

Youth and Social Cohesion in Ibero-America

A model in the making

Summary



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Foreword

Ibero-America is living through promising times in terms of the relation between youth and development. The signs are well known, and this report provides an unprecedented compilation of evidence confirming them. The region's youth today have more years of education on average than adults, and the gap is even more favourable for youth in terms of access to new communication technologies, information and knowledge. The population dynamic indicates that the coming years will see a reduction in the proportion of young people in the overall population in most Ibero-American countries, and this will improve the supply-demand situation they face in education, health and employment. Young people move about more easily than children or older people, and this enables them to change their life paths in pursuit of new opportunities. Youth have fewer illnesses and are less likely to die during this phase of the life cycle. Cultural change and organizational models encounter young people with greater versatility and vitality to engage in and make the most of these new scenarios. Lastly, young people are abundant in new areas of "bottom-up" participation, given their ability to take advantage of new, emerging forms of association and distance communication.

Nonetheless, as shown extensively in this report, Ibero-American youth are also experiencing their own dramas, some cyclical and others emerging. Despite higher education levels, young people face higher levels of unemployment and receive lower wages. Although they are less likely to fall sick, more young people die as a result of external causes,

and youth homicide rates are very high in several countries. The high persistence of adolescent maternity raises questions as to the effective ownership of reproductive rights among young girls. Youth displays the highest rates of substance abuse and exposure to related risks. Skill development, access to opportunities and exposure to risks among young people are highly segmented by income levels, and also by geographic, racial and gender distribution. There are also problems in the field of migration, since many young migrants are vulnerable to deprivation of their rights, highly precarious jobs, and people trafficking. In the political domain, young people identify little with the representative system and State apparatus; new generations perceive that sectoral criteria, corporate rationales and entrenched bureaucracies make it harder for them to satisfy their demands rather than easier.

Significant progress has been made in terms of public and political recognition. Over the last two decades, not only have all countries set up government institutions to formulate youth plans and programmes (national institutes and departments or ministries), mechanisms have also been put in place to increase knowledge and understanding of youth and to improve the effectiveness and targeting of public policies designed for them. The mechanisms frequently used to support and implement efforts in this area include legislation for youth, design and monitoring of plans and programmes, holding of national surveys, establishment of observatories and the creation of juvenile information centres and Internet portals.

Moreover, 2008 has been declared Ibero-American Youth Year, and the topic of that year's Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Governments is youth and development. A growing number of countries have ratified the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth, the main Ibero-American instrument protecting and promoting the rights of almost 110 million people in the 15-24 years age group, distributed among the 22 countries of Ibero-America. This Convention recognizes youth as a subject of law and as a protagonist of the economic and social development challenges facing Ibero-American countries.

Although public policies on youth have made headway over the last few years, progress is still needed in developing comprehensive approaches that cut across sectoral perspectives based on the nature of "youth actor", which combines dimensions of risks, capacities,

opportunities, systems of belonging and forms of participation. Hence, these are the specific dimensions that comprise the content of this report. The greatest challenge for the States is, therefore, to develop youth policies and suitable institutional and operational mechanisms to meet the challenge of this need for comprehensiveness.

Against this backdrop, notable progress has been made by the decision of the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government to implement an Ibero-American Plan for Youth Cooperation and Integration. To this end, the key needs of young people in the region have been identified, and better dialogue with the main stakeholders of youth policies has been established, making it possible to jointly formulate strategic recommendations to strengthen the public agenda in this field. This agenda needs support from the international community through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, together with initiatives to raise awareness of the key role of youth policies in social cohesion.

The challenges are clearly not few. Young people must be both subjects and effective beneficiaries of development, i.e. they need to construct life projects and collective dreams within societies that include them in their opportunities and protect them in risks. The new generations are the clay for recreating a “common us”. This is the motivation that inspires the report jointly presented here by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the General Ibero-American Secretariat (SEGIB) and the Ibero-American Youth Organization (OIJ), supported by the Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID). The invitation is on the table.

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I. Youth yesterday and today

Youth is a recent guest in history. It is gaining its own status thanks to the lengthening of life expectancy over the last century; an extension of the period needed to acquire capacities and skills to enter the productive world owing to more intensive specialization of labour; and the generational change in values and projects in the modern culture marked by the expectation of progress. Formerly, and not long ago, the transition from childhood to adult life did not have that interlude in time and state of mind that today is represented by youth, but instead was ensured by entrenched rites of passage, together with the early incorporation of men into productive tasks and women into child-bearing. The division of labour in terms of gender and age left little room to be young and reflect on youth.

This does not mean that we are working with a blank slate, however; far from it, because much has been accumulated on the way. Youth as promise, transition and challenge. Trust and lack of trust in the ways young people recreate social life. Youth misunderstood as an interlude, i.e. a necessary parenthesis in which the construction of their own lives is delayed while they accumulate skills that will bear fruit in the future, and so on. Young people as vehicles of change, with greater moral authority than children, but without the material autonomy of adults, exposed to risks and provokers of risks, energetically producing their own meanings and culture. Youth as an object of concern and as subject of transformation.

Besides being new, the image of youth changes with the pace of the times. The way adults themselves represent youth is suggestive in this regard. On the one hand, the adult world confers upon youth a wide range of positive features, including the notion that young people¹ are the reserve of adaptability and vitality for new models of production and consumption. Being young means being in the best position to enjoy the products, services and adventures supplied by globalized markets. But in the same adult imagery, young people are also associated with disruption and alienation in society: weakness in terms of standards, lack of discipline in studies or in work, unpredictability in reactions and trajectories, or a proliferation of risky conducts. Thus, through discourses and institutions, young people are both extolled and stigmatized at the same time. They are recognized as protagonists in the new forms of modernity, but at the same time are associated with violence, particularly if they are men, urban, and come from low-income sectors.

