragua and Honduras, only three out of ten young people have a secondary education qualification. In Guatemala, this figure stands at a quarter. In these countries, a mere 53% to 63% of youth entered the secondary level (see Table 2). These figures mean that the proportion of those who embark on that level of education and manage to complete their educational trajectory is the lowest in the region. The educational trajectories of these three countries are indeed the weakest and

shortest among all the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The expansion of the level is modest in the case of Nicaragua and fairly high in Guatemala and Honduras – basically, as a result of extended access. In Nicaragua and Guatemala, however, these achievements are diluted by the persistence and worsening in the exclusion of young people from secondary attendance. By contrast, Honduras has managed to capitalize on the advances in access to that level, resulting in a steeper increase in the proportion of young people able to complete their secondary studies.

**Table 2.** Percentage of young people aged 21 to 23 years who entered secondary education (access), percentage of graduates among those who enrolled (retention) and percentage of young people completing their secondary studies (completion), by country. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013 and percentage change cca 2000 - cca 2013

COUNTRY	CCA 2013			Percentage change CCA 2000 - CCA 2013		
	ACCESS	RETENTION	GRADUATION	ACCESS	RETENTION	GRADUATION
<b>Average</b>	<b>85.5</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>26.2</b>
<b>SOLID AND EXTENSIVE EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES</b>						
<b>Chile</b>	98.2	83.0	81.5	17.9	8.0	27.3
<b>Peru</b>	91.4	89.9	81.0	12.6	11.7	25.8
<b>Bolivia (PS)</b>	88.5	86.8	76.8	30.7	18.9	55.4
<b>Venezuela (BR)</b>	89.4	75.3	67.4	20.9	33.9	61.9
<b>Colombia</b>	85.1	79.0	67.2	9.1	7.5	17.3
<b>Ecuador</b>	81.2	80.6	65.4	22.2	28.7	57.3
<b>Argentina</b>	88.9	72.6	64.5	11.5	1.9	13.6
<b>WEAKENED EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES</b>						
<b>Panama</b>	86.5	70.8	61.3	9.3	9.1	19.2
<b>Paraguay</b>	83.5	73.3	61.2	65.8	15.9	92.2
<b>Brazil</b>	88.9	66.5	59.1	25.5	9.9	37.9
<b>Dominican Republic</b>	82.8	71.0	58.8	21.4	32.5	60.9
<b>Costa Rica</b>	79.7	67.1	53.4	39.2	12.6	56.7
<b>Mexico</b>	87.8	57.5	50.5	19.0	30.1	54.8
<b>El Salvador</b>	73.6	57.4	42.3	67.3	-31.3	14.9
<b>Uruguay</b>	88.7	41.5	36.8	5.8	2.5	8.5
<b>WEAK AND BRIEF EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES</b>						
<b>Nicaragua</b>	63.2	54.0	34.1	27.6	0.6	28.4
<b>Honduras</b>	57.7	58.4	33.7	57.4	16.1	82.8
<b>Guatemala</b>	52.9	48.1	25.4	62.5	-3.3	57.1

Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

To sum up, the longitudinal analysis of educational trajectories carried out between 2000-2013 confirm that in all countries in the region, there are more boys and girls who complete their primary level and who continue studying and attending school for longer. Yet, the policy strategies used to promote the educational inclusion of marginalized groups are still insufficient to guarantee that all young men and women develop solid and extensive educational experiences up to completion of their secondary studies. The educational situation of boys, girls, adolescents and young people show the scale of the endeavours in the region but, at the same time, demonstrates the challenges that Latin American countries are still facing in their bid to move towards universalizing the right to basic education.

### **1.3 Why do young people disengage from education?**

Given that the large majority of children and adolescents in the region are enrolled in the education system, it can be argued that when a learner is absent from an educational establishment that it is due to the weakening of a link, which for a variety of reasons wore away and finally broke (D'Alessandre and Mattioli, 2015). The fact that school drop out intensifies specifically when young men and women are between the ages of 15 and 17 years and that it increases disproportionately in populations that are under-served in other ways highlights the difficulty the education system has in interacting with populations in situations that are more complex than those with which it was designed to cope. Adolescents and young people from the most disadvantaged social sectors who are typically the first generation from their families to attend secondary school are six times more likely to be out of school.

Given the increased focus on and investment in secondary education as well as the extension of the compulsory periods and consequent expansion of

free education, how can it be explained that 21% of young people aged 15 to 17 years do not attend school and only 63% of those aged 21 to 23 years complete secondary schooling (see Figure 1)?

When analysing the household surveys of some countries in the region – notably, those of Bolivia, Chile, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Paraguay – researching the opinions of boys, girls, adolescents, young people as well as their families on the reasons they drop out of school, some recurring features surface that enable us to group the analyses into two main categories.

The first is directly related to 'the material dimension' of education. In this case, financial difficulties are the main reason why families do not manage to keep their children and adolescents in school. This is compounded by the deficit of education services and the difficulties caused by chronic illness or disability. These factors loom particularly large among the causes of school drop out in primary education. Later, when they reach adolescence, the work done both outside and inside the home seems, according to those involved and their families, to be the most direct cause of school drop out. Paid work is in fact mentioned by only 20% of young people as the cause of school drop out while a further 20% identify work related to parenting at a young age or the direct care of other members of the household as the reasons for drop out (see Figure 1).

It is clear from these findings that the link between paid work, caregiving and interruption of each educational trajectory could be thought of as the outcome of family dynamics due to persistent shortages and deprivations. This means that young people dropping out of school is one of the consequences of the difficulties encountered by adults trying to achieve a minimal level of well-being to protect the educational trajectories of their adolescents. In emergency family situations like those described, the roles assumed by youth within the family dynamics for producing well-being are always gender differentiated. Thus, over

70% of those reporting work-related reasons as the main cause of drop out are males while 97% of the females surveyed state that parenting duties and associated domestic tasks are the main causes of school drop out (D'Alessandre and Mattioli, 2015).

In other words, the intensification of paid work and of care work during adolescence – and its impact on each educational trajectory – is a clear expression of the roles assumed by young people in contexts of persistent material privations. Family dynamics while seeking to achieve adequate levels of well-being undoubtedly form a complex web of interactions that, in many cases, affect educational trajectories.

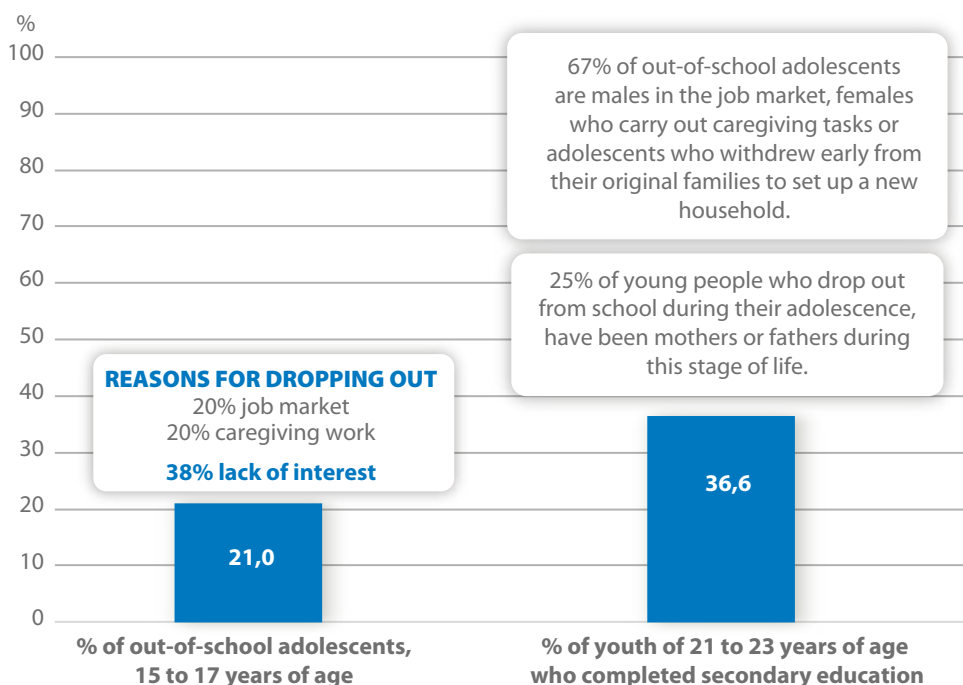
The information from the household surveys in the region confirm, to a large extent, a close link between the participation of young people in the family dynamics of the production of well-being

and school drop out. This was done by investigating the relationship of the causes for drop out with the school, conditions of economic activities, family structure and constitution of a new household.

A first approximation enabling us to gauge this group of out-of-school young people shows how the increase in care work among women, men entering the job market early, early motherhood and fatherhood, and a separation from the family of origin affect 39% of them.

Indeed, 67% of the young people who left their educational trajectories early are men who work or unemployed women who live together with small children and take care of the members of the household (see Figure 1). In any case, the information analysed shows strong indications that a quarter of out-of-school youth aged 18 to 24 years who left school before completing their secondary education

**Figure 1. Percentage of out-of-school adolescents and young people, reasons for school drop out\* among out-of-school adolescents, and family structure of out-of-school adolescents and young people. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



\*Note: Data from Bolivia, Chile, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Paraguay.

Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

have brothers and sisters or other young family members who were adolescent fathers and mothers. The behaviour patterns analysed also revealed that many young people left the household in which they were raised to set up a new household. An over-representation of this subgroup of adolescents and young people who broke off their educational trajectories before completing their secondary level was found in considerably greater proportions among the poorest households, in rural areas and among women. When this cause of school drop out is taken into account, the numbers point to a social gap of 22% within the poorest sectors, a geographical divide of 7% within rural areas and a gender gap of 10% of women.

The other major group of factors for school drop out is more subtle and directly connected to the analytical framework from which interpretations are made. These factors fall into the 'subjective dimension' of the educational experience. The surveys revealed that 22% of out-of-school boys and girls aged 10 or 11 years state that they are in this situation because they have no interest in studying. This percentage jumps to 38% in adolescents aged 15 to 17 years who also provided this reason for their disengagement with the education system (see Figure 1).

With the challenge taken on by the countries in the region to guarantee the right to education, this 'lack of interest' in studying mentioned by boys, girls, adolescents and young people makes it clear that access to educational services is not something that happens naturally (Ierullo and Gamardo, 2014). It is the result of a combination of conditions and doctrines of the educational services linked with the representations that the young subjects make of them.

As previously mentioned, access to educational services as an obligatory space for the policy strategies aimed at access to, retention in and graduation from secondary education can be thought of in terms of the new pact of educational inclusion covering secondary education in the

region. Previously, the capacity to generate teaching, curricular and institutional policies that made young people feel involved was not a challenge that the education system took upon itself but remained a responsibility that fell almost solely on the families of these youth. However, youth and their families indicate that to them the school does not feel like a space for them and this is the reason for their lack of interest in studying. It is clear that educational establishments and the education community more broadly must implement the conditions needed to realize the new pact of educational inclusion that makes upper secondary education compulsory. They must lay the foundations for this in accordance with the new regional norms but they are also overwhelmed by the task.

In essence, the intensification of paid and caregiving work constitute obstacles for the schooling processes that have failed to be surmounted by the social and educational policies intended to protect educational trajectories. In contexts of persistent deprivations, educational trajectories run the risk of being derailed by the family dynamics deployed to produce acceptable levels of well-being. Given this overview of the reasons for school drop out, it is evidently impossible for the state to break one of the main sequences of events that transmit and reproduce the intergenerational accumulation of social disadvantages.

In particular, these challenges underscore how families suffering the consequences of living with persistent material privation struggle to get by without the resources and time that young people contribute to the household's subsistence. These difficulties, which always affect the educational experience (e.g. when fatigue and dispersal of energy limit the learning processes, push up absenteeism and thus greatly increases the probability of repeating), mean that, in many instances, these challenges faced by families and adolescents gradually erode the link to and causes a definitive break with the education system (ILO, 2015).



## 1.4 Young people's contribution to their family's well-being

How do the families of young people organize themselves to produce well-being and protect their educational trajectories? How do persistent material privations drive youth to participate early in such dynamics or intensify their involvement to the point that they end up leaving school?

Within family groups, the characteristics of the process of producing well-being and the ties of protection that secure the educational trajectories of dependents are determined by the family's care load. In households with dependents, the caregiving tasks that accumulate social disadvantages increase in certain circumstances. A comparatively high fertility rate, for example, is one of the main factors. Indeed, in families with the most disadvantaged social backgrounds and with at least one dependent person aged 0 to 17 years, half of their members are children or adolescents while in families from the highest social strata, this proportion goes down to 41%. Associated to this, 34% of household members of families from the lowest social strata are employed while this proportion rises to 44% among families that are more socially favoured. Similar divides can be observed in the rest of the region with the exception of Bolivia, where the dependence rates of the households that accumulate social disadvantages are lower than among their peers.

The persistent accumulation of social disadvantages goes beyond income disparity and the structural deficiencies of living environments. The lowest-income families with at least one dependent aged between 0 and 17 years are four times more likely than higher-income families to live in conditions of critical overcrowding, substandard housing, lacking access to drinking water inside the home or without basic sanitary services. In adverse environments, the daily time, skills and efforts required by the adults to protect boys, girls and adolescents from contracting illnesses and suffering violence or accidents are substantially increased

– in other words, the care load they carry is bigger (Clemente, 2014).

In short, the historical accumulation of social disadvantages determines the relative care load carried by each family. The reproductive patterns of women and men from disadvantaged social sectors increase the care load of their families, resulting in a greater relative participation of the dependent members vis-à-vis those who provide the income. In addition, the location of the homes of poor families also augments their care load due to the increased likelihood of illnesses, accidents and of suffering violence. At the same time, substandard locations translates to having less opportunity to avoid the risks of mortality as a consequence of, among other factors, the discrimination to which these families are subjected, which in turn further restricts their access to basic services.

What do families need to obtain a basis of well-being enabling them to protect the educational trajectories of their boys, girls and adolescents up to at least completion of their secondary education? To overcome the substantial challenges, families need access to material resources; access to a space in which to produce these resources (an adequate home located in a healthy environment, for example); and the time and skills of agents capable of transforming those resources into protection ties (Hernández and D'Alessandre, 2014).

The way in which families gain access to material resources is basically through marketing their labour force. This means that between 95% and 97% of the monetary income of the families comes from a work source. However, the job market disfavours families with the greatest accumulation of social disadvantages and hence, in various ways, reproduces patterns of inequality. The number of hours per week that the working members of families with dependents devote to paid work averages around 45 hours per worker. While this average does not differ substantially according to the social background or age of the child under 18 years, the compensation for these working hours

is considerably lower in the case of households categorized at a lower socio-economic level. In this respect, the gaps are very pronounced. In Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, the hourly earnings of heads of households in the highest social strata is practically double that of the heads of households in the lowest social backgrounds. In the extreme, in Colombia and Guatemala, the gap between the hourly earnings of heads of households, associated with the social stratum of the household, rises to five and seven fold, respectively.

As previously mentioned, the production of well-being requires not only material resources and a space in which to apply them but also agents capable of transforming those resources into protection ties. Producing well-being, in fact, involves an equal or greater number of hours than those devoted to obtaining income. It is unpaid and hence, from the angle of opportunity costs, means that in certain contexts, agents enjoying the same conditions as the economically active members withdraw from or limit their participation in the job market. This further restricts access to the available material resources on which households rely.

The way in which families tackle the irresolvable tension involved in social organization for the production of well-being is found in well-established patterns, generation after generation. A central feature of these dynamics is 'gender-adaptation' in the distribution of tasks. The 'woman carer – man provider' dichotomy continues to form the central premise for households bringing up their dependent members. The rigid way in which tasks are distributed between the males and females of the household goes beyond social frontiers. Although the availability of material resources undoubtedly gives families more opportunities to redefine this cultural pattern that is so deeply entrenched in the lives of their members.