From the standpoint of young people themselves, their subjectivity is a source of tension between the urge to join the adult world and a desire to construct unpublished scripts. Modern life confronts them with an innovative range of individualization alternatives, but also submits them to formalized requirements to conform to education and employment patterns. The identity of so many young people is constructed in this hinge which links, but also stresses, the desire for social inclusion and the yearning for meaning and the alternatives of that same inclusion.

Lastly, the term “youth” encompasses a highly heterogeneous social group. There are major differences in the situation of urban and rural youth; young people from deprived socioeconomic groups compared to others living in higher-income homes; young people of 15-19 years of age, compared with others of 20-24 or 25-29; young people with little formal education or a lot; young women in relation to young men; indigenous youth and Afro-descendants, compared to others. Different too are opportunities in terms of public policies, support institutions, family conditions, employment dynamic, acquired capacities and networks of relations.

¹ Throughout this document, the expression “youth” is used to refer to young people of either sex.

II. Youth and social cohesion

In the Ibero-American scenario, youth can be described as living in a glass that is both half full and half empty. Compared to adults, young people have more education and are more in tune with the new information and communication technologies; but, while autonomy tends to be projected almost as a natural value of youth, it is hard to construct as an effective life project in the face of access barriers to employment and housing.

Ibero-American youth is innovative in terms of forms of participation, having grown up alongside the imagery of democracy and human rights; youth is the generation that is most sensitive to environmental issues and the historical claims of different types of minorities. But they do not put much trust in political institutions and find it hard to envisage democracy as the order in which collective projects are negotiated on a representative basis.

Youth has overabundant flexibility to constantly renew the supply of the cultural industry and urban imagery, and this recreation simultaneously sublimates their conflicts and brings them to the fore. Nonetheless, the range of policies has no public counterpart to establish clear bridges with their aspirations and languages. Young people adapt more effectively to changes in work organization and leisure, and they capitalize more easily on the possibilities for constructing virtual networks around any issue or motive. But in the world of employment they encounter more precariousness than flexibility, and connectivity at a distance has not yet led to more equal opportunities.

This setting begs the question as to what is happening to the dynamic that links youth with social cohesion in Ibero-American countries. We recall that in the document on social cohesion that ECLAC and SEGIB presented to the XVII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Santiago in 2007, social cohesion was defined as a coin with two faces: one marked by structures and institutions that facilitate social inclusion (access to education and employment, social protection, and assets making it possible to escape poverty—all aimed at narrowing social divides); and another marked by the sense of personal and group membership of the broader community (crystallized through trust in institutions and other groups, expectations for the future, expanded participation and disposition towards solidarity and forming part of social networks). From this standpoint it is assumed that the sense of belonging becomes more or less diffuse, according to the size of the gaps in terms of welfare, assets, and access.

The social cohesion argument (ECLAC, 2007) claimed that cohesion goes hand-in-hand with closing these divides; yet for young people they are an everyday reality. In their relations with adults, not only are there divides in terms of socialization and in the content of projects, but also the paradoxes that were highlighted four years ago (ECLAC/OIJ, 2004): more education but less employment; more information but less power; more symbolic consumption but less material consumption; more expectations of autonomy, but more difficulties in setting up their own homes and making an easy transition through the life cycle. Young people today have a window of opportunities, given the current phase of the demographic transition: the lower their relative weight in the population, the better the relation between supply and demand for education and employment for this group. On the long-term horizon, however, a new phase is emerging in which these same young people will have to support a much larger elderly population. Moreover, it is among young people themselves that there are gaps in terms of educational achievement, job opportunities, connectivity, income levels, exposure to violence and access to reproductive health.

This raises the following question: will this prove to be a sword of Damocles for the future of social cohesion? Are these gaps between generations, and within the youth generation itself, systematically corroding the acceptance of standards and institutions, trust in others,

links with the broader community, and a willingness to participate in deliberation and representation mechanisms?

The answer is ambivalent: yes, but also no; but there is also encouraging news. Firstly, the past five years have been favourable for the region in terms of economic growth, the terms of trade, a consolidation of social policy on the public agenda, recovery of employment, reduction of poverty and indigence, and the continuity of democratic regimes in all countries. Against this backdrop and hand in hand with economic growth, youth unemployment has been falling in this decade thus far, which benefits young people of different income levels in differing degrees. Moreover, the growth pattern in the region during the current decade has generated more productive employment than in the past decade.

In general terms, youth has increasingly high levels of education, which in the long run creates greater opportunities for social inclusion. At the same time, the expansion of connectivity is now starting to benefit new generations at all social levels (albeit not uniformly), thanks to internet access throughout the school system from primary to secondary school, and to the fact that the majority of children and a growing percentage of adolescents are enrolled at school. The challenge is to work towards more equal achievement among young people from different family income levels, zones of residence and ethnic identities; and to complement progress in education with policies that reforge the lost links in the transition from education to employment, through programmes facilitating access to a first job, training with work experience and skill certification, among other things.

Although youth's greater mastery of information and communication technologies is not reflected in their access and presence in politics, their ability to redefine the political is at stake. Concern for public affairs is thus recreated and not dimmed. This occurs in local spaces, virtual networks, mobilization around new agendas, flexible forms of collective action, forming part of a new social cohesion map, rather than its denial. Thus, many initiatives in the civil society domain have young people as their protagonists.