Indeed, the activity rates of male heads of households with at least one dependent are around

90%, in all cases (see Figure 2). Hence, practically all adult males, both rich and poor, bring income home with few exceptions among the countries in the region. However, in two-parent households in which boys, girls and adolescents from all social backgrounds live, the participation of adult women in the job market is considerably lower than that of their male counterparts with only half of them bringing home income.

Likewise, the activity rate of women varies according to the family structure in which they belong, and the probability of working increases with the growth of dependent persons within the home. The occupation rate of female spouses in two-parent homes rises gradually from 47% when the age of minors in the household is between 0 and 8 years to 55% when they are adolescents. Again, with the exception of Bolivia, this trend is observed across all the social backgrounds and in all the countries in the region.

The gender gaps are considerably wider in the most socially disadvantaged households. The gap in activity rates between male heads of households and female spouses in families with small children and a greater accumulation of social disadvantages exceeds 54 percentage points. In families similarly structured but belonging to the most privileged social strata, this gap is reduced to 30 percentage points.

At this stage of the analysis, the question is: why do families that, from a strictly economic angle, are most in need of augmenting income for their homes forgo the economic potential of women (who generally have more educational capital)?

The lack of capacity to alleviate the care load through the payment of support services occupies a central place in this dynamic. There are at least four ways in which families organize themselves and manage to fill the time needed to attend to the care needs of the dependent members: assigning

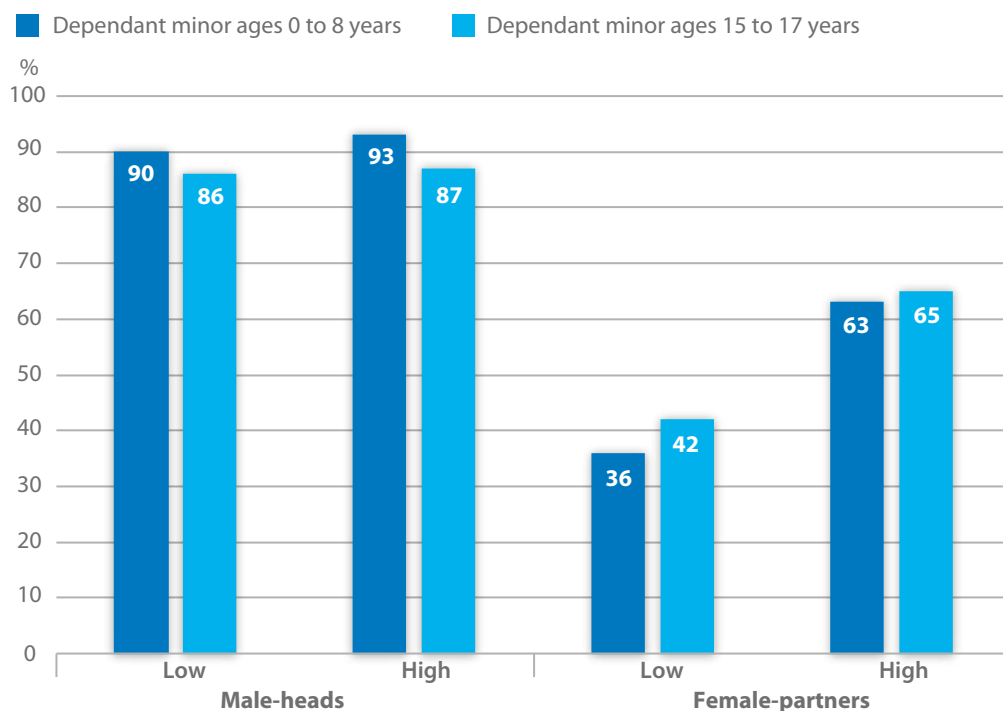
the task (generally, maternal care) to one or more members of the household, using public care support services (public and free child development centres, nursery schools and kindergartens), transferring care time to family members or others not living with the nuclear family (grandmothers or female neighbours, although this is increasingly less likely) or acquiring substitutes in the market (kindergartens, domestic services or nannies). In general, research on this matter shows that families manage the direct care load through a combination of several strategies (Esquivel, 2011).

In the context of a generalized shortage of public and free services to support families in the nursing stage, families that manage via the market to generate a surplus of total income sufficient to

lighten the direct care load tend to preserve the work participation of their women. In contrast, in families lacking this surplus, the female adults of the household spend practically all their time transforming material resources into care tasks.

This information leads us to the hypothesis that, while male adults dedicate their available time to the labour market, women give up their economic potential to alleviate the burden of the direct care load required by the dependent family members. Given this dynamic, how do the families make up for hours of work not provided by the adult women? One way is through the incorporation of economically active members outside the primary core. This gives rise to multi-core households. Another strategy frequently used by households

**Figure 2. Activity rate of the male heads and female partners of two-parent households with at least one dependent aged 0 to 17 years, by age of the minor dependent and socio-economic status. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

to increase their total family income is the early incorporation of their dependent persons in the tasks of producing well-being. In fact, in households belonging to the lowest social strata with at least one dependent, 25% of young people of secondary school age bring home 34% of the total income that the families earn from a source of employment. Yet, in households of a similar structure but of a high socio-economic level, the occupation rate of youth is 9% and the income contributions of these young people drop to under 20%.

The activity rate of all young people who remain with their families tops 80% while their income represents 43% of the family's total per labour source. Surveys conducted in the region reveal that the activity rate of young sons is twice that of the spouses in families with low education capital while a considerably narrower gap is observed in more socially privileged families.

## **1.5 Family dynamics: a possible driver for secured educational pathways**

The early incorporation of boys, girls and adolescents in the family dynamics of day-to-day subsistence greatly affects the real chances that learners will maintain their link to the education system. From the perspective of the families, protection of the educational trajectories of young people involves managing without the time resources they provide as they attend school daily and study. This represents valuable time that can be invested in training the younger members and that is withheld from the potential capacity to produce and contribute to the family's well-being.

Clearly, under the pact of educational inclusion at the secondary level, how families organize themselves internally to produce well-being is an

unavoidable topic for countries to address when seeking to broaden the effective opportunities of access to, retention in and graduation from the secondary education. Therefore, the construction of a new policy, the adolescent and the young person at school, is an acknowledgement of what is happening in reality and shapes a mutually beneficial alliance between the state and families to generate dynamics where young people can become exclusive recipients of care – at least until completion of their secondary schooling.

The information analysed reveals, however, that not all families are able to cope without the contribution that young people make to the production of well-being as they represent key resources. This requirement becomes, in many cases, an irresistible force resulting in the early interruption of educational trajectories. The strategies employed by families to produce well-being represents a 'gender-specific' matrix that has a different impact on male versus female adolescents. This plays out in how school drop out is connected to participation in caregiving work and the job market, according to gender.

In the early 2010s, a quarter of the boys and girls aged 15 to 17 years were active participants in the job market while 11% were participating in neither study nor work. The data show that the differences between countries are very pronounced. In Guatemala and Peru, for example, four out of ten adolescents are economically active while in Argentina and Chile, the activity rate of this age bracket does not reach the double digits. Among adolescents neither studying nor working, it was observed that, in some Central American countries like Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, the relative weight of this group compared against the total doubles that in the region as a whole (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Activity rate and percentage of adolescents neither studying nor working, by country and socio-economic status (SES). Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013

	Low SES		High SES		TOTAL	
	Activity rate	% neither studying nor working	Activity rate	% neither studying nor working	Activity rate	% neither studying nor working
Argentina	15.3	22.4	2.8	1.6	6.6	8.1
Bolivia (PS)	52.6	5.1	14.6	3.7	32.1	4.3
Brazil	35.5	10.1	21.6	4.9	31.2	8.2
Colombia	27.8	15.7	9.0	6.6	19.4	12.6
Costa Rica	21.9	23.7	5.3	2.5	12.9	10.5
Chile	9.4	10.0	4.0	5.2	6.4	6.2
Dominican R.	19.1	9.5	8.8	4.1	11.7	8.1
Ecuador	25.3	11.7	5.1	3.3	14.0	7.7
El Salvador	33.6	20.2	6.2	4.6	23.7	14.5
Guatemala	50.3	20.7	13.3	3.2	42.5	17.3
Honduras	44.0	28.6	11.6	2.9	33.3	20.9
Mexico	45.6	17.7	16.4	3.6	32.6	11.3
Nicaragua	44.9	23.8	25.3	10.7	34.9	19.0
Panama	44.2	15.1	5.8	3.2	17.8	9.0
Paraguay	53.2	15.3	15.5	3.4	34.3	7.1
Peru	60.0	7.8	20.3	12.3	39.6	10.6
Uruguay	28.5	22.8	5.8	1.4	16.8	12.5
Venezuela (BR)	27.8	14.5	5.9	5.4	14.5	8.3
<b>Average</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>22.9</b>	<b>11.5</b>

Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

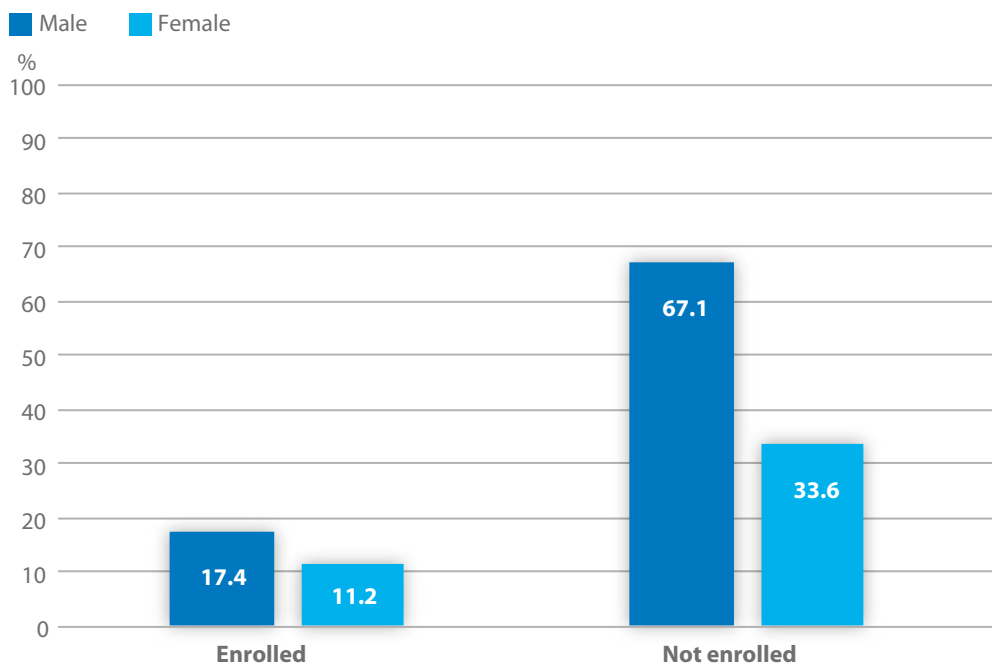
In all countries in the region – even with the differences that exist in the sizes of the groups – the activity rate is considerably higher among young people aged 15 to 17 years who interrupt their educational trajectory. Among males, the likelihood of doing paid work is quadrupled when they are out of school while among females, this probability is tripled (see Figure 3). In some of the countries where the proportion of adolescents remaining out of school and the general activity rate is relatively low (e.g. Argentina, Ecuador and Colombia), the intensification of paid work among those leaving school is considerably higher.

In addition to this trend, the gender gap in the activity rate of young people attending school versus those not enrolled increases six-fold. This means that school drop out coincides – among both boys and girls – with the intensification of their participation in the job market. Nevertheless, the likelihood that young males will become

fulltime workers after dropping out of school is much greater than that of women. They may also drop out of school if they feel unable to strike a balance between working and studying. Among males not attending school, the proportion working or seeking work is greater than in the case of non-working youth, which dispels the widespread misconception that lack of schooling among males inevitably thrusts them into the ranks of those ‘neither studying nor working’. Women not attending school, however, are considerably more likely to be economically inactive than to take on paid work. In comparison, seven out of ten female adolescents not attending school are not doing paid work either while seven out of ten of males are economically active.

The trends seen in the increased participation in the job market and in gender-differentiated performances characterize the countries in the region as a whole. The exceptions are Chile,

**Figure 3. Activity rate of young people aged 15 to 17 years, by schooling condition and by sex. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

Argentina and the Dominican Republic where the likelihood that males not attending school are not working either is greater and Bolivia where the quantity of economically active women among those not attending school is similar to the number of economically inactive women.

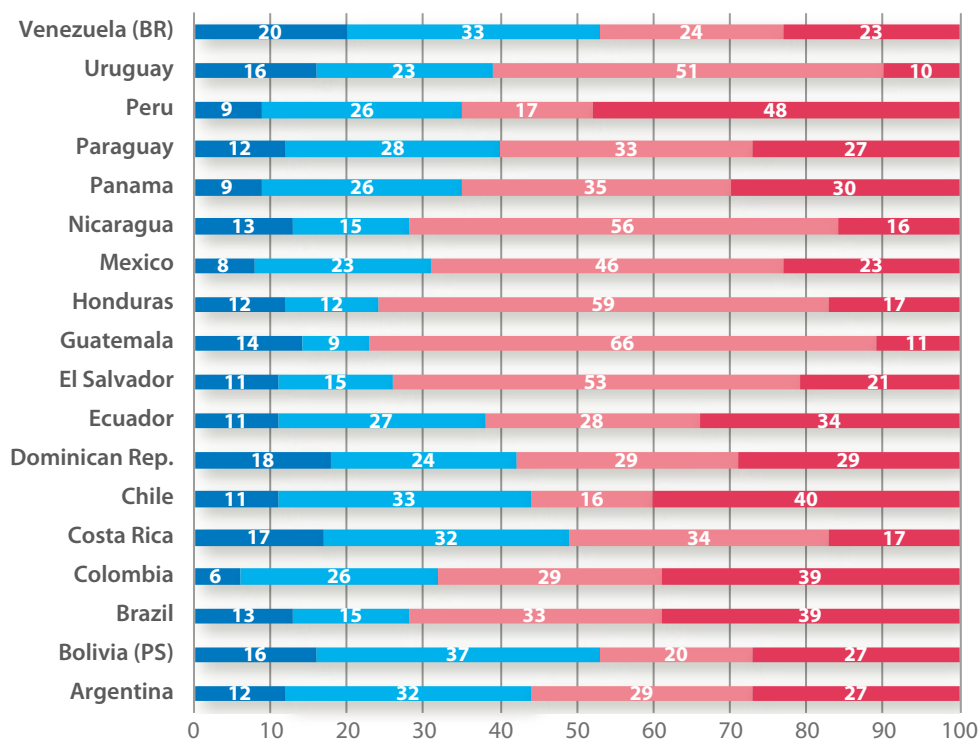
The socio-educational situation of young people sets the course for their incremental incorporation into the adult world and, in particular, into public life. As they enter into young adulthood, 32% of Latin Americans aged 18 to 24 years are not enrolled in school as they interrupt their education during adolescence before obtaining any secondary qualification. Among youth in the region, 8% are

still trying to complete their secondary school level, 36% completed their secondary studies but did not continue studying and 24% are engaged in studies at a higher level.

The extremely diverse regional panorama is characterized by gaps of over 50 percentage points in the completion of the secondary school level with Chile and Guatemala representing opposite ends of the spectrum (see Figure 4). Schooling deficits are particularly stark in rural areas and among people in the historically most neglected social sectors. While there are differences between the various countries in the region in terms of the intensity of the gaps in education, overall, the

**Figure 4. Distribution of youth aged 18 to 24 years, by schooling condition and by educational attainment in each country. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**

- ATTENDING - Did not reach tertiary education
- ATTENDING - In tertiary education
- NOT ATTENDING - Dropped out of primary or secondary education
- NOT ATTENDING - Completed secondary education



Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

trends described represent Latin American youth as a whole. When there are exceptions to these trends, an explicit mention is made of the distinctiveness of the country in question.