Moreover, if the trend is maintained, the combination of less unemployment and greater continuity in education tends to reduce institutional alienation, i.e. the proportion of young people that are neither studying nor working outside the home, and who are therefore

“disconnected” in their daily lives. And, although, as claimed in the 2004 document (ECLAC/OIJ, 2004), the gap between symbolic consumption (of information, image and knowledge) and material consumption exacerbates expectations, symbolic consumption in the long run also implies the development of capacities that can have a positive influence on income generation and social inclusion.

Lastly, youth itself is redefining what is understood by social cohesion. For many young people, this does not pertain exclusively to employment and formal education, but increasingly involves participation in distance communication, being able to join new physical spaces through migration, manage resources and services collectively through strategic information use, participate in networks in which expression and aesthetics are reciprocal domains of recognition, and participate in social movements and associations of their peers for a very wide range of purposes (Hopenhayn, 2008). Less stable and more diversified, young people are also redefining what social inclusion and belonging actually mean.

From this perspective of difficulties and opportunities, the following sections consider the life of Ibero-American youth: their poverties and risks, capacities and opportunities, forms of belonging and participating, and the youth policies that the region needs.

III. Poverities and risks

It is firstly necessary to review the domain of the main problems affecting the quality and prospects of life for Ibero-American young people, included in the dynamic of youth poverty over the last 50 years, the main causes of youth mortality, the use and abuse of harmful substances, the persistence of high levels of teen pregnancy, and increasing violence in which many young people are both victims and perpetrators.

Youth poverty in Ibero-America

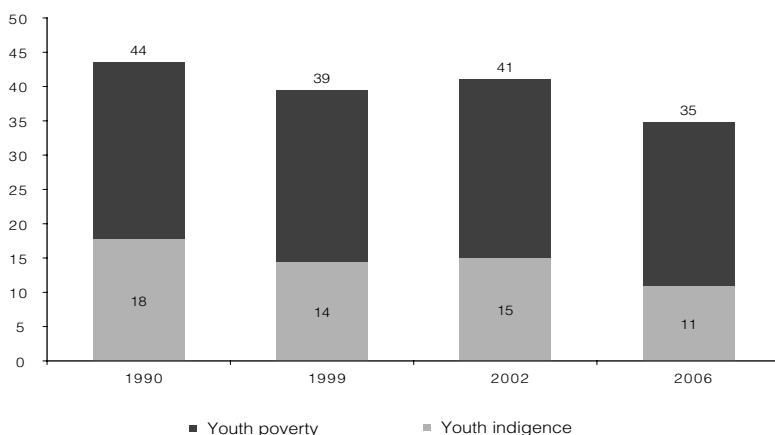
Poverty and social exclusion are mutually determining, in a vicious circle that is perpetuated from one generation to the next. Young people are a crucial link in this inter-generational relay race, since they are in the phase of the life cycle in which the dialectic linking the acquisition of skills and their capitalization in effective opportunities, operates most strongly. Thus, inadequate access to skill development generally condemns people to life paths in which employment is more precarious and does not generate enough income to escape from poverty or gain access to appropriate social safety nets.

In this framework, the Ibero-American scenario is like a glass that is both half empty and half full. On the one hand, an evaluation of the dynamic of youth poverty shows that, on average, Ibero-America has evolved positively over the last five years and has reduced the index of youth poverty and indigence, measured by the availability of income.

Nonetheless, there are disparities in this dynamic between countries, with a long way still to go and, above all, huge inequalities when one compares rural and urban youth, men and women, indigenous and Afro-descendants with the rest of the population, and young people from different age subgroups.

Between 1990 and 2006, both youth poverty and youth indigence decreased significantly in the Ibero-American region, to the point where the absolute number of indigenous youth fell by almost 4 million. Nonetheless, over the last year there were more than a million additional young people living in poverty, which means that the increase in the incomes of indigent people was not sufficient to lift them out of poverty altogether. There are major differences in this trend between countries and between groups within countries.

Figure 1
IBERO-AMERICA (18 COUNTRIES)^a: TREND OF POVERTY AND INDIGENCE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE OF 15-29 YEARS OF AGE, 1990-2006
(Percentages)

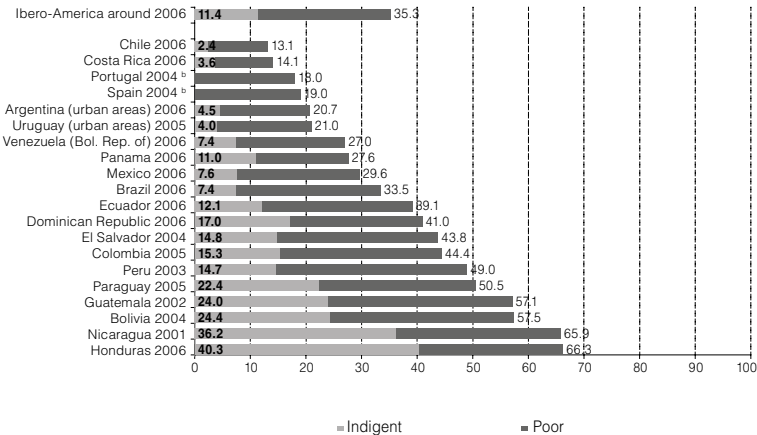


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of household surveys conducted in the relevant countries.

^a The total figures include indigence. The regional total does not include Spain or Portugal.

Around 2006, just over 35% of young people of 15 - 29 years of age were living in poverty (47.5 million), and 11.4% were in situations of indigence, equivalent to over 11 million young people (see figure 2). In the countries of Latin America, there are wide disparities in youth poverty and indigence levels, ranging from 13.1% poor and 2.4% indigent in Chile, to 66.3% and 40.3%, respectively in Honduras.