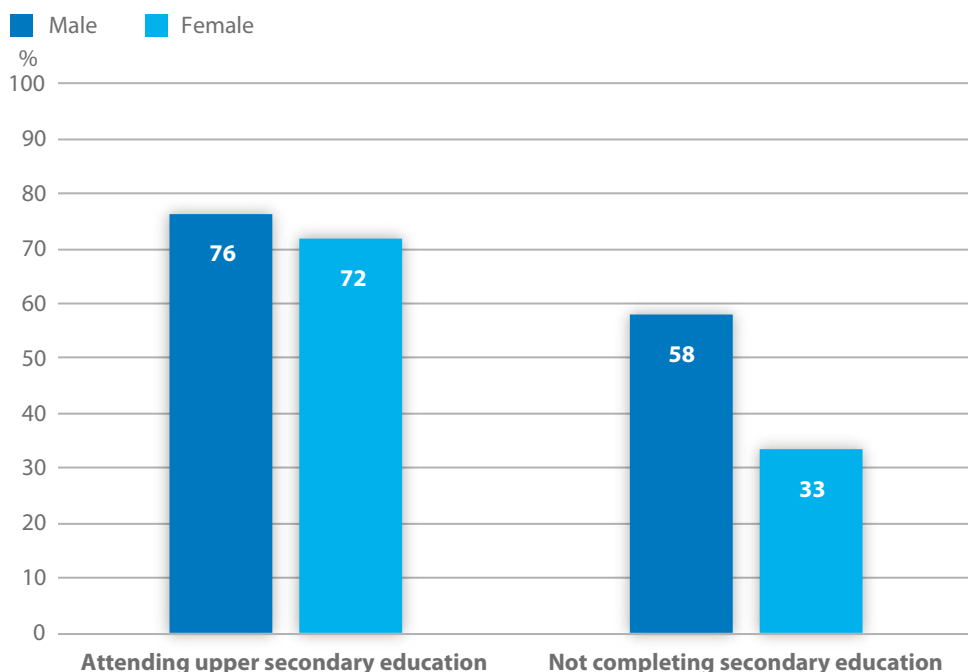
The family structures of young people who interrupt their educational trajectories early compared to those who extend their schooling to the upper level indicate that the latter group's performance depends to a great extent on the capacity of adults to accompany and protect the educational opportunities of youth. Indeed, 74% of the young people enrolled at the upper level remain in their homes. On the other hand, this proportion drops to 46% among young people who did not complete their secondary studies. In addition, the gender gap is very small among youth enrolled at the upper level but increases by 25 percentage points for those who did not complete the secondary school level (see Figure 5). Young women with a low level of education, on the

other hand, tend to leave their family homes much earlier than their male peers.

What do these variations reveal? Firstly, they indicate that age alone is not a sufficient indicator of the various routes that the transition from childhood to adult life can take. Two of the crucial landmarks of this transition in life – the setting up of a new family and completion of the schooling process – have no predictable biological correlation. Quite the opposite is true since if any key relevant factor exists, it is markedly social.

In reality, the schooling process delays entry into the job market and, as a result, makes youth more dependent on reference adults. Thus, young people enrolled at the upper level of schooling have to remain within their family household to sustain their educational trajectories. In contrast, young people 'trapped' during adolescence in the dynamics of the production of well-being

**Figure 5. Percentage of young people remaining in their family homes, by educational attainment and by sex. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.



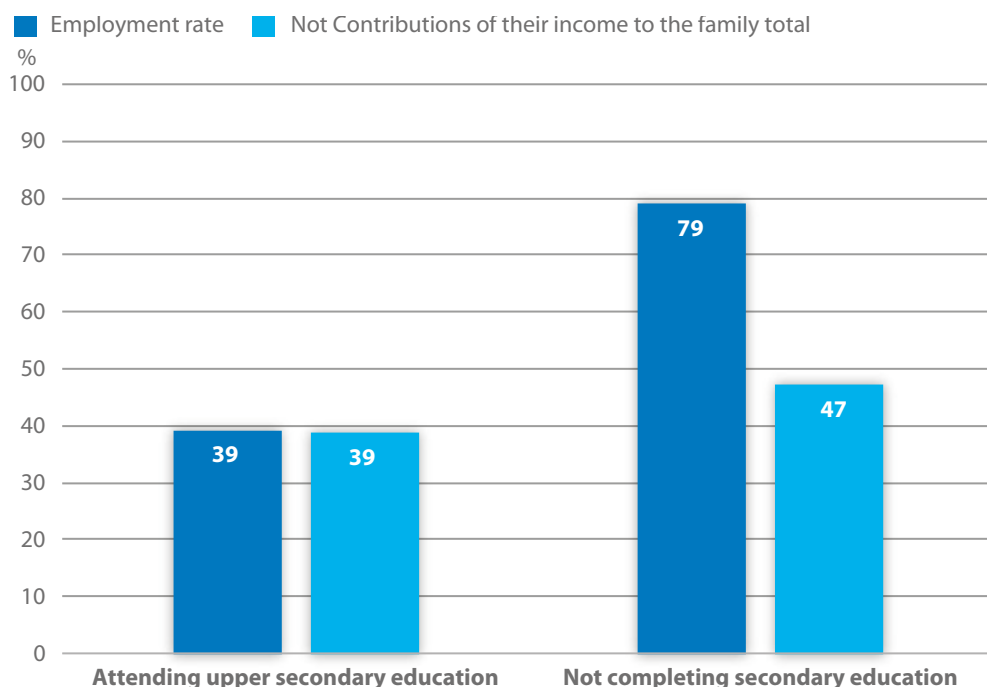
strengthen their positioning by supplying resources and time for the provision of care – either within their family homes or within new families that they may start. Among young people attending the upper level, their commitment to the family dynamics needed for the production of well-being is considerably lower. For these youth, the extension of their educational trajectories is protected when compared to poorly educated youth who remain in the home.

Indeed, even when living with their parents or other reference adults, 79% of young people with poor education work or seek work and their contributions represent 47% of the household's income (see Figure 6). However, activity rates among young people attending the upper level fall to 39% and their contributions do not exceed 39% of the family's total income. This holds true in instances where young people possess a high level

of education and earn two or three times more per hour than their poorly educated peers.

The care load borne by families with young people who have not completed their secondary studies is much greater compared to their better-educated peers. Six out of ten young people with a low level of education living in the homes of their upbringing live with at least one child aged 0 to 8 years, whereas only two out of ten young people attending the upper level find themselves in that situation. Further, the gender gap is quite considerable. The proportion of women living with at least one child aged 0 to 8 years is greater than that of men. In addition, among young people with little education, the gender gap is three times greater in both poorly educated women and those reaching the upper secondary level. The same trend is observed for the activity rate of men and women. However, the presence of small children in

**Figure 6. Activity rate of young people living in the families of their upbringing and contributions of their income to the family total income, by educational attainment and by sex. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

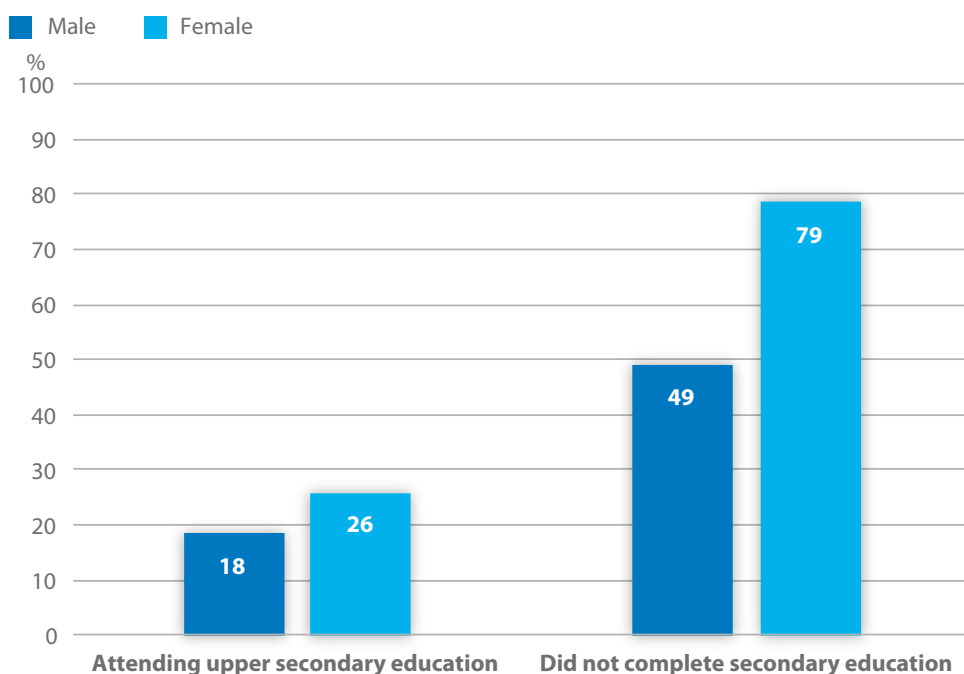
the household does not affect the activity rate of highly educated young people or open up gender gaps. In contrast, among poorly educated young people, the presence of small children increases the likelihood that males will enter the job market by about 8% and broadens the gender gap to 30 percentage points (see Figure 7).

There also exists a group of young people aged 18 to 24 years whose relationship to the female or male head of the household indicates that, in principle, they have stopped receiving direct care within their families of origin. Among those attending the upper level, the relative weight of this group amounts to 9% while among youth who did not complete their secondary schooling, this proportion climbs to 34%. Beyond identifying this gap, it is worth noting that the family structures and their realities differ so much that such groups are practically incomparable. It is estimated that 78% of poorly educated young people who left their

families of origin live with children aged 0 to 8 years (presumably their own children). This proportion drops to 25% among their highly educated peers. Among young males who set up a new household and are not qualified at the secondary school level, 86% live with their female partners. In these cases, 99% of the males are economically active as are 37% of their partners. In contrast, only 27% of well-educated males live with a partner and, in such cases, 93% of the men and 56% of the women are economically active (see Figure 8).

From the empirical evidence gathered by analysing the issue of school drop out among young people, it can be argued that the intergenerational accumulation of social disadvantages perpetuates one of the critical links in the processes of social exclusion – educational exclusion, to be precise. Among persons who are now the heads of families or their partners, those who received a poor education in their youth, have precarious work,

**Figure 7. Percentage of young people living with at least one child aged 0 to 8 years, by educational attainment and by sex. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



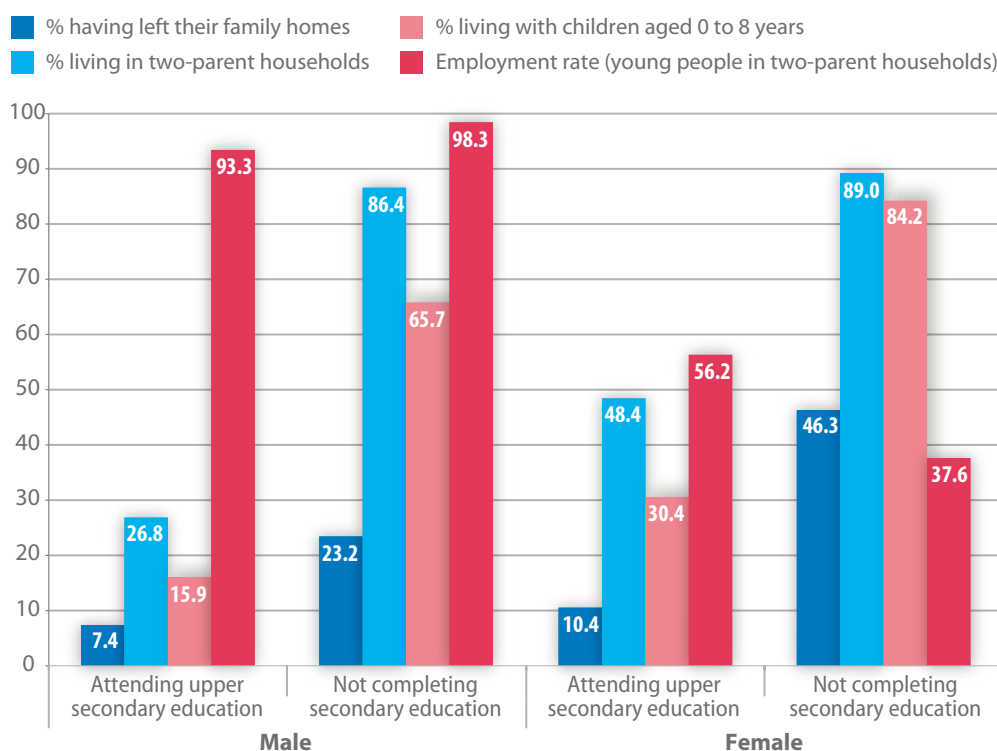
Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

receive an hourly income well below that of their better-educated peers and have dependents in their charge are over-represented. This reflects the lack of a robust structure of policies rooted in the original family. The pact of educational inclusion at the secondary level places the structural organization of families at the centre of social policies. Specifically, the pact centralizes the ways in which families organize themselves internally to subsist, which takes into account their material and symbolic resources as well as the skills and the essential knowledge they require to produce well-being. This is considered together with the public, free and quality services needed to expedite the time and resources these families have to devote to protecting the educational trajectories of their dependent boys, girls and adolescents.

The seemingly insurmountable obstacles that households with persistent shortages face to carry their care load leads to a great underutilization of the potential of the young members and adult women in the family. Among the solutions needed to lighten the care load are access to decent housing, a healthy environment, suitable work as well as public and free care services or the capacity to purchase care substitutes. Without these solutions, households cannot forgo the potential income they need from their youth as they would not be able to strike a better balance between paid employment and care work.

In short, the lack of policies focusing on the production of well-being constitutes one of the major structural shortfalls that leads to the unjust distribution of opportunities among members

**Figure 8. Family structure of young people aged 18 to 24 years: selected indicators. Latin America, 18 countries. Cca 2013**



Data source: Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina (SITEAL), based on the household surveys of each country.

of society – all of whom should be afforded the right to fully exercise their rights as citizens. This structural lapse perpetuates a vicious cycle as it reproduces an intergenerational accumulation of social disadvantages. In essence, it feeds the social mechanisms that maintain inequality. From the perspective of women, in particular, the situation further limits their empowerment by obstructing the use of their full potential through training and access to formal education, confining their social capital to the intimate space of the families and limiting their access to material and symbolic resources – all basic conditions for achieving a better and fairer distribution of power between men and women. Overall, the overview in this section discusses the real limitations faced by the Latin American countries in implementing the pact of educational inclusion, as well as the difficulties encountered in extending its coverage.

## 1.6 Final considerations

The pact of educational inclusion at the secondary level expresses the general consensus for the need to unify and strengthen the institutional spaces that young males and females will need to complete this stage of their life cycle. It is a twofold movement to make the completion of secondary schooling obligatory and the insistence that female citizens be given the opportunity to exercise their right to education. It is this goal that drives the Latin American countries to overhaul the schooling experience and reshape these institutions as priority spaces for the social inclusion of young people regardless of gender. Thus, compulsory secondary education has been established in the vast majority of Latin American countries to formalize the expectation that all youth without exceptions due to class or gender should remain in the education system at least until completion of their secondary studies. This bid directly challenges the institutional positions and practices that have contributed to and reproduced differentiated

circuits for the social integration and participation of young people, segregating them according to social status and gender. The inclusion pact shifts the focus of the education debate to schooling, steering it firmly away from the training potential of the job market and domestic life.