Figure 2
**IBERO-AMERICA (20 COUNTRIES)^a: INCIDENCE OF POVERTY AND
 INDIGENCE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE OF 15-29 YEARS OF AGE,
 AROUND 2006**
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), on the basis of special tabulations of household surveys conducted in the relevant countries.

^a The total figures include indigence. The regional total does not include Spain or Portugal.

^b Measures the risk of falling into poverty (line representing 60% of median income after the reduction of social transfers). Includes the 16 - 24 year age group.

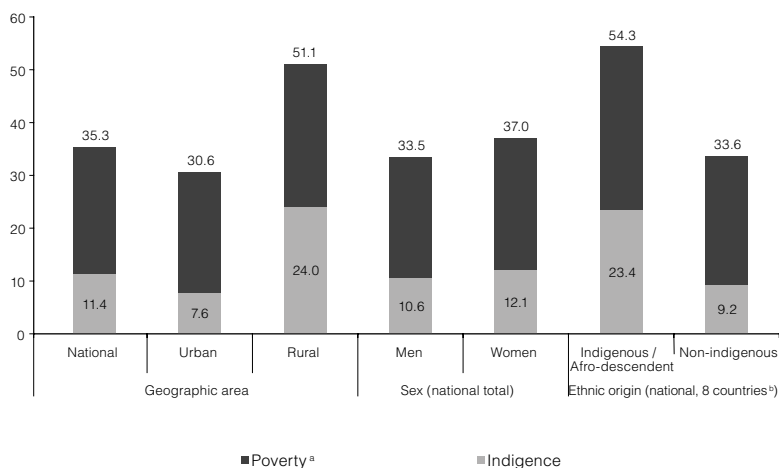
Poverty levels differ between the different age groups comprising youth, and tend to be lower than the rest of the population, particularly among those younger than 15 years old. The child population is the worst affected by this scourge. Among youth, the youngest (15-19 years old) are the hardest hit with poverty levels exceeding those of the population as a whole —just when they should be making the most of the opportunities provided to them by the education system.

From the standpoint of the first Millennium Development Goal to cut poverty and indigence levels by half by 2015 from the 1990 baseline levels, the reduction of extreme youth poverty displays significant progress, and by 2015 it should be possible to reduce it to half of the level recorded in 1990. Nonetheless, the heterogeneity between countries makes it harder to achieve these objectives in the region generally, and among young people affected by poverty and indigence.

Reducing youth indigence from 18% to 11% over a 16-year period represents 77% of the reduction expected by 2015 (the target would be to achieve a 9% indigence level in that year) whereas 64% progress would be expected by 2006 (i.e. a youth indigence rate of just over 12%). Although progress is not far ahead of what was expected, the aggregate results are positive, considering that at the start of the new millennium there was a significant reverse followed by a sharp recovery.

The difficulty in reducing poverty on a sustainable basis is firstly due to the effects of the region's high level of economic volatility, where crises exacerbate youth unemployment and threaten to undermine the accumulation of skills and opportunities for many young people from unprotected families. Secondly, the magnitude of poverty is correlated with the persistence of major inequalities in income and access to other assets. As shown in figure 3, poverty incidence varies among young people depending on whether they are rural or urban, men or women, more or less educated, and also in terms of skin colour and cultural identity. There is clearly a higher incidence of poverty and indigence among rural and urban youth, and among indigenous and Afro-descendant youth than the rest of the population. The gender division of poverty is also biased against women, although the gap is smaller than those based on territorial differences (urban- rural) and ethnic-racial factors. There is also high correlation between youth poverty and low educational levels among parents and young people themselves.

Figure 3
**IBERO-AMERICA (18 COUNTRIES)^a: INCIDENCE OF POVERTY AND
 INDIGENCE AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE OF 15-29 YEARS OF AGE
 BY AREA OF RESIDENCE, SEX AND ETHNIC ORIGIN,
 AROUND 2006
 (Percentages)**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of household surveys conducted in the relevant countries.

^a The total figures include indigence.

^b Includes Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama and Paraguay.

Risks and mortality among young people

With regard to the problems of youth morbidity and mortality, it should be noted that young people become sick less frequently and normally are less likely to die than individuals at other stages of the life cycle. Nonetheless, there is a specific youth profile in terms of the morbidity and mortality problems affecting them. This attracts little attention on health systems, however, because it relates to external causes and risk conducts: serious injury and death resulting from accidents, violent confrontations (homicides, aggression), substance abuse and suicide, undesired pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Secondly, youth is the age group with the highest consumption of legal and illegal drugs, which needs to be tackled basically with public health criteria, highlighting appropriate information, prevention and containment and care networks.

The frequency of deaths from violent causes is alarming among young men in several Ibero-American countries, although the figures vary greatly from one country to another in the region, thus causing the incidence of youth mortality generally to vary. Youth mortality as a result of transmissible causes displays significantly smaller national differences. In general, male youth mortality rates are higher than female rates, reflecting male lifestyles that involve greater exposure to external risk .

Nonetheless, the pre-eminence of exogenous risks in youth health poses major challenges in terms of policy design, going beyond conventional sectoral schemes and requiring systemic approaches that place greater emphasis on prevention. Conduct involving health risk is often closely related to other problems in the life of adolescents and young people, including violence and family breakdown, early socialization in violence, poverty and lack of opportunities, territorial segregation, machismo and lack of information or trust on issues of sexuality and self-care in respect of drug abuse, both legal and illegal. For the same reason, social cohesion factors are also decisive in youth health.

Table 1 clearly shows the differences between Ibero-American countries in terms of the incidence of external causes of mortality in general, and each one in particular. Thus, while homicide predominates among young people in Latin America, death from road accidents is much more prevalent in Portugal and Spain. Chile, Costa Rica and Cuba approach European averages in terms of deaths from external causes, but homicides and suicides are more preponderant. Suicide rates are also higher in Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay). The incidence of road accidents is also high in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, with figures similar to those recorded in European countries, but the rate of deaths by homicide is also high. Figures for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, El Salvador, Colombia and Brazil continue to diverge radically from the Latin American average (141), and these countries also display extremely high rates of youth mortality as a result of homicide.

Table 1
**IBERO-AMERICA (18 COUNTRIES): MORTALITY RATES BY EXTERNAL
 CAUSES AMONG PERSONS OF 15-29 YEARS OF AGE, BY SEX^a**
(For every 100,000 people)

Country	Men				Women			
	Total	Homicides	Suicides	Road accidents	Total	Homicides	Suicides	Road accidents
Argentina (2004)	81	17	19	16	17	2	5	5
Brazil (2004)	173	97	8	39	20	7	2	8
Chile (2004)	72	15	22	20	14	1	5	5
Colombia (2004)	228	159	12	26	28	13	5	6
Costa Rica (2004)	66	13	14	24	13	3	2	5
Cuba (2005)	55	14	10	16	17	4	5	6
Ecuador (2005)	131	55	16	32	25	4	9	6
El Salvador (2005)	307	223	20	40	39	20	9	6
Mexico (2005)	94	23	11	33	17	3	3	7
Nicaragua (2005)	68	23	15	13	13	2	6	2
Panama (2004)	90	36	12	26	16	2	5	6
Paraguay (2004)	96	43	9	19	26	3	5	6
Peru (2000)	45	3	2	10	14	1	1	3
Dominican Republic (2004)	99	17	3	30	15	2	1	5
Uruguay (2004)	73	11	23	17	19	3	6	6
Venezuela (Bol. Rep. of) (2004)	271	112	9	37	28	6	3	11
Total Latin America (16 countries)	141	68	10	30	19	5	3	6
Spain (2004)	50	2	9	27	12	1	2	7
Portugal (2003)	63	2	7	40	15	1	2	9

Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Mortality Database; Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of ECLAC; and United Nations Population Division.

^a Codes V01-Y89 of the tenth edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10).

HIV/AIDS is becoming increasingly important in morbidity and mortality resulting from transmissible diseases. According to estimates based on data from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on the prevalence of this disease among young people of 15 -24 years of age up to 2005, the highest figure is recorded in Central American countries (see box 1).

Box 1	
LATIN AMERICA: PREVALENCE OF HIV/AIDS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE OF 15-24 YEARS OF AGE, 2005	
<i>(Rate per 10,000 young people)</i>	
Low level (6-20 in every 10,000):	Bolivia, Nicaragua
Low-medium level (18-30 in every 10,000):	Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico
Medium level (24-50 in every 10,000):	Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay
High-medium level (36-70 in every 10,000):	Argentina, Colombia, Peru, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
High-level (54-90 in every 10,000):	El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama
High-level (90-150 in every 10,000):	Honduras
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), <i>Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic</i> , 2006, Geneva, 2006.	

Rates of mortality associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and puerperium are much lower, and its incidence is correlated with the country's development level. In both Spain and Portugal, mortality rates from this cause are well below those of Latin American countries.

In the case of substance abuse, the most frequently consumed drugs which generate the greatest problems among youth and their future are alcohol and tobacco —much more than illegal drugs. The fact that drugs are legal does not render them less harmful, and their victims are distributed among those whose addiction generates irreversible health damage, and those who, under the influence of alcohol expose themselves and others to risky conduct.

Adolescent maternity

Adolescent maternity, particularly when undesired, is a public health issue in Latin America closely related to the lack of reproductive rights among young people, social exclusion and the inter-generational reproduction of poverty. Almost one quarter of young Latin American women between 15 and 24 years of age become mothers before they are 20. Among the higher-income socioeconomic groups, less than 5% of young women are mothers at the age of 17, whereas among the lowest-income groups the figure rises to between 20% and 35%, depending on the country.

Adolescent maternity among women up to 19 years of age includes a high percentage of undesired pregnancies, involving higher levels of reproductive health risk than in older mothers; and it also generates vicious circles of exclusion from one generation to the next, since most adolescent mothers are poor, have little education, and are highly likely to constitute single-parent homes outside protection or promotion networks. This reflects a lack of access to reproductive rights and equal opportunities for women. It also has complex and cross-cutting causes and thus requires integrated policy approaches.

Table 2 compares the different regions of the world in terms of total gross fertility (TGF) and the specific adolescent fertility rate, for the period 2005-2010. The first thing to notice is that Latin America and the Caribbean is below the world average in terms of total fertility, but considerably above average in terms of early fertility, only surpassed by Africa in this respect. Moreover, levels of this indicator are almost six times those recorded in Portugal, and over eight times those of Spain. This suggests a clear asymmetry in terms of active policies on sexual and reproductive rights between Latin America and the European Ibero-American countries, which is partly responsible for the differences that emerge in terms of adolescent maternity between the two groups of countries.

Table 2
LARGE REGIONS OF THE WORLD: ESTIMATES FOR 2007 OF THE GLOBAL FERTILITY RATE AND SPECIFIC FERTILITY RATE FOR THE 15-19 YEAR AGE GROUP

Region	Global fertility rate (TGF), 2005-2010	Specific fertility rate for the 15-19 age group (per 1000), 2005-2010
World	20.55	520.6
Africa	40.67	1030.9
Asia	20.34	390.7
Europe	10.45	140.7
Portugal	10.46	130.5
Spain	10.41	90.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	20.37	760.2
North America	20.00	390.9
Oceania	20.30	260.5

Source: United Nations Population Division [online] <http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm> [date of reference: 10 March 2008].