By focusing on the education system, the longitudinal analysis of the educational trajectories of youth reveals that Latin America has experienced an intense process of expansion of its secondary schooling, particularly in those sectors of the population that live in the poorest countries in the region, with low-income social backgrounds and from the most disadvantaged geographical areas. Undeniably, there has been much progress made in expanding secondary school access for historically neglected social sectors by making the school a central pivot of the mechanisms of social integration. However, these successes are tempered as ingrained differentiation circuits continue to be recreated within the school. Growth by proliferation has been established as a new frontier of educational exclusion (Tenti Fanfani, 2014). This is namely the expansion of schooling without revision and adaptation of budgets, institutional formats and the training of school and out-of-school agents. As a result, the growth in access to the secondary level has not been matched by the numbers of students graduating. Presently, many more adolescents enter the secondary level than they did a decade ago but the proportion dropping out continues to be high. Worse still, attempts at reducing this rate have ground to a halt. Nonetheless, the increase in numbers of youth with secondary schooling qualifications are matched fundamentally by achievements in expanding their transition from primary to secondary school. Yet, it should be noted that this is not because there has been any substantial change in the capacity of the education system to prevent learners from interrupting their educational trajectory and developing school experiences that are significant and dense in learning outcomes.

The analysis discussed in this section concentrates on the dynamics of producing well-being and the structures of the families of origin of adolescents and young people. Ultimately, the analysis of the educational trajectories of these youth indicates that the old differentiated circuits of the passage to adult life, though at present discredited, still remain. The intensification of paid and care work among those individuals who interrupt their educational trajectories early confirms that the link with the school is inextricably tied to family interactions geared towards guaranteeing survival. These dynamics were identified using modelling that would reflect the life path of young people based on their relationship with the education system, the job market and domestic life. Although these dynamics are highly predictable, they have historically been left out in socio-educational research. Indeed, the processes and social dynamics that give rise to the conditions allowing the development of the schooling process were not among the central concerns since inclusion was not previously part of the set of constituent proposals. However, the current bid to universalize secondary education necessitates policies of inclusion as the pact of educational inclusion for secondary education is, first and foremost, a pact of social inclusion.

From the outset, the opportunities and skills of the adults who support and accompany adolescents and young people in their passage through the secondary level formed part of the bedrock of the educational pact. When secondary access was socially legitimated as a privilege, any family dynamic favourable to the schooling process acted as a criterion for inclusion. In the new scenario, the various strategies of families for guaranteeing their survival stand out as one of the fundamental spaces that impact educational trajectories and are, therefore, established as priority spaces of government intervention. Having established that the family dynamics for producing well-being is a priority for government interventions in order to guarantee the access to, continued presence in

and qualification of young people at the secondary level, what exactly does this entail?

In principle, the aim is to direct public action towards addressing the following questions: What is the minimum income needed by the families of young people to generate a context favourable to preserving their educational trajectories and protect them, for example, from the interference caused by early entry into the job market or a substantial increase in time devoted to caregiving work? How can the state guarantee public, free and quality services needed by families to alleviate their care load in terms of the time spent on the direct care of dependents? What are the policy strategies required to transform the dynamics that constantly reproduce the inter-generational accumulation of social disadvantages, social inequality and inter-gender power?

In view of the analysis in this section, creating conditions conducive to the educational inclusion of youth involves simultaneously dealing with the family dynamics of producing well-being 'from within' and 'from without' the education system as well as understanding that these factors influence youth and their educational trajectories for the entire duration of the schooling process. Achieving this goal requires the repositioning of the secondary school as an institution capable of passing on to new generations a body of objectified culture and the necessary knowledge and skills for participating actively in society, which in turn reconstructs and enriches social life and developing full participation as a citizen. There is a generalized consensus among countries in the region that is constantly being reaffirmed and strengthened. However, a close look at the social profiles and family dynamics that impact the educational trajectories of young people who dropped out of secondary school before graduating shows that the persistent shortfalls families face in producing well-being do much to affect the course of their lives and, in the case of women, greatly restrict their autonomy during adulthood.

The acculturation and normalisation of the mechanisms whereby families produce the well-being necessary for preparing and supporting the links protecting the educational trajectories of their dependent members constitutes one of the most revealing indications of a social agreement. Efforts to uphold this agreement continues to demonstrate the serious difficulties of recognizing that young people's right to a quality education means that it is urgent to transcend the rigid frontier between family and school. This gridlock feeds stale dichotomies, such as those that place in opposition care work and education, or family education and school education.

This is certainly the case for families grappling with the possibility of putting the new pact of educational inclusion into action. Ignoring this dynamic and leaving it out of public debate only serves to perpetuate the intergenerational mechanisms of social exclusion, which reproduces unequal social opportunities. This chapter compiles empirical evidence showing that only if socio-educational policies prove capable of establishing beneficial alliances between families and schools will they be able to rise to what is now expected with the compulsory completion of secondary school.

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**Chapter 2.**

**The subjective dimension of youth drop out:  
Social representations, identity and  
the secondary school**



## 2. The subjective dimension of youth drop out:

### Social representations, identity and the secondary school

Daniel Contreras<sup>6</sup> and Miguel Lafferte

#### 2.1 Introduction

The expansion of secondary education is undoubtedly a phenomenon that stretches across Latin America. This is evident in the higher enrolment rates in the region;<sup>7</sup> the legislative and educational policy changes that point to a 'step forward' in the area of compulsory education; the programme for gradual implementation in the region of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the discussion on policies aimed at the development and growth of the countries of Latin America in the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the promotion of the notion of the 'critical threshold of schooling' (ECLAC, 1998).

This positive turn has been accompanied, however, by the persistence of the phenomenon of drop out. Indeed, the gradual inclusion of new social groups in education has clearly succeeded in terms of access as there are more schools in more territories in the continent (primary schools in particular but also secondary schools) but success has been

limited in terms of retention and completion of the educational cycles. Furthermore, the available data show us that the problems of retention are more pressing in the actual zones of these new recently enrolled segments, namely in rural, indigenous and marginal urban areas.

Adequately understanding this reality is a key challenge in the drafting of education policies that truly seek to ensure the right to education for all. This task necessitates at least two avenues of analysis. First, the completion and update of the socio-demographic analysis of the phenomenon to help answer questions on where the young people leaving school are located; what characterizes them; what characterizes their families and socio-economic contexts; what characterizes the schools they attend and their respective education systems; and how all these factors are related.

Nonetheless, we cannot give an account of this reality without inquiring into the 'subjective dimension' of drop out. This second avenue of analysis entails considering how drop out is influenced by the structure of identity during adolescence and the expectations of youth. The analysis of the subjective dimension calls for consideration not only of youth expectations and representations on education and its role in the

6. The views expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of UNICEF, the organization where the author works as an Education Specialist.

7. Barro and Lee (2010) estimated that the schooling of the population aged 25 years and up in Latin America progressed between 1960 and 2010, and increased from 3.35 to 7.97 years.



development of their future plans but also the subjectivity of the learners in connection with their own day-to-day school experience and precisely how that experience helps shape expectations. It is likewise necessary to include in the analysis, the expectations of teachers since they are stakeholders who interact significantly with their learners and contribute to the process of forming their subjectivity.

The need to include this dimension is supported by at least three arguments. First, the fact that adolescence – regardless of the tremendous geographical, socio-economic and cultural variability covered by this societal age category – is increasingly experienced as an age where autonomy is desired and promoted. This does not mean that young people (especially the poorest of the region) can fully exercise their autonomy but that the perception of their experiences – how they live and observe them – influences the structure and development of those same experiences. In other words, how they experience and value schooling has a bearing on their development. Second, the configuration of meaning of the space of the secondary school for young people, which impacts their continued attendance, is influenced by the expectations, identities, life projects and representations they have of the secondary school, and by the expectations that the adults encountered in the secondary school (mainly the teachers) have for the young people concerned. Third, it is necessary to consider matters in this subjective dimension (i.e. the expectations, identities, life plans and representations of youth in relation to the secondary school) in light of i) the experience of the secondary school as a configuration of meaning with respect to the future (i.e. education as preparation for the projects needed when schooling comes to a satisfactory end), and ii) the experience of the secondary school as a life practice (the ‘going to secondary’), which, currently (phenomenologically perhaps) may or may not provide spaces and links for socialization,

experiences and symbolic contents that affect an individual’s subjective well-being and the day-to-day significance of their experience. In addition, it is reasonable to suppose that both these areas (the experience of secondary school as a configuration of meaning and as a life practice) influence, in varied and specific ways, the processes of drop out.

Incorporating these analyses is highly relevant as it permits a more comprehensive understanding of the reality of secondary learners and positions the problem of school drop out more clearly. Tackling these avenues of analysis, however, comes with practical problem since understanding subjectivity implies qualitative approximations, which, unlike quantitative analyses, cannot be generalized, are harder to distil for policy-making purposes, and is a less extensively developed analytical approach.

Nonetheless, the analysis discussed in this section seeks to make a specific contribution – even at the risk of being partial or incomplete – to the debate on the subjective dimension of youth schooling by using qualitative studies to capture the experiences of youth (particularly of youth of the ages corresponding to the secondary level of education).

Incorporating the subjective dimension in the analysis of the problem of drop out will inevitably involve methodological challenges. To meet these challenges, an integrated and critical review of research done on secondary schooling has been undertaken. To this end, two sources of past research are drawn on. First, the recent scientific literature on a wide range of subjects of study linked (or linkable) to the phenomenon of drop out was consulted. Second, the work reports of the main networks of youth researchers in the region and the progress reports of the region published by international organizations were examined. The first source is consulted mainly to develop a greater understanding of the phenomenon while the second is examined more expressly to guide policy making by helping visualise the problems through the comparative review of cases and analysis of

the policy and legal responses to formulating policy recommendations.

The first group of scientific production consulted consists of a review of publications in five subject categories. The first of these is *identity*, which included search terms like 'juvenile', 'young people' and 'youth'. The second category was *school*, with associated terms, such as 'daily experience', 'student experience', 'scholars' and 'students'. The third category was *drop out* and considered terms like 'biography', 'drop out', 'giving up', 'absenteeism', 'protective mechanisms' and 'expelling mechanisms'. The fourth category was *social representations* and the fifth category corresponded to studies on the *practices of secondary students* with search criteria like 'study practice', 'phenomenology', 'student's craft' and 'learner's craft'.

The search was limited to Latin America and only considered publications in Spanish and Portuguese. Overall, 147 articles were identified from 11 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay. Subsequently, a corpus was established using the most frequently cited articles (47 in all).

According to the search results, these categories were then regrouped into the following four categories:

- *youth identity*, which includes the discussion on information technologies and their effect on the construction of youth subjectivity, urban tribes and other forms of sociability of young people, and the discussion on how living conditions determine this process and generate specific identity contents of urban or rural youth
- *life plan and autonomy*, which constitutes an emerging and less dense debate
- *student's identity and career*
- *representations and in-school factors associated with drop out*, which refers to research on how

biography, identity and drop out factors are articulated together with the discussion on the position and role occupied by the subjective dimension in expulsion and protection mechanisms. In this group, school violence is distinguished as a specific expulsion factor as is the problem of reciprocal representations between teachers and students.

The aim of this analysis is to describe the present debate on identity and social representations in the context of their connections with the drop out process, drawing on the most extensive findings and identifying the gaps. Some proposals and recommendations are then established based on the key findings.

## 2.2 The debate on adolescent identity

Since the 1990s, a debate has existed in Latin America on the processes of sociocultural construction of meanings in youth. This debate is based on an understanding of youth as a stage of the life cycle and on its modelling from the social differences of, *inter alia*, class, gender and ethnic groups.

The youth condition can be understood as the way in which society constructs and attributes meaning to that stage of the life cycle but also as how this construction is experienced in accordance with the social differences of, *inter alia*, class, gender and ethnic groups (Dayrell, 2007).

The question on the youth condition leads us to the challenge of understanding its practices and symbols as manifestations of a new manner of being young, expression of mutations having taken place in the socialization processes (Dayrell, 2007). There are also challenges in understanding youth practices in the context of profound sociocultural changes in the Western world in recent decades as a result of

the processes of resignification of time and space; reflexiveness; and loss of territory and unpinning, which has generated a new architecture of the social (Giddens, 1991). Indeed, there is a new condition of youth in contemporary Latin American societies.

The terminology of Mead (1971) and Barbero (2002) describes Western culture starting in the 1960s as pre-figurative (i.e. as a culture where peers replace parents as behaviour models). Thus, heterogeneous individuals and collectives attain, from various temporalities, a world community where they undertake a cultural learning process based more on exploration than on mere reproduction.

The social construction of youth dates back to the nineteenth century and the rise of the capitalist bourgeoisie. However, youth only became consolidated in the 1960s with the extension of the middle classes (industrial professionals and workers) in the United States and in post-war Europe. Up to 1970 in Latin America, youth was restricted to university students. The conception of youth only broadened with the extension of formal education, the growth of major cities and the boom of the mass media (Silva, 2002).

### 2.2.1 Digital culture as a new adolescent culture

Beyond the material and symbolic conditions that begin the construction of youth, the experience of young people is a tremendously heterogeneous field. Its symbolic and expressive dimension has been increasingly used by its actors, young people themselves, to communicate and adopt positions among themselves and vis-à-vis society through such manifestations as music, dancing, video, community radio programmes, and so forth. The construction of youth also involves cultural consumption to generate an 'us' and production to acquire more visible involvement in the process of constructing their identity (Dayrell, 2007).

For instance, the 2014 *Report on Social and Educational Trends in Latin America* stated that:

... in terms of new subjectivities, we find ourselves in the presence of the first generations managing to disrupt the standard series of sequences (as a result of the hypertext and the hypermedia as the substratum of the narrative) and open up a plurality of paths, which implies the fading of reading hierarchies with a defined annotation (centre-margin; time-space; point A-point B)... The new generations are capable of engaging in several activities at once and in on-going multitasking activities. They open a great many windows simultaneously: they watch television, do homework, play, chat (with several people at the same time) and listen to music, all at once. What seems to be happening is that we are faced with a new modality of attention that we could call 'distributed attention', as opposed to the traditional 'focalized attention' (SITEAL, 2014).

What is certain is that the modes of practicing and training attentiveness in the present are related to the habits and the techno-cultural context in which the children and young people are active, and which are perhaps connected with the needs and expectations of these generations who were entertained by their parents, who in turn linked them to a host of activities.

Regarding these contents and practices, *hermeneutic communities* are formed (Barbero, 2002). New modes of perceiving and narrating identity come into play with more fleeting and precarious yet also more flexible temporalities capable of bringing together in one and the same individual, ingredients from very diverse cultural universes. In the relationship of youth with technology, there is a twofold complicity – cognitive and expressive – in which youth find a language and a rhythm of their own (Barbero, 2002).

The body and looks are a particularly relevant aspect of youth cultures. Their attire and attitudes

as well as their interaction with electronic devices such as MP3 players or mobile telephones, which have impact on the everyday lives of the young 'requires further research' as Dayrell states (2007).

### **Uses, modes and frequency of access; cultural consumption and production; production and circulation of symbolic goods**

A first line of research in this area focuses on the analyses of access, uses, modes and frequencies with which young people interact with information technologies.

Occupying the virtual space has become a common practice among the young people of the region, particularly in urban contexts. In countries like Chile or Argentina, expanded access to the internet has reached nearly all of them. Youth connect by different means and devices and from a variety of places: at home, in local shops with internet access or cybercafés, in libraries or at school. According to Murduchowicz (2010), 75% of adolescents and young people in Argentina aged 11 to 17 years have a personal profile on a social network, with Facebook being the most popular.

In that country, youth connect to the internet daily for variable periods (averaging an hour and a half), which considerably increases when they have internet access at home (more or less three hours). Youth also use the internet to communicate through chat rooms, social networks, email and blogs. Other uses of the internet are: looking up information, doing homework, listening to or downloading music, watching videos and taking part in online video games. In 2008, the report *The Interactive generation in Latin America* estimated that 95% of the youth in seven countries of the region<sup>8</sup> were internet users and observed that the main uses were, in descending order, communicating, information seeking, sharing, entertainment and consumption.

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8. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela.

This line of inquiry that focused on greater internet access in Latin America over the last decade gives rise to a whole set of important new questions on the use of electronic devices other than desktop computers, such as laptops, smartphones, tablets and others together with the various modalities and strategies of use by young people. All such questions are much harder to investigate.

### **Cyber-socializing, the internet and its roles**

There is a set of phenomena that occur in conjunction between virtual culture – understood as the modes and norms of behaviour associated with the internet and the online world – and youth culture. While we can speak of a duality between the virtual (online) and real sphere (face-to-face relations), for youth, this frontier is implicit and permeable. On occasions – to the annoyance of parents and teachers – these spheres are even superposed, meaning that young people may be in the real world without ceasing to be connected.<sup>9</sup>

In the present techno-cultural context, the relationship between the real world and the virtual world cannot be understood as a link between two independent and separate worlds, possibly coinciding at a point, but as a Möbius strip where there exists no inside and outside and where it is impossible to identify limits between both. For new generations, to an ever greater extent, digital life merges with their home life as yet another element of nature. In this naturalizing of digital life, the learning processes from that environment are frequently mentioned not just since they are explicitly asked but because the subject of the internet comes up spontaneously among those polled. The ideas of active learning, of googling 'when you don't know', of recourse to tutorials for 'learning' a programme or a game, or the expression 'I learnt English better and in a more entertaining way by playing' are examples often cited as to why the internet is the place most frequented by the young people polled (SITEAL, 2014).

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9. This discussion can be followed in Murduchowicz (2010) and Zegers and Larraín (2011), among others.

The internet is becoming an extension of the expressive dimension of the youth condition. There, youth talk about their lives and concerns, design the content that they make available to others and assess others reactions to it in the form of optimized and electronically mediated social approval.

When connected, youth speak of their daily routines and lives. With each post, image or video they upload, they have the possibility of asking themselves who they are and to try out profiles differing from those they assume in the 'real' world. They thus negotiate their identity and create senses of belonging, putting the acceptance and censure of others to the test, an essential mark of the process of identity construction. Youth ask themselves about what they think of themselves, how they see themselves personally and, especially, how others see them. On the basis of these questions, youth make decisions which, through a long process of trial and error, shape their identity. This experimentation is also a form through which they can think about their insertion, membership and sociability in the 'real' world (Murduchowicz, 2010).

From other perspectives, the question arises on what impact the internet has had on youth through accessing this sort of 'identity laboratory' and what role it plays in the shaping of youth identity (Turkle, 1995; Wallace, 1999). On the one hand, the internet enables young people to explore and perform various roles and personifications while on the other, the virtual forums – some of them highly attractive, vivid and absorbing (e.g. video games or virtual games of personification) – could present a risk to the construction of a stable and viable personal identity (Zegers and Larrain, 2011).

In addition to being a space for the construction of individual identity, the internet constitutes a space for youth socializing, mainly between groups of friends. This is a type of simultaneous interaction by means of one or more screens (telephones,

laptops, desktop computers) in real time that does not require one's physical presence. One of the most significant features of the internet for young people is that it enables them to establish relations between peers to broach subjects they would not otherwise bring up. It thus becomes possible to share secrets and confidences difficult to express in person by doing away with physical contact, which reduces inhibitions and avoids direct value judgements.

The relationships that youth construct through the internet offer a feeling of freedom and autonomy that they seldom experience in other spheres of their lives and possibly becomes a space where they can achieve greater independence (Murduchowicz, 2010).

The experiences offered through the internet through virtual or cyber communities as well as hermeneutic communities (audiovisual and musical cultures) correlate with how youth inhabit and lend meaning to the ramified screen formed by the lines and nodes of the city (Barbero, 2002).

### 2.2.2 The identity of young people in rural and poor urban areas

Historically, the concept of youth has excluded rural youth. In some ways, this concept continues to revolve around a model of the urban male student (Silva, 2002). However, globalization and access to information technologies together with new theoretical developments regarding the studies of rurality have reopened and resituated the debate – although, its presence in specialized literature remains marginal.

However, the same is not true for youth of poor urban sectors, whose experience is based on the 'meeting between the material and symbolic social conditions in which their lives unfold', which is characterized by vulnerability (Fogolino et al., 2012). Precarious living conditions, substandard public services, alcoholism, teenage pregnancy and

violence are some of the factors associated with this vulnerability.

In this situation, the marginalized youth experience is characterized by the need to break cultural reproduction with the membership group (parents) and the generational group (brothers and sisters, cousins, friends) through what Bourdieu called a 'heart-rending mission' (Bourdieu, 2002). The material and symbolic conditions of these youth make them highly sensitive to the changes and breaks involved in the youth condition. This, in addition to the need to enter the world of work, all may come with a highly subjective cost (Foglino et al., 2012). This daily challenge is expressed as a 'constant tension between the quest for immediate gratification and a possible future project' (Dayrell, 2007).

In these circumstances, peer groups become increasingly important. For young people who have had a subordinate identity imposed on them, the peer group operates as one of the few spaces for building self-esteem, where they are afforded the possibility of positive identities (Dayrell and Gomes, 2002; 2003).

In terms of time and space, the distinctive temporality of the youth condition finds – in the case of the poorer population – a correlate in the world of work that is generally characterized by insecurity and short-term work.

On the other hand, working-class youth also use and lend meaning to the space. The periphery is therefore given new meaning (due to the violence and the real lack of services) as a place of emotional and symbolic interactions. The streets, squares, corners and bars become places for socializing. Despite a lack of money and transportation difficulties, getting around the city means a fun challenge that can bring pleasure and happiness in itself. Working-class youth constitute transitional territorialities and thereby affirm their place in a city that excludes them (Dayrell, 2007).

Subject to conditions of structural constraints, these young people see the passage to adult life as a labyrinth that obliges them to immerse themselves in a constant quest to articulate the principle of reality (what can I do?), of duty (what should I do?) and of desire (what do I want to do?), which places them at a crossroads where nothing less than their future is at stake (Pais, 2003).

### 2.2.3 Urban tribes, new groups and territorialized identity

In the context of depersonalization, the mass scale and anonymity fostered by modernity and the living conditions of present-day capitalism (globalization, transnationalization), youth have in recent decades developed mechanisms to respond to the hegemonic society, creating micro-societies or micro-cultures and new primitive societies – that Durkheim termed as elemental societies – that emerge in major cities and alter the urban map (Silva, 2002).

For young people, inhabiting the scattered and anonymous city becomes tribal and so they group themselves around such markers as age, gender, sexual tastes, lifestyles, forms of social exclusion and a varied ensemble of aesthetic repertoires (Barbero, 2002).

Beyond an important aesthetic component and a particular use of the urban space, these tribes may be understood as 'an ingenious and circumstantial response' that youth 'give to the present state of things [in] contemporary societies', in a movement that progresses from depersonalization towards personalization (Silva, 2002).

#### **Urban tribes and new forms of sociability**

Urban tribes are temporary and fleeting groups but they are also places where youth can go to meet each other and meet others, building personal and collective identities. They are characterized by an emotional-affective component within a community of fraternal peers who share a

destination or finality and possess their own ethical and social codes. According to Maffesoli (1990), their distinctive feature is corporal and emotional physicality derived from the close, immediate, joyful and occasionally aggressive meeting of its members.

Urban tribes are a source of identity insofar as they offer an escape from the known frames of reference (the family), acceding to peer groups. As Silva (2002) observes, 'personal identity is based on knowing and recognizing oneself in others'.

Through friendship, the peer group becomes a fundamental reference point. Within it, activities are carried out, ideas are spread and forms of affirmation are sought prior to entering the adult world, creating an 'I' and a 'we' as distinctive aspects. According to Pais (1993), friends 'constitute the mirror of one's own identity, a means whereby [young men and women] establish similarities and differences vis-à-vis everybody else'.

According to Aguirre and Rodríguez (1996), the identity of the urban tribes 'is organized around some coordinates of space and time within which the members of the group manifest and develop a distinctive and differential culture: language, symbols, rituals and ceremonies'.

In temporal terms, the present is uppermost, especially the time outside institutions (and particularly at night) when randomness, emotions and experimentation come to the fore. Such times produce an impression of release, an escape from more rigid times and are sought out in a bid to overcome monotony through adventures and strong emotions. The reversibility of youth time is also expressed in the adherence to styles, musical groups, groups of friends and amorous practices and relations that tend not to create commitments that go beyond a day or a week (Dayrell, 2007).

These forms of youth sociability have a spatial dimension expressed in the quest for a territory of one's own and in active outings around the

city and its surrounding areas (Silva, 2002).

These are nomadic ways of inhabiting the city, through displacements of the youth band, which change and reshape themselves in a movement similar to that of migrants (Barbero, 2002). These movements are a sort of synthesis of the time and space of youth, of the dimensions of the youth condition executed in space, lending it meaning and converting it into an anchor point for the individual and collective memory (Dayrell, 2007). In these times and spaces, the young people meet, take part in performances, amuse themselves and walk around the city, temporarily reinventing the meanings of the urban spaces (Herschmann, 2000).

Returning to Maffesoli (1990), urban tribes can be defined on the basis of four characteristics: they are emotional communities (given the lack of contact and emotional contagion); they push back against passivity, showing a subterranean energy; they create a new sociability orientated towards a general climate rather than specific contents; and finally, in view of the fragmentation, they generate strong, albeit discontinuous, interactions (dancing, elbowing one another, fights, etc.).

In their journeys around the city, through which they take part in these intense forms of sociability and a quest for identity, young people go in search of friends, though potentially also of enemies or opponents.

### **Approaches to identity and gangs; violence and group and gender identity**

The cultural practices of youth groups are far from homogeneous and are, in fact, channelled depending on a variety of objectives defined by a great many influences, both internal and external. In the same cultural style, there may be criminal, intolerant or aggressive practices as well as others to do with the healthy enjoyment of free time or with citizen mobilization (Dayrell, 2007). In some cases, the new urban cultures may be anti-authoritarian and resistant to the dominant culture (Zarzuri, 2000).

Despite not being generalized, expressions of violence tend to occur within the groups of friends, especially among males, in the form of arguments, fights and acts of vandalism in the setting of broader societies which, in many instances, also prompt and permit violence (Dayrell, 2007). Gender roles may foster particular types of conduct when, for example, the male image is associated with courage and virility. Then, added to rivalry, these values may acquire a function within youth sociability. Even so, the degree of physical and symbolic violence present in youth relations is confined, in its clearest expressions, to a few very specific urban tribes (Silva, 2002).

## 2.3 Autonomy and life plans

As stated, in personal and social experience, structural material conditions intersect with subjective conditions, individual and collective. The latter may be described as determined or centred in the interaction between the public and the private, the past and the future (Atria, 1993) (see Figure 9).

From this perspective, the various aspects of life-courses have different impacts on the structure of youth identity and the position of schooling within it. The main conceptual device is that of the life project. In this respect, the expansion of secondary schooling implying the possibility of enjoying biographical time more or less protected

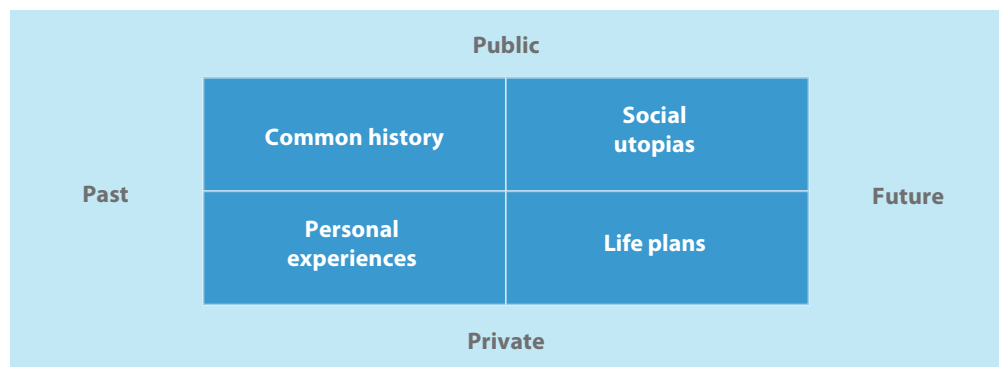
(from productive and reproductive tasks) in order to project oneself towards the future has become a relatively common experience among the young people of Latin America.

Although it is hard to establish a substantive appreciation for this planning process, three general assertions emerge from the research, constituting the relationship between young people and the life plan in the region: a strong tendency is observed to postpone the age for having children; there is also a tendency to delay marriage and wait longer before leaving home; and the same is true for becoming economically active.

Underlying all these logics for constructing the future is an eminently pragmatic position: having an adequate economic situation constitutes the basis and starting point for any life plan (Ghiardo and Dávila, 2005). From this perspective, we can highlight the following two specific themes.

**The significance of motherhood among secondary students.** Housework and adolescent pregnancy/motherhood are among the biggest specific causes of youth drop out from school. According to research, girls who become pregnant or assume motherhood follow a logic of their own and their acts, which from an outside point of view may seem contradictory or incorrect, are consistent with specific cultural models where pregnancies are not an accidental consequence of

**Figure 9. Interaction between the public and the private, the past and the future**



Source: Atria, 1993



youth disinformation but outcomes sought after, as a logical consequence of notions of femininity and masculinity established in their social setting (Hernández, 2003). This implies that pregnancy is understood (even when not part of a previous project and also as an *a posteriori* resignification) as a form of acquiring a defined identity and a new status in the community.

Far from being a simple or linear phenomenon, teenage pregnancy linked with school drop out arises as a complex problem with economic, sociocultural, psychological and affective implications and, needless to say, brings with it personal, educational, family, work-related and social consequences. Part of this complexity can be glimpsed through several studies (Molina, 2004), which have demonstrated that school drop out occurs not only during pregnancy but also before it – so, a portion of teenagers who get pregnant remain off the institutional radar. Some researchers have stated that school drop out constitutes a rather late link in the chain of failure at school, which has been preceded by repeating school years and the low educational level of parents, in addition to a background of poverty (Meléndez, 2000).

### **Autonomy, social protection and loneliness.**

The condition of youth can be defined as an effort to build a personal biographical base in the arena of negotiation (and tension) between individual autonomy and social dependency. This negotiation occurs in social contexts and also requires social resources.<sup>10</sup> Güell (2007) recognizes three basic social resources for the creation of youth: a skewed sense of time, a space defined by non-family ties, and a sociability organized on elective bases.<sup>11</sup>

In the region, many adolescents do not have a context to provide them with an adequate sense

of time (the present is demanding and the future is viewed as an empty promise), inclusive public spaces (both physical and communicational, plural and non-discriminatory), or real conditions for introducing sociability in open and plural ways (lack of a powerful social language that includes them). Given this situation, we also have the aspects of indifference and the defensive or loneliness and aggression, which are ultimately the same thing. In fact, for many boys, girls and young people of the poorer strata, the street becomes the most satisfactory environment for socialization among peers, while school comes to be seen as the first experience of social failure (Espíndola and León, 2002).

In Latin America, this jeopardizing of the process of autonomous construction of the individual takes place in a scenario where the school does not assign itself a clear function of support and guidance in this process. A recent study conducted in Chile noted that, even if the idea of a life plan is often used in school, its implications remains vague and it is not accompanied by specific learning opportunities (Castillo and Contreras, 2014).