The persistence of high rates of teen pregnancy and maternity is associated with an increasingly early start to active sexuality among young people, compounded by insufficient sex education in school in many countries, lack of public policies on sexual and reproductive health for unpartnered adolescents and young women, and deficits in terms of adolescent sexual and reproductive rights. In addition, the risks of undesired adolescent maternity tend to be concentrated among adolescents of lowest incomes, since they start earlier and make far less use of contraceptives. It is therefore urgent to improve adolescents' access to free protection services for risk-free active sexuality and pregnancy prevention. There should not be any discrimination in terms of pregnancy, gender, sexual behaviour or income level in public programmes and services.

Violence and youth

The increase in youth violence, in which young people are both victims and perpetrators, is a recurrent topic in Ibero-America and closely related to problems of social cohesion. The more disperse are the established social integration channels, the more the borderline between what is legal and what is illegal is blurred, and the more diffuse also becomes adherence to an instituted symbolic order. The exclusion risks that seem

to have the greatest causal effect in situations of violence among young people include urban marginality, lack of access to social mobility channels and consumption, institutional alienation among young people who are neither studying nor working, socialization in aggressiveness and crime from an early age (among families and neighbourhoods), and frustrated expectations when the higher educational levels of many young people fails to guarantee better job opportunities.

The results of studies based on information provided by survey respondents across the world, show that a large majority of individuals participating in acts of violence against youth are members of the same age group and have the same gender as their victims. In most cases, the aggressors are men acting in groups (UNICEF, 2006). Participation by young people in acts of violence is related to the global setting of inequality generated in the large cities and Latin American capitals. For example, urban segregation undermines the quality of community life and alters local associativity patterns. Young people from marginal neighbourhoods find their socialization in fundamental values that define their membership of national society blocked. In this context, youth associativity tends to develop expressions of group identity that make it hard for young people to harmonize or institutionally articulate with other sectors of society (ECLAC/OIJ, 2004). All of this has given rise to new forms of urban violence and organizations that exert violence for the purpose of appropriating urban-marginal territories or controlling drug trafficking networks or niches, along with other forms of organized transnational crime and the use of violence to confront the violence of others.

In this respect, gang membership operates as inclusion in exclusion. In a system of recoding which ranges from tattoos to specific slang, and extends to the refounding of law as a way of organizing crime, rather than abolishing it, many gangs operate as social integration systems at the micro level, which reflect, compensate, and the same time strengthen social disintegration at the macro level. Youth gangs provide an alternative socialization mechanism for excluded children and young people, whose sense of belonging is based on collective actions that range from sharing free time to criminal actions in a framework of constituted paralegality (Reguillo, 2008). For many young people the gang is a social participation space, a system of values in which personal and group identities will be affirmed through new communication codes,

new forms of authority and communication, different from those that exist in the world of formal institutions.

The problem of youth violence requires a “Copernican revolution” that recognizes young people as actors and subjects of rights, facilitates their access to assets enabling them to gain autonomy, and opens spaces for youth self-affirmation in the public and political domains. The assumption and challenge is that greater inclusion and citizenship leads to less violence. In this framework, innovative strategies (Rodríguez, 2005) display a preventive orientation and attempt to base themselves on community assets and include a participatory dimension. There are programmes of this type already being executed at the national, regional and local levels, with the clear intention of creating institutional prevention networks, raising awareness, generating knowledge and encouraging youth participation.

At least five different models can be inferred from the diversity of programmes and approaches: the expansion of education and the use of leisure time; an approach that links policies in support of the poor and prevention of crime; the heavy-hand policy with regard to problems of youth violence, whether associated with drug trafficking, gangs or “maras” or common delinquency; an approach involving training and labour-market participation by excluded youth; and policies to encourage young people’s self-affirmation as citizens.

IV. Capacity development

Capacity development enables young people to take advantage of their potential by acquiring skills. This phase of the formal education life cycle is the key source that fosters individual potential. But it is also important to consider other mechanisms for skill and capacity development among young people, such as associative practices and access to new information and communication technologies, in which young people learn by doing.

Education

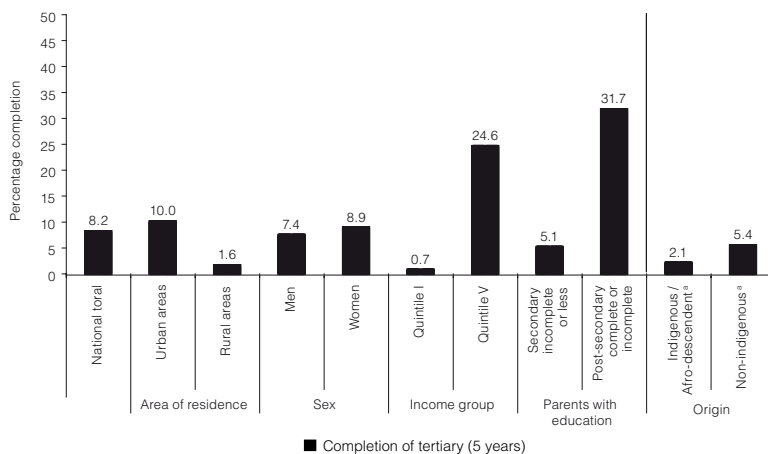
Education is the key mechanism allowing for progress in multiple dimensions of social cohesion: more equal opportunities, human capital for future social mobility, formation of active citizens that are respectful of rights, familiarity with various cultural codes and access to the labour market with broader options. Nonetheless, this lever of mobility and democracy does not function equally for all young people, because educational achievements, while higher than those of earlier generations, still display wide gaps based on family of origin. The fact that those that are least likely to complete secondary education are young people whose parents did not complete formal education, those of indigenous origin and Afro-descendant, those living in rural zones and those who enjoy less economic well-being, shows that growth and government efforts have failed to promote greater equity in education.

This is even more important considering that having secondary education is fundamental for being able to have good chances of access to a minimally decent standard of living. Not only because it makes it possible to develop various general and specialist skills among young people, but also because it gives a credential in the labour market that accredits the possibility of performance in multiple services. In a decade and a half (between 1990 and 2006), the proportion of young people completing the full cycle of secondary schooling rose from 27% to 51%. Although this is a major advance, it is insufficient, because half of the region's young people do not succeed in obtaining this educational credential and remain in a situation of social vulnerability with little chance of obtaining a decent job.

Secondary education was completed by 20.4% of 20-24 year-olds in Ibero-America in the first income quintile, compared to 78.6% in the fifth quintile, and 35.1% among indigenous and Afro-descendants, compared to 50.4% among the rest of the population, 23% among rural youth compared to 56.4% among urban dwellers, 46.3% among men compared to 51.8% among women, and 31.7% among young people whose parents did not complete primary school, compared to 91.4% among the children of parents with full university education.

In terms of access to post-secondary and tertiary education (technical, non-university vocational and university), progress made since the start of the 1990s is not very encouraging. While the proportion of young people of tertiary education age that were studying—either in post secondary or still in secondary education—rose from 28% to 35%, only just over half of them were actually pursuing post secondary studies. In other words, many were still completing secondary education. Accordingly, only 19% of young people in that age-group are actually studying in that education cycle (i.e. the net post secondary education enrolment rate). Moreover, inequalities of access to this educational cycle are scandalous: while 5.3% of young people from the lowest income quintile were pursuing post-secondary studies, the figure was 44.9% among those in the highest income group.

Figure 4
**IBERO-AMERICA (18 COUNTRIES): COMPLETION OF TERTIARY EDUCATION
 (FIVE YEARS OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION) AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE
 OF 25-29 YEARS OF AGE, ACCORDING TO VARIOUS CHARACTERISTICS,
 AROUND 2006**
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of household surveys conducted in the relevant countries.

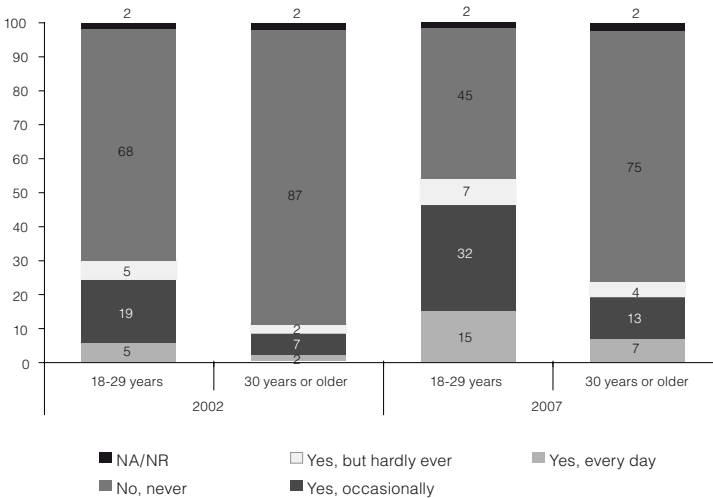
^a The classification of young people by ethnic origin includes eight countries.

Young people are an opportunity. In this respect it is encouraging that completion of secondary education is growing on a sustained basis in the region and is also benefiting young people from low-income sectors. Nonetheless, there is a long way to go to improve the equity and quality of education, and to make it relevant in terms of content, based on the sociocultural settings of the students and the relevance of the learning for creative incorporation into the dynamic of the productive system. It is also crucial to universalize Internet access in the education system, because for many young people it is the only alternative for connectivity and acquiring skills for the information society. Lastly, from the standpoint of learning in and for social cohesion, special mention needs to be made of the informal spaces of group interaction in which capacities are acquired. An example is youth volunteer action, which makes it possible to increase the capacities of young people, improve their self-confidence and grow their sense of solidarity with their less fortunate peers and society at large.

Connectivity

Digital conductivity today operates as a hinge between capacities and opportunities, and Ibero-American youth is gaining increasing access to this. Frequent use in 2007 was more than twice as prevalent among young people than adults, whereas occasional and daily use encompassed half of all young people between 18 and 29 years of age, and only one fifth of all adults. This makes young people protagonists in progress towards the information society. It is youth, above all, who through connectivity are revolutionizing access to information and knowledge, participation in groups, management of resources and projects, and new forms of recreation and symbolic consumption.

Figure 5
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: INTERNET USED BY AGE,
2002 AND 2007
(Percentages)

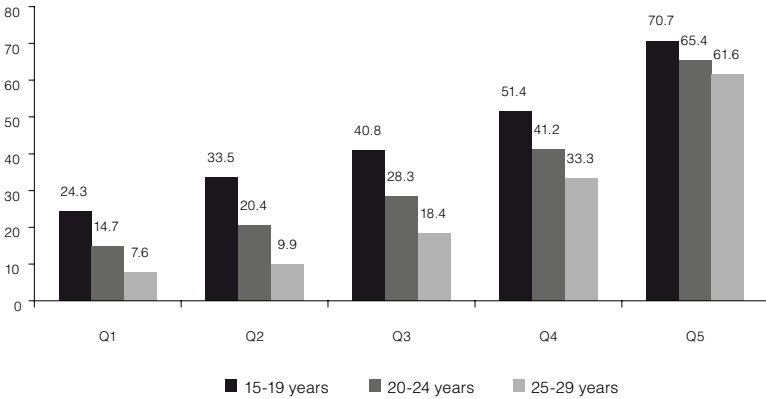


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of the Latinobarómetro 2002 and 2007 surveys.