Pereira (2012), on investigating how secondary students lend meaning to the school, states that there is an evident discontinuity and that a way to restore the continuity between the consciousness of young people and the consciousness of the school culture lies in 'recognizing these in their specificities and identities. Perhaps through perceiving them as young people, we can create channels for a broader dialogue in which they can find meaning in constructing themselves as students-young people or young people-students' (Pereira, 2012).

This situation worsens in a context in which the adolescent has weak social protection, with very little relevance and presence in the dispute on public policies of childhood protection since there exists a prevalence and near monopoly of the field by early childhood.

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10. Hence, youth is understood as a social product and the various forms of being and becoming young are not equal since societies are those providing the social resources equitably for becoming young.

11. These are symbolic resources that society can only provide as a whole.

## 2.4 Construction of the student identity

Since the late 1990s in the region – and largely drawing on the works of Perrenoud (1990 and 1995) and Giroux (1993) – a specific approach has been developed around the phenomenon of identity construction in secondary students as stakeholders who deploy strategies whereby they take decisions based on the adaptation or appropriation of the environment in the course of their daily experience.

Secondary school students are not passive individuals. The relationships they build up with their schools are not alien to their subjectivity. Young people construct 'knowledge' and 'know-how' that allow them to give personal sense and meaning to what they do. They acquire this 'knowledge' and 'know-how' through an appropriation process marked by the fact of being collective and localized. Not understanding such senses and meanings, as well as the strategies that they develop in order to make their participation possible, can lead to invalid relationships with them or to the formulation of misguided policies (Baeza, 2002).

In a similar vein, Dubar (1996) and Dubet and Martuccelli (1996) observe that the training of any stakeholder involves a process of socialization conditioned, though not determined, by their surroundings but also marked by a process of subjectivity that allows for a differentiation that underlies his or her own identity.

This process develops in tension with the institutional practices of secondary schools, which see young people as passive, malleable individuals (with the school in a position to lay down the law), and where levelling down (the young person being seen restrictively as a mere student), labelling (distinctions are made between students on the basis of stereotypes), distrust (it is imagined that the young will act correctly if watched over)

and individual meritocracy enter the picture (any achievement being attributed to individual merit with no account of the socio-economic and cultural determinants of the persons concerned). This perspective constitutes special ways in which the adults of the school process the individual variability of learners. In this respect, Giroux (1993) affirms that 'the voice and the experience of learners are reduced to the immediacy with which they can be made use of and exist as something that must be measured, administrated, registered and controlled. Their distinctive character, their disjunction and their vivid quality are all aspects that remain dissolved beneath an ideology of control and management'.

The empirical studies in this field show that two coordinates can be recognized that encompass the process of developing the student's craft (Ghiardo and Dávila, 2005). On the one hand, we have the strategies and practices of adaptation to the regulations and norms of school life (which include stipulations regarding study) and, on the other, the position of the learners on these strategies and practices.

While the few studies available are not conclusive, we can see that these strategies move between certain guidelines directed rather towards constructing a fulfilling collective sociability and others that are more individually tailored. In this case, at least two tendencies can be recognized: (i) processing school life as the result of what Goffman (2001) calls 'total institutions' (where internal friction is processed through expressions such as 'the escape'), and (ii) especially in the countries with greater secondary school coverage, an exacerbation of individualism is observed with a tendency to understand schooling as a career where success depends solely on personal effort.

## 2.5 Intra-school factors associated with school drop out

As we have observed, the process of construction of the identity of youth affects – and is affected by – the way in which educational experience unfolds. In this respect, the quantitative analysis of factors associated with school drop out within which intra-school factors present a high relative weight should be complemented with a review of these variables, an analysis of violence as a specific factor and, finally, an analysis of the interaction of the reciprocal perceptions of teachers and learners in the school context.

### 2.5.1 The subjective push factor

The start of the last decade saw a consolidation of the distinction between extra-school factors (poverty, rurality, gender, ethnicity, among others) and intra-school factors (low performance, problems of conduct, teacher authoritarianism, academic performance, perception on the quality of educational provision) associated with school drop out (Alcázar, 2009). Various studies have characterized this reality, such as the case carried out by Espíndola and León (2002), who state that:

In this manner, the characteristics and very structure of the education system<sup>12</sup> together with the intra-school agents themselves would be directly responsible for generating its expelling elements, whether on account of its inadequate socializing action or because of its inability to channel or contain the influence of the (adverse) socio-economic environment in which children and young people develop (Espíndola and León, 2002).

12. Terrigi (2012), referring to the case of Argentina, reinforces this limitation, affirming that 'the basic organizational matrix of Argentine secondary education is a powerful reason why it is difficult to introduce the changes we consider necessary at this educational level. I proposed a tripod formed by a highly classified *curriculum*, some processes of recruitment and training of teachers, in accordance with the principle of disciplinary speciality, and posts established as collections of paid times matching the classroom hours of the students;

More recently, from the perspective of preventing failure at school (and hence drop out and early school leaving), Román (2013) constructs a matrix for analysing factors associated with failure at school, whereby (quantifiable) structural factors combine with other factors (more qualitative) related to feelings, which lie mainly in a cultural dimension.

### 2.5.2 Violence as a critical push factor

A particularly pertinent phenomenon in this scenario is the problem of violence. Escotto (2015), Trucco and Ullmann (2015) recognize a set of causes of violence affecting the young people concerned. Notably, the growing inequality and exclusion (or exclusions); the series of civil conflicts; drug trafficking; migratory processes and deportations;<sup>13</sup> violence within the family; young people lacking a sense of belonging; the stigmatization of youth; and institutional disaffiliation.<sup>14</sup> To this are added two cultural classifications: a generalized culture validating violence as a mechanism for settling conflicts (IIDH, 2011); and a low tolerance of differences in very unequal societies, which fosters discrimination.

There clearly exists a broad spectrum of expression of violence affecting adolescents. Trucco and Ullman propose the following integrative and classificatory outline (see Table 4).

13. Migrants are in a condition where their rights may be limited and they are exposed to abuses on the part of employers, to difficulties of access in services, and to discrimination and marginalization (ECLAC, 2014).
14. 'The situation of disruption of the links permitting capacity-building and participation in the social capital, insofar as the job market and the education system are the most important spaces of inclusion, may become a risk factor making the young more inclined to resort to some manifestations of violence. The acceptance by these young people of their own marginalization makes them vulnerable and conditions them to reproduce poverty and exclusion, and exposes them to risks in the area of reproductive health, in addition in some cases, to making them potential participants in law-breaking' (SEGIB-OIJ, 2008, cited in Escotto, 2015).

**Table 4.** Manifestations of violence in youth classified according to the Galtung and Ecological Model typologies

GALTUNG TYPOLOGY	TYPOLOGY OF THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL		
	SELF-INFLICTED	INTERPERSONAL	COLLECTIVE
<b>DIRECT</b>	Self-injury and suicide	Physical and/or psychological aggression in the family context, from or towards the spouse or close friends	Physical and/or psychological aggression towards schoolmates ( <i>bullying and cyberbullying</i> ), neighbours, authorities or gangs
<b>STRUCTURAL</b>	Self-exclusion	Discrimination in family or close circles on account of assigned characteristics (e.g. affiliation to minority groups)	Social exclusion
<b>CULTURAL/ SYMBOLIC</b>	Low self-esteem	Exclusion associated with concepts rooted in the culture (e.g. traditional gender roles)	Stigmatization

Source: Trucco and Ullmann, 2015. Reprinted with permission from the United Nations.

Specifically in the educational sphere, violence occurs more or less extensively, aggravating three types of key tensions (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015):

- i) violent behaviour versus the school as a safe and protected place for training the new generations in citizen and democratic conduct and values (Román and Murillo, 2011);
- ii) the school as a space regulating behaviour (shaping a harmonious school community) versus the emergence of the external space (for example, the reshaping of sociability regarding ICTs and their impact on the daily life of youth); and
- iii) the educational institution directed towards a homogeneous population versus a new diverse school population.<sup>15</sup> López (2011) observes the latter tension as ‘... an imbalance in appraisal terms between the student the school would like to have and the actual student in the classroom from day to day. Not only is it observed that the new students are different but it is also clear that this difference generates

uneasiness which, furthermore, is connoted and valued negatively’.

This assertion could explain the strong daily expression of violent behaviour in the school space, both in the form of institutional violence and in the case of aggression among peers or reactions to environmental discrimination (Eljach, 2011). Addressing these situations requires not only rules, consequences and sanctions but more importantly backup measures and the development of personal capacities of tolerance and conflict management, all of which require resources and training facilities that are not currently being provided by the secondary school.

### 2.5.3 Reciprocal representations between adolescents and teachers

The reciprocal representations between adolescents and their teachers also determine both the various learner trajectories and even the continued presence of some young people in the secondary school.

15. The educational institution, conservative by nature, has been unable to fully accommodate some of these changes (ECLAC, 2015).

Currently, there is a significant number of young people who have lost faith in the school. Confirming this observation, the national youth surveys conducted in the countries in the region (with their methodological variability and certain local adaptations) highlight the persistence of the traditional models of assessment of the role of the school which is under strain due to many problems, such as the widening educational divides according to socio-economic backgrounds, physical and psychological violence, and the imbalances between learning processes and the labour market, among other factors.

At the regional level, a third of the young people interviewed strongly question the relevance of the school as the main socializing institution; this trend is even more accentuated in the Southern Cone. The specifics, however, vary. Nearly 20% of the region agree on the role of teachers and contents, their instrumentality for work or violence in the educational environment, with the exception of Central America and Brazil, where the criticisms in all respects remain at a little over 35% (OIJ, 2013).

Among young Mexicans (according to the 2005 National Youth Survey), the reasons for choosing to study are linked to the possibility of having a good job (58%), which means that education continues to be viewed as a possible means to obtain social promotion and mobility. In Argentina (according to the 2009 National Youth Survey in Argentina), some 56% of those surveyed, regardless of their age, stated that youth should study and not work, which confirms the value of education in the social construct and the importance given, above all, to the right to education. In this respect, many of those polled (whatever their age) highly value education credentials and are confident that this will help them achieve social insertion.

In Guatemala (according to the First National Survey of Youth in Guatemala – ENJU, 2011), youth consider that the education they receive, or have received, is relevant for further learning or for

obtaining greater knowledge (40%) while a similar proportion state that education enables them to get a good job, improve their financial situation or even help their family members (37.3%). A lower proportion, 14.3%, of young people see education's role as developing socialization capacities, such as getting to know people, making friends, obtaining prestige or meeting social expectations. The survey also revealed that some 43% of these young people have suffered teasing or derision at school (i.e. psychological violence) and 30.8% have been victims of physical violence.

Among young Uruguayans (according to the Third National Survey of Adolescence and Youth – ENAJ, 2013), the main reason stated by 45.1% of them for attending secondary school is 'to acquire training'. The reasoning statement provided on the survey, stating 'you hope/were hoping to improve your social position by studying' scored a mere 6.2%. Finally, in Colombia (from the data of the 2000 National Youth Survey), youth consider that first among the factors most contributing to success (in descending order) is personality (38%), the second is preparation (24%) and the third is effort (21%). Teachers, however, rated last in the importance attributed to them by young people as socializing agents in daily life – after mother, brothers and sisters, father, friends and boyfriend or girlfriend. Across the board, youth surveys in the various countries indicate that the lack of money (for transport or enrolment) is the main reason for school drop out.

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A large, stylized blue graphic of the number '56%' is centered on the page. The '5' and '6' are connected at the top, and the percentage sign is to the right. The font is a clean, sans-serif style.

of those surveyed in Argentina stated that youth should study and not work.

Finally, in the quest for answers as to how far the trajectories and motivations of youth are redirected, Dávila (2009) studied various groups of young people in Chile and the rest of Latin America and their connection with the phenomena of political participation and mobilization. He observed that youth have developed 'particular strategies for addressing – and also fleeing – the world in which they live, in a context in which the two-dimensional family-school ecosystem seems to have eroded and other stakeholders have come to the fore in the shaping of meaning for the identities of these youth collectives'.

As explained above, the questioning of the traditional role of the school as the choice space of socialization applies not only to youth in schools, but also to cultural groups and other forms of youth groups.

To address the problem of the loss of meaning in the educational experience felt by youth, Maroto (2000) has proposed an integrated typography of the teachers' representations of their students that would enable educators to categorize their own teaching practice and understand, in part, adolescents' indifference to school. The first category in this typography is the 'traditional approach' (Maroto, 2000) and involves teachers seeing students as incapable ('the student cannot'), so they relinquish any possibility of teaching them or define their own role as compensating for the student's inability (patience, resignation, among other types of conduct). The second category is 'interventionist' in which teachers view students as lacking interest ('the student doesn't want to'). In this case, teachers understand their role through motivational theories and, thus try to stimulate students (perceptive change, manipulation). The final category is a 'perspectivist stance' whereby teachers represent their students as holders of other perspectives ('the student sees reality differently') and, on that basis, carry out their practices as a process of exchange, negotiation

and mutual adaptation. Although it is not easy to quantify how far educators respond to these patterns, it is most likely that a large majority of teachers in secondary schools of the region move between the first and second of these categories.<sup>16</sup>

Levinson (2012) completes this picture by stating that there is a 'gap between the sense of rights of young people and the specialized expertise of teachers; between the search for a significant membership by the young people and the imposition of an antiquated nationalism by teachers;<sup>17</sup> between the quest to engage and interest the student and the imposition of the teacher's work; and between the supposed "anti-values" of the students and the "good values" of a school eager to democratize itself, but this is very self-contradictory in practice'.

## 2.6 Lessons and projections

Although the contributions to the educational debate covered so far is not homogeneous and in many ways is partial, incomplete or even contradictory, it is possible to identify a set of certainties that will enable us to expand our knowledge in this field.

There can be no doubt that the subjectivity of young people, even when they are constrained by structural situations of exclusion, plays a significant part in the drop out processes. The way in which they construct their identity and lend meaning to their experiences acquires a weight of its own,

16. In the study of Ghiardo and Dávila (2005), it was found that 'the immense majority of teachers (61%) considered that what most complicated their teaching was the type of learner with whom they had to work'.

17. On this issue, he takes the matter further with: 'unfortunately, much of teacher training for the secondary level gives our teachers a consciousness of being "experts," and a pronounced self-identification with specialist knowledge' (Quiroz, 1992; Quiroz, 1987). On the one hand, it is a good thing that professional identity is embedded in an area of disciplinary knowledge but, on the other, if the concept of being a trainer of young people is not equally deep-seated, specialization may leave the teacher too constricted, placing his or her field of knowledge above others and with tendencies towards an encyclopedic approach (Levinson, 2012).

which should be extensively considered in the design of the policies to ensure the completion of secondary education.

The internet and multiscreen formats have been gaining ground as the new socialization space used by youth. Cyber-socialization is not only a new space for interaction but also a place where they can very explicitly try out identities and representations of themselves. This space is not necessarily incorporated into school life so an active part of the process of constructing the personal identities of young people remains opaque, if not hidden, from the school.

Within cities, territorialized forms of socialization and construction of identities are spreading, where a collective sense of belonging is strengthened through the common participation in rites and practices. These dynamics directly affect how young people assess the schooling process.

There is an active dynamic of adaptation to school life on the part of young people whose behavioural patterns are grouped around the 'student's craft'. This set of adaptive practices usually takes place under tension with institutional dynamics and despite (or perhaps because of) this, they lend meaning to the experience of attending secondary school. This formation of meaning could explain, in certain contexts, the disaffection that young people harbour towards the educational institution, which – as shown by some surveys – can be observed in the attitudes of the youth in several countries in the region.

In the drop out processes, a set of factors arise from within the educational institution and function as push factors. The dynamics of violence in the context of the secondary school (direct, structural, cultural/symbolic) constitute one of the most complex push factors and, although widespread, the problem is relatively less visible when it comes to reflecting on and seeking solutions to encourage the completion of schooling.

It is possible to identify gaps and propose some, as of yet, unverified hypotheses and questions that call for continued in-depth research. For example, although the urbanization of the population is a feature of the Latin American region, we should not disregard analysis of the realities of young rural people since they make up the group with lowest access to and lowest attendance in secondary education.

The weight of the subjective dimension refers not only to the significance that youth attribute to secondary education, to the teachers or to their school experience but also to that developed by the teachers regarding their students and their sphere of work. While studies on these topics are finding ways to contribute to the current debate, there is a need to probe deeper into how these reciprocal representations interact and mutually influence one another.

Finally, we can identify a relatively extensive academic corpus – from sociology, anthropology and psychology – that through analysing the process of identity-building in young people, builds a complex theory on the phenomenon of drop out. While there is an imbalance between that knowledge corpus and its more explicit connection with the phenomena of educational trajectory and drop out, the study on educational identity, the student's craft and life plans and autonomy could rebalance this situation and provide more information to help the design of secondary education public policy in the countries in the region.

Given these observations, we recommend the development of policies that provide – in addition to material support – symbolic backup and resources that will be directly beneficial to the personal and collective processes of identity-building, which would encourage more sustained and inclusive educational trajectories.

As a social process, the subjective dimension of drop out implies interaction. Hence, more far-reaching studies coupled with better policies aimed at modifying the student representations that

teachers construct are prerequisites to progressing towards the consolidation of inclusive secondary schooling for the entire region.

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**Chapter 3.**

**Inclusive Education 2030:  
Issues and implications  
for Latin America**



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# 3. Inclusive Education 2030: Issues and implications for Latin America<sup>18</sup>

Renato Opertti

## 3.1 Background

The 2030 Education Agenda approved in May 2015 in Incheon, Republic of Korea (UNESCO, 2015a), positions inclusive education as one of the hubs of transforming education and education systems (UNESCO-IBE, 2015). Given this viewpoint, Latin America becomes an excellent window of opportunity for rethinking inclusive education as a key ingredient for a new generation of social and educational policies in accordance with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015).

This chapter discusses three dimensions of analysis, which may help position this new global agenda regionally. Firstly, four fundamental ideas are examined on inclusive education that have impacted the international debate of the last 70 years (Opertti, Zachary and Zhang, 2014;

Opertti, 2015). These ideas centre around education as a human right and public good; targeted for groups with special needs; as a priority in situations of exclusion and marginalization; and as an axis for change for the whole education system. Some implications for the region are also presented in this section.

Secondly, it is argued that the development of inclusive education in Latin America is, to a great extent, permeated by these four ideas. Over the last decade and a half or so, there have been significant advances in the region in regulatory aspects and conditions of education, which despite putting into effect the right to education and smoothing the way to inclusion still fail to entrench an integrated concept of inclusive education embodied in effective policies and above all effective practices. Inclusive education has thus remained unfinished business in the region under democratic governments with markedly different political, economic and social lines of emphasis.

Thirdly, a series of tensions and challenges are identified that are linked to policy dilemmas specific to an inclusive education approach. Among other challenges, specific reference is made to the need:

- i) to devise public policies that are clearly directed, sustainable and long term;

18. This document echoes the ideas and concepts put forward in two talks: i) the lecture 'Inclusive education: international perspective and challenges in Latin America,' delivered in connection with the presentation of the 24th issue of the review *Diálogos Pedagógicos* during the 25th Meeting on the State of Educational Research on 23 October 2014 and subsequently published by the review *Diálogos Pedagógicos* (Year XIII, No. 25, April 2015, Córdoba, Argentina); and ii) the presentation 'Inclusive Education: spirit and matter of reform of education systems,' made during the Workshop 'Secondary Education and Youth Cultures' organized by IPE Buenos Aires, the Education Research and Foresight Unit of UNESCO Paris and IBE-UNESCO on the 15th and 16th September 2015 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

- ii) to convince a great many institutions and stakeholders about the value of inclusion;
- iii) to shape an inclusive curriculum set in a common frame of reference that serves as a basis for responding to the fact that each person is special and unique;
- iv) to design educational institutions as communities of learning sustained by the leadership of the principals of the institutions and the empowerment of teachers; and
- v) to mould inclusive teachers who understand and appreciate the diversity of learners.

Finally, we ponder whether a renewed emphasis on inclusive education as set out in the 2030 Education Agenda entails rethinking the educational aims and the design of the education system for the purpose of shaping a sustainable development that is engaging, conciliatory, fair and equitable.

### **The 2030 Education Agenda positions inclusive education as one of the hubs of transforming education and education systems.**

## **3.2 Four ideas on inclusive education**

Over the last 70 years and within an international comparative perspective, it has been observed that the debates and policies on inclusive education have been permeated by four ideas that set the compass for education policy on inclusion as a human right and a public good – and more recently, as a common good targeted to groups with special needs; as a priority in situations of exclusion and marginalization; and as an axis for change for the whole education system. These ideas do not necessarily represent linear evolutions in time but rather of historically referenced goals that mark a turning point in the meanings and purposes of education policies. These four ideas have become

more firmly linked over time as research has sought to clarify and synthesize them.

The first idea entails positioning inclusive education as the right of access to and enjoyment of an appropriate and significant education which is, at the same time, the entry point to a full and harmonious development of the ensemble of human rights. Furthermore, since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), education has been linked to the pursuit of social justice that entails, *inter alia*, responding to the purpose of education and generating a basis of consensus on the shared meaning of education among diverse stakeholders, primarily learners and teachers. The gaps in meaning – in addition to resulting in disillusion among teachers and the exclusion of young people from the education system – reflect to a great extent the absence of social constructs that convincingly bring together and express shared educational pathways.

In the historical progression of inclusion as a right, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989; UNICEF, 2011) substantiates the right to an education that does not discriminate on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, religion, language or gender. On the other hand, the World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (UNESCO, 1990) defines inclusion as the absence of exclusion and focuses on women as well as individuals and groups categorized as differently abled. The language of disability has indeed strongly permeated the discussion on inclusion and tends to highlight, to a large extent, the shortcomings rather than the potential of learners.

In the most recent debate on citizen rights, inclusive education entails reaffirming the role of the state as the guarantor of rights. Thus, the state must regulate both state and private management as part of public policy in order to guarantee people the full exercise of their right to education.

Under this framework, the right to 'curricular justice' is understood as the equality of opportunity to acquire relevant knowledge. In essence, to gain access to non-discrimination (inclusion) and guaranteed education that is free of charge.

In terms of rights, education may be understood basically, as a public good or alternatively, as a common good (UNESCO, 2015b). The concept of public good implies guaranteeing that each person can enjoy and benefit from the right to education, which may involve a diversity of service providers, although, in general, the reference is to the state's public sphere. There is not necessarily any binding and dependent relationship between persons seeking to gain the right to education and the state. Rather, the relationship established between the state and persons seeking access to education is one where the state acts as guarantor for the real opportunities that each individual has to materialize his/her right to education. Alternatively, the idea of common good implies that persons avail themselves of their rights by intermingling with one another, reaffirming the collective nature of education as an endeavour and sharing a whole range of values and references – for instance on solidarity and justice – common to all. The notion of common good is indeed essentially a political, socio-historical and cultural construct that recognizes a diversity of contexts, points of view, and national and local knowledge systems as the source of its legitimacy and development. The common good rests upon inclusive processes drawing on a variety of institutions and stakeholders committed to formulating and implementing policies (UNESCO, 2015b).

Also, from the perspective of rights – and to an even greater extent from the common good approach – the education system is not a service-provider but a coordinator of the diversity of learning environments whose purpose is to provide real learning opportunities for each learner living in a shared social and educational construct. The state as guarantor holds no monopoly over the provision

and assessment of education but ensures that educational opportunities, regardless of their form, are aligned with a vision of education that is shared and is, in effect, a standard for the society in which it is based.

The second idea of inclusive education is fundamentally linked to the conceptualization of and targeting of groups who fall under the broad heading of special needs. In this line of thinking, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) marks a historic milestone for two reasons: it extends the discussion of inclusive education to sociocultural aspects and positions it in the context of comprehensive social reform of the state; and it restricts exclusion to the incorporation of learners with special needs into mainstream schools and redefines the role of special schools as resource centres supporting the mainstream schools. To a great extent, this gives us two agendas that can be construed by developing two parallel paths – one of social inclusion and another of the inclusion of learners with special needs with the option of seeking their integration, harmonization and increased potential. Perhaps, one of the most significant aspects of the Salamanca Statement is that the document introduces the idea that the education system, and particularly educational establishments, should adjust to the learner and not the learner to the educational establishment.

Developments which followed on from Salamanca, mainly the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006) and the Conference '15 years since the Salamanca Statement' (Inclusion International, 2009) focus on the need for profound modifications of the education system to meet the requirements of groups with special educational needs through a lifelong learning perspective.

The third idea that strengthens and builds on the Salamanca Statement focuses on the inclusion

of socially marginalized groups. This is how, from the Dakar Framework for Action of Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) to the EFA Global Monitoring Reports, inclusive education is beginning to be understood as a combination of equity and quality on the grounds that greater equity of education systems – in this case, ‘overcrowding’ being a problem and democratization an opportunity – ‘impaired’ the quality of education. However, the observation that equity and quality go hand-in-hand changes the terms of the programme debate and, therefore, the construction and development of educational policy. The experience of the Nordic countries, and particularly of Finland, shows that the most progressive education systems are those that achieve, at the same time, high standards of equity, quality and excellence (Tedesco, Opertti and Amadio, 2013). The proof is in how an education system prepares itself to provide both equity and quality based on the assumption that the social and cultural context is at once a challenge and an opportunity rather than a hindrance.

The 2010 EFA Report (UNESCO, 2010) strikes a critical balance by recognizing the failure of the international community and of countries to place inclusive education at the heart of education for all. Inclusion, in the sense of generating a comprehensive and robust response to the diversity of situations of social exclusion and deficiency, has not played a significant role in meeting the EFA goals. Indeed, this 2010 report observes that inclusive education implies the development and the implementation of policies from three complementary angles: as rights and opportunities; as accessibility and affordability; and as the creation of friendly learning environments. Underlying this approach, the concern for inclusion as seen in the constructs and actions of governments and the international community has been understood more in terms of guaranteeing access to primary education rather than being considered as a possibility to democratize educational opportunities for all citizens from birth and through life.

The fourth and final idea refers to inclusive education as an axis for changing the essence and the substance of the education system. Inclusive education entails harmonizing the reduction of inequalities obstructing the right to education and learning by understanding the diversity of expectations and needs of all learners as opportunities for extending and democratizing the learning processes.

The intellectual leadership exercised by UNESCO in putting forward this transformational view of inclusive education has been fundamental. In 2005, UNESCO conceptualized inclusion as a dynamic and positive-response approach to the diversity of learners, moving away from assessment that the growing diversity and related inequalities among learners makes the classroom ‘ungovernable’ and that it was therefore appropriate to separate learners by sociocultural profiles in order to better cater to their needs.

In addition, during the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education (ICE, 2008), organized by UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education, the representatives of 153 countries, including more than 100 Ministers of Education, agreed that inclusive education was a general guiding principle that could strengthen:

- i)** education for sustainable development;
- ii)** lifelong learning opportunities; and
- iii)** the equitable access of all levels of society to learning opportunities (UNESCO-IBE, 2008). This conceptualization recognizes:
  - the sociocultural, economic and political substratum of inclusion;
  - its transversal positioning at educational levels and the overcoming of the barriers between formal, non-formal and informal education; and
  - inclusion as meaning not only access to education but the assurance of effective learning opportunities.

Inclusion indeed implies that all boys and girls are equally catered to (Ainscow and Messiou, 2014). This broad concept of inclusive education requires a rethink of the format of education systems, moving from learning goals and objectives to the individuals who are learning. The flipside of taking into account the diversity of each learner as a learning subject is the personalization of education. This transformation involves recognizing that all of us are unique, that we need to be supported and strengthened through collaborative and interactive learning environments, and that, at all times, inclusive teaching underpins the monitoring of the learning process of each learner. The other side of diversity consists then of organizing a 'made-to-measure' approach for each individual (Amadio, Opertti and Tedesco, 2015).

Thirdly, the 2030 Education Agenda that emerged from the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea (UNESCO, 2015a) positions the concepts of inclusion and equity as the foundations of a systemic approach to educational quality, supported by the view that education transforms the lives of people and communities. The two concepts are closely linked in the sense that, while inclusion means putting into effect significant learning opportunities that take into account the diverse needs of all learners and that indeed respond to the inequalities of contexts, equity involves guaranteeing that fair educational conditions, inputs and processes find expression in the equality of purposes and outcomes for all learners. From this perspective, inclusion and equity inform a systemic concept of educational quality that entails interrelating and conferring unitary meaning to the various parts of the education system with the aim of generating and facilitating learning opportunities. Quality with respect to the education system is not essentially defined by the domains of public/private or formal/non-formal action but by the capacity to foster relevant and sustainable learning processes that put into effect education as a common good and guarantees the

### **The other side of diversity consists then of organizing a 'made-to-measure' approach for each individual.**

right to education and learning.

Since ICE 2008, it has been argued that expanding the view and practice of inclusive education required rethinking the purposes of education and the framework of organization and functioning of education systems. The Education Agenda 2030 strengthens this appraisal and also places emphasis on the need to rethink the concept of educational quality, incorporating concepts of equity and inclusion to ensure the transformation of education systems.

### **3.3 An overview of inclusive education in Latin America**

The development of inclusive education in Latin America has largely resisted the four ideas described and has sparked policy debates and dilemmas that remain unresolved. Four aspects that may define the position of the regional debate on inclusive education will be specified in this section.

First, in Latin America as a whole, the most traditional programmes – mainly built around the concepts of equity and quality – exist side by side with those reflecting renewed sensibilities and approaches, through such themes as Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), comprehensive citizenship education, intercultural bilingual education and ICTs, and academic inclusion. Rather than being anchored in one unified approach, the new agendas tend more to combine together, stacking on top of one another and adding up to a sum of divided trends, projects and interventions. They are predominantly based on educational provision and maintain a



fairly marginal relationship with the core of the education system (i.e. its essence and substance). The Education Agenda 2030 presents an alternative to a programme of accumulated themes and places Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) at the core of formal, non-formal and informal education through comprehensive measures and academic support (UNESCO, 2015a).

Furthermore, the incorporation of new subjects to the regional agenda has not induced a rethinking of what is understood in the field of inclusive education or what the options and the paths needed to achieve greater equity and quality truly involves. For example, with respect to achieving intercultural bilingual education, we should ask ourselves whether this is rooted in references and curriculum frameworks common to all or, alternatively, requires separate curricula. Likewise, when considering inclusion, if we should aim to deal with the specific nature of groups linked to intercultural bilingual education with or without a base in universal policies or what type of universalism this should be based on; or rather, whether equity involves guaranteeing access to education for these groups or differentiating curriculum approaches and pedagogic strategies to lend education meaning and relevance for them.

Generally speaking, education systems are immersed in a variety of actions that seek to overcome the lack or inadequacy of common conceptual threads among the various educational levels. It is possible to consider this while still acknowledging the lack of unified policy frameworks and the ordering of priorities. In any case, education systems are often constructed more in terms of service providers as opposed to providers of learning opportunities.

Secondly, within the field of inclusive education, there are a variety of approaches, policies and interventions that may place the responsibility for the achievement of inclusion outside the education

system and instead on those systems that assimilate people 'with special needs'. The multiple foundations of inclusive education policies reflect an adaptable concept that generally lacks its own meaning and projection but instead serves the purpose of other policies.

Thirdly, Latin America presents a case of unfinished democratization when it comes to genuine inclusion and educational achievements. Certainly, and particularly in the last 15 years, the region has made notable progress in at least four fundamental respects that fall under what could be termed 'educational progressivism': i) the strengthening of the concept of education as a right and public good to the detriment of the concept of education as a service and consumer good; ii) expansion of the right to education through an extension of compulsory schooling, with an emphasis on lower and upper secondary education; iii) greater investment in education as a percentage of GDP of each country and a steady improvement of the conditions and inputs aimed at supporting teaching and learning processes, chiefly with respect to physical infrastructures, equipment and materials; and finally iv) the priority given to improving the working conditions and pay of teachers.

Educational progressivism has generated the political will to bring about positive change in the regulatory framework and the conditions to implement the right to education and the improvement of learning opportunities but this has not been matched by the political will to provide each and every child and young person a chance to participate in education and learning. For the most part, this endeavour has lacked the full-bodied institutional, curricular and academic policies needed to achieve this goal. More often, educational progressivism has tended to make use of the traditional battery of classroom approaches thought 'to be advanced', as in the case of the different variants of constructivism rather than to reflect on what are the most pertinent combinations of curriculum and teaching approaches to support and

guide learners towards gaining access to relevant and sustainable learning processes. Currently, the urgent need to realize a huge academic effort tailored to the individual learner has not been sufficiently weighted – nor has this effort been valued or recognized – as a fundamental ingredient for policy change in education.

Lastly, the fourth aspect is how to situate oneself in the most recent past and present in order to get to the root of the problem of achieving inclusive education. A superficial historical perspective ranging over the past four decades runs the risk of presenting an ideological vision classifying this period in terms of gains and setbacks, without any nuances or transitions. Yet, it is important to observe that the challenges to inclusive education have not been confronted or solutions channelled sustainably and satisfactorily in a great variety of ideological and political frameworks. If by inclusion, we understand equity and justice in the processes, participation and outcomes, which entails seeking equality starting from the recognition of differences (López, 2005), then inclusion in this sense constitutes an unfinished business on account of both conservatism and progressivism in education.

In short, from a joint regional perspective, we can identify four orders of problems that obstruct inclusive education:

- i) the aggregation of policies for educational changes without any comprehensive rethinking of the vision of education and the role of the education system as their guarantor and support;
- ii) the broad array of concepts of inclusive education and its adaptability for supporting a wide range of education policy proposals;
- iii) the lack of linkages between the discourse, regulatory framework and real conditions for putting into practice the right to education, along with the implementation of educational practices bent more on educational approaches than thought from understanding and
- iv) the observation that inclusive education is thus still unfinished business under democratic governments with markedly different political, economic and social differences.

regarding the expectations and needs of the learners; and

- iv) the observation that inclusive education is thus still unfinished business under democratic governments with markedly different political, economic and social differences.

### 3.4 Challenges for achieving inclusive education

The policy dilemmas regarding inclusive education can be examined as a series of tensions and challenges. A first tension falsely posits social inclusion against social unity and assumes that cohesive societies cannot change this. However, this is not the case. Inclusive societies have to be genuinely united but unity without genuine inclusion favours exclusion, or, indeed, excludes. Inclusion challenges unity in two ways: through achieving levels of politically and socially acceptable equity; and significantly reducing the equity and quality gaps in educational opportunities on account of cultural, social, gender and territorial conditions, among others. Without a doubt, these gaps erode confidence in democracy and the sense of a society resting on common values and references.

A second tension – also a false dichotomy – is between diversity and disparity. The policies and programmes seeking to mitigate the effect of the cultural and social barriers to learning processes do not go fully into the meaning or projection of inclusion. It is more accurate to conceptualize that initiatives to combat disparities should be complemented (within unitary policy settings) with the task of ensuring (from the curricular, academic and teaching standpoints) that each learner is treated as a distinct and unique being who learns in a distinct and singular manner. Basically, supporting diversity entails understanding how each individual learns and supporting him or her in the learning process, seeking ultimately to turn the findings of

cognitive psychology and neuroscience into criteria and instruments to guide learners in the regulation and development of their learning.

A third tension involves the disconnections between the processes of educational change most oriented towards access and the conditions and inputs needed (or those most amenable) to the processes and outcomes of learning. To a certain extent, it is a matter of defining the identity of change, its significance, scope and implications. The region faces the major challenge of articulating education policies where better learning conditions and inputs (i.e. reforms mainly legitimated in terms of education as a ratio of GDP of the countries) are transformed into authentic learning opportunities and real processes that lead to better results (i.e. reforms mainly justified by the quality of the educational opportunities made available to all learners).

A fourth tension lies in the asymmetries and the spaces of complementarity between social inclusion and inclusive education. Inclusive education is indeed a tool for social inclusion but only operates effectively in a setting of complementarity with other social policies as part of the triad of neighbourhood, families and educational centres. Furthermore, it could be argued that inclusive education is not possible via approaches based on social determinism or voluntarism.

In Latin America, sociocultural determinism claims that inclusion is determined more outside than inside the classroom. The concept of educability has often been interpreted as a form of unloading

responsibility onto the education system and not so much as a manner of understanding and acting on the requisite social and cultural conditions needed to develop education and the learning processes along the lines suggested by Tedesco and López (2002).

On the other hand, the education system has to bear the greatest responsibilities because, in short, a child has a real opportunity to learn even in the most adverse context. We believe that to espouse a viewpoint of social inclusion devoid of strong educational, curricular and academic roots and lacking genuine 'application' in the classroom damages the countries of the region. Social inclusion and inclusive education provide a feedback loop in a framework of totality and complementarity within the whole range of social policies, which means that they need and strengthen each other mutually.

Perhaps the lack of enhanced interaction between the policies of social inclusion and inclusive education is one possible explanation as to why an improvement in investment during the past 10 to 15 years – largely going to very necessary pay increases – have unfortunately not been matched by sustained improvements in learning processes and outcomes (Tedesco, Opertti and Amadio, 2013). Maintaining educational quality based on growing investment is as important as specifying clearly what type of education and society in which one wants to invest. In this regard, it must be noted that the region has experienced a certain reduction in educational change and reform approaches that have been repeatedly advocated by the different variants of social conservatism and progressivism.

A fifth tension appears to arise between the homogenizing universalism that basically involves giving the same thing to everyone (according to the principle of equal opportunities associated with equal access) and the inclusive and diverse universalism that recognizes the specific features

**Maintaining educational quality based on growing investment is as important as specifying clearly what type of education and society in which one wants to invest.**

of groups and persons while maintaining universal values and references. One of the key challenges of educational policy seems to lie in moving beyond a model of thought and educational action seeking to foster equality while detaching itself from and, to a great extent, ignoring the identities, conditions and styles of persons and groups. A further challenge lies in matching an educational conception that conceives of inclusion as a situation where each group expresses itself in its own way without references and responsibilities to the collective of society. In both cases, the challenges could also be represented as variants of a crude form of relativism and multiculturalism.

Likewise, this last tension stems from the gradual universalization of educational agendas. Concretely, in terms of curriculum and pedagogy, there is a predominant approach involving universal issues, goals, standards and assessments devoid of regional and local references and contents, which results in neglect for a vision of education as a sociocultural and political construct that reflects diverse points of view (Amadio, Operti and Tedesco, 2015). This vision of universalism devoid of references clashes with the concept of education as a common good understood as a political, socio-historical and cultural construct.

For example, the standards – limited to uniform approaches and practices that do not take into account the diversities of requirements, abilities and styles of the learners – generate enormous pressure on the schools to meet them and end up reducing the relevance of the curriculum only to what can be measured and, hence, becomes the only thing that matters. Responsibility for the results is a desirable practice but it has to be immersed in a comprehensive education policy that generates conditions and processes for its achievement.

Taking into account these five tensions, we believe it necessary to put in place a renewed agenda for

inclusive education in the region. With this intention, six features should be taken into account.

**Public policies.** First, the need to design and develop public policies that are clearly targeted and sustainable with clear and substantive content and that are positioned as cultural, social and economic policy. As previously mentioned, the 2030 Education Agenda is a window of opportunity to prompt the rethinking of the relationship between education and the whole range of social policies geared to forging a fair and equitable sustainable development.

Inclusive education cannot be a direction, a division, a unit, a dependency, an approach, a programme or a project, and even less so a sum of these things but it should rather be the core (i.e. the essence and substance) of public education policy. The temptation to give in to ‘projectitis’ in public policies as a means of bypassing the education system or the issue of adding changes is an effective way of isolating and weakening these changes and hence, damage their durability. Obviously, the aim is to alleviate the usual political costs but it must be acknowledged that the cost is very high as inclusive education requires a long-term educational vision and practice, which is the hallmark of the most inclusive education systems.

**Foundations and strategies.** The second requirement is to create the foundations and strategies needed to ensure that institutions and stakeholders are convinced by inclusion. Inclusive education involves convincing others that it is possible to achieve. There are four key stakeholders that require convincing:

- i) learners whose confidence needs to be boosted in the value of the education policy designed to help forge their personal and social development as well as closely align to their daily reality of representations and experiences;
- ii) teachers whose representations and learning expectations of those they teach are one

of the main factors related to inclusion or exclusion of children and youth in educational opportunities;

- iii) mothers, fathers, tutors, caregivers and the community at large all need to be convinced by the education system that the training opportunities of their children are enhanced in heterogeneous learning environments; and
- iv) political and social elites need to be convinced that it is better to live in an inclusive rather than exclusive society, which requires calling on an integrated and coherent range of moral, economic, social and political bases. Ultimately, an ethical argument for inclusion is inescapable but not sufficient to convince nor to secure commitments.

**Inclusive curriculum.** Thirdly, it is necessary to delve further into the concept of an inclusive curriculum to ensure that it is built on a framework of common references – profiles of those completing their studies, goals, contents, learning strategies and assessment criteria, among other items. This will form the basis to accommodate the fact that each person is unique and learns through interaction with others in collaborative learning environments, and that assessment stands on the effective development of learning processes.

This does not mean adapting the curriculum in order to separate the learner from the collective endeavour of education through individual educational plans but to strengthen the collective spaces for personalizing learning processes as well as generating synergies and instances of mutual support between peers as well as between teachers and learners. Personalization, then in this context, means assuming diversity that strengthens a collective learning framework.

The curriculum implemented should not be the sum of individual plans but comprise a broad range of academic strategies joined together in shared objectives, which respond effectively to the cultural,

### **The 2030 Education Agenda is a window of opportunity to prompt the rethinking of the relationship between education and the whole range of social policies.**

social and individual diversity of learners. Without a doubt, there is no better tutor for a learner than a peer as each of them possesses relative strengths and weaknesses so that each can share and, in this way, grow together.

**Learning communities.** The fourth requirement involves conceiving of schools as learning communities that rely on the institutional and academic leadership of their principals to generate working conditions for teachers that permit collective collaboration and construction, and the empowerment of principals so that they can act as effective decision-makers for the school curriculum of each institution. One of the most effective ways of generating changes in practices is to foster spaces of dialogue among the teachers, given that they share common cultures, frames of reference and challenges. It should also be noted that teachers are usually a bit wary of approaches put forward by stakeholders outside the classroom.

The working experience in networks and communities of schools and teachers, serving as both tutor and tutee, warrants further research. An example of this research is the school networking project in Manchester, England (Ainscow and Messiou, 2014) that enabled schools in a variety of cultural, social, ethnic and religious settings, belonging to state and private settings to engage in mutual support to improve the quality of learning processes and outcomes.

The leadership role of the state is strengthened when it is able to bring very diverse schools together to collaborate on shared learning goals and strategies as well as foster meeting spaces

that overcome territorial segmentations and the 'categorizations' of schools. Back to the example in Manchester where a Jewish Orthodox school tutored a state school attended mainly by Muslims. This project engendered a harmonious combining of the objectives of learning to learn and 'learning to live together' promoted by UNESCO (Delors et al., 1996), the international community and the different countries.

**Inclusive teachers.** It is necessary to understand that the correlate of a school and an inclusive curriculum is an inclusive teacher who understands and appreciates the diversity of learners. If diversity causes alarm and generates apprehension or doubts, it is likely that teachers become isolated and reject this quality, shutting out any learner who doesn't fit into the standard model. In the present context, teachers may see diversity as an opportunity to generate more and better learning processes, but also a factor that hampers both learning and teaching.

Teachers will need to take on the role of guiding and not just providing learning processes. In a context marked by hybrid learning models (Horn and Staker, 2015), each teacher needs to guide the learner in the use of online resources to contribute to the personalization of the education policy. As observed by Umberto Eco (2014), it is evident that the internet does not replace the teacher. Teachers play a key role in how children, adolescents and young people learn and they help them to become the main actors and regulators of their learning processes (OECD, 2013).

We should not become naive or adopt a fundamentalist position that leads us to believe that virtual teaching replaces the teacher as this practice would put an end to the collective and interactive essence of learning, and the curriculum would become the property of mainly transnational institutions that retain the rights to

or are the producers of educational content. In the case of virtual teaching, the role of the state in a democratic society would be marginalized when it comes to the training of children, adolescents and young people. Instead, the duty bearer role of the state should be strengthened to enable hybrid learning models to generate more and better educational opportunities that are fairly distributed.

### **Bridging the divide between young people and adults.**

Finally, there is a need to rebuild anew the bases of trust and empathy between young people and adults as a prerequisite to generating effective teaching and learning processes. Evidence of the absence of this long awaited and very pertinent connection can be witnessed in curricular and academic policies that neither attract nor earn the commitment of learners, which is often mistaken as a supposed lack of interest by young people in education. That youths may be bored at school does not mean that they fail to appreciate the value of education in their lives. In any case, it is equally important to understand the roots of the lack of dialogue between generations and between cultures, mainly because these missing factors may erode any education policy that seeks to take root.

## **3.5 Pending issues**

The comprehensive and integrated outlook on the state of education in the region together with the tensions and challenges identified reflect the need to move forward in the broad conceptualization of the theory and practice of inclusive education. The outlook also establishes the need to review the policy and implementation frameworks of programmes in each country in the region. However, the renewed emphasis on inclusive education under the 2030 Education Agenda involves a rethinking of the educational purposes and concepts of the education system.

To foster the rethinking of education systems, the following four challenges need to be addressed:

- i) A holistic, humanistic and transformational vision of education (UNESCO, 2015b) needs to be strengthened by an approach involving a unitary and integrated education system with components that have a clear role and a responsible and binding relationship. This can be accomplished once the range of educational purposes and goals are agreed upon by the political system and society as a whole;
- ii) inclusive education should be understood both as a cross-cutting principle of education policies and as an institutional, teaching, curricular and academic strategy that puts into practice the right of each learner to a real opportunity for self-education and learning;
- iii) a more refined understanding of learning expectations and needs of the learner is required. At the same time, recognition of the collective nature of learning and the singularity of the educational response is needed. Reference criteria for defining, developing and assessing the relevance of the academic responses is likewise required;
- iv) the realization is needed that the genuine responses to the gradual achievement of inclusion is not modelled on any particular ideological-political paradigm but is rooted instead by the search for robust responses to the questions of 'for what, what, how and where' to educate and learn.

In summary, based on the 2030 Education Agenda, inclusive education holds the essence and substance to transforming education and education systems to lay firm foundations for development that is engaging, conciliatory, fair and equitable.

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Education Sector

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# Youth and changing realities:

Rethinking secondary education in Latin America

Youth are central to UNESCO's mandate. The more than one billion youth and adolescents in the world today hold the key to our shared future and to global sustainable development. With a focus on Latin America, this publication addresses the need to regain young learners' trust in education and to arrive at more positive social constructions of youth among educators, parents and education authorities. In so doing, this study looks at educational experiences as meaning makers that shape youth cultures and identities as well as their attitudes toward education and its potential to improve individual and collective well-being.



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