Note: The data correspond to replies given to relatively different questions: Have you ever navigated on the Web? (2002) and Have you ever used electronic mail or connected to the Internet? (2007).

Differences of age, socioeconomic level and education clearly mark the digital divide in terms of access, intensity of use and contexts of use. Among youth subgroups, those who access most are those of highest income and highest education levels. The youngest also have an advantage (15-19 years of age), and among this group, use in school and commercial sites is strongest, whereas older youth access more frequently at home and at work, which is to be expected.

Figure 6
LATIN AMERICA (5 COUNTRIES): INTERNET USERS BY INCOME QUINTILE AND AGE, AROUND 2005^a
(Percentages)



Source: Observatory for the Information Society in Latin America and the Caribbean (OSILAC), on the basis of household surveys conducted in the countries, latest year available [online] at <http://www.cepal.org/SocInfo/OSILAC>.

^a Simple average. The countries included are Chile (2006), Brazil (2005), Costa Rica (2005), Mexico (2007) and Paraguay (2005).

Young people's protagonism and advantage in accessing and using information and communication technologies (ICTs) raises questions about the gap between generations and among young people themselves. If this use involves a qualitative leap in cognitive maps and ways of thinking and meaning, the age gap in terms of access and use of ICTs also should generate clear inter-generational divides. Moreover, if ICTs are disseminated among young people from different income groups and facilitate distance communication, they represent a unique way to reduce gaps, build bridges and facilitate social cohesion among young people themselves.

V. Access to opportunities

Capacity development among young people is one side of the coin. The other is access to opportunities in which such capacities can be exercised to further the development and well-being of the young people in question. While youth employment and job opportunities play a key role in this domain, the geographic location and mobility of young people also define opportunities for their development.

Youth employment

Employment clearly remains the key pillar of social inclusion. Playing active part in the world of work strengthens access to well-being through continuous income and, in principle, because employment includes health and social security system coverage. It also strengthens people's sense of belonging, in that they perceive themselves contributing to collective progress and forming part of a system consisting of contributions and compensations. Labour-market participation enables young people to integrate autonomously into society, and facilitates interpersonal development, self-esteem and mutual recognition in collective organizations with common characteristics. Accordingly, job opportunities are decisive in promoting social cohesion for the future.

Table 3
**LATIN AMERICA (17 COUNTRIES): YOUTH EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS
 (15-29 YEARS OF AGE), AROUND 1990, AROUND 2000 AND
 AROUND 2005, SIMPLE AVERAGES**

Measurement around:	Total			Men			Women		
	1990	2000	2005	1990	2000	2005	1990	2000	2005
Participation rate	56.6	58.1	57.8	74.7	71.6	70.7	39.7	45.1	45.4
Employment rate	49.3	49.3	50.6	66.5	62.8	63.6	33.1	36.2	38.0
Unemployment rate	12.8	16.1	12.5	10.9	13.6	10.2	15.9	20.0	15.8
Proportion of the unemployed in job search for at least one year ^a	17.8	15.8	10.9	17.2	15.5	9.7	18.2	16.1	12.0
Unemployment rate compared to adult unemployment rate	2.68	2.30	2.73	2.54	2.25	2.63	2.80	2.36	2.89
Percentage of students ^b	22.0	23.9	25.4	21.6	23.0	24.1	22.8	24.9	26.7
Percentage of economically inactive who are not studying or undertaking domestic work ^b	4.4	3.7	4.1	4.8	3.9	4.4	3.7	3.5	3.8
Percentage of persons employed in low productivity sectors ^c	48.7	50.7	45.7	47.0	48.8	43.2	51.1	53.2	49.0

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of processing of household surveys conducted in the relevant countries.

National total for Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Dominican Republic; urban total for Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay, and greater Buenos Aires in the case of Argentina.

^a Only includes Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Uruguay.

^b Does not include Brazil or Peru.

^c Does not include Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua or the Dominican Republic.

Young people face huge difficulties in entering the world of work at the appropriate time. Better educated than older generations, they face much higher levels of unemployment, lower pay, and less access to employment-based social protection systems. Taking simple averages for 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries, female labour-market participation grew between 2000 and 2005 while male participation did not; whereas the employment rate rose both for men and for young women. The unemployment rate among young people of 15-29 years of age fell from 16.1% to 12.5% between 2000 and 2005, returning to levels similar to those of 1990 (12.8%), but remaining much higher among women. Lastly, unemployment gaps by generation and income quintile

remain very large, to the detriment of young people and, above all, poor youth. With regards to the generational divide, youth unemployment was 2.73 times higher than adult unemployment in 2005 on average for both sexes, compared to 2.68 times higher in 1990 and 2.30 times in 2000. There is also a huge gap in terms of youth unemployment between the lowest and highest quintiles (24.1%, compared to 6.6% in 2005, and 26.8% and 6.1% respectively for 1990).

There are also specific groups of young people that face special difficulties in achieving productive engagement and accessing employment paths that enable them to break the exclusion and poverty barrier, such as young people of low educational levels, young women in traditional homes where roles are rigidly distributed, young people who are neither studying nor working, rural youth and ethnic minorities. In addition, a vicious circle operates among poor families, involving low educational performance of young people in those families, a high incidence of young people with low education levels in low productivity jobs, and low pay in those jobs.

Table 4
LATIN AMERICA (12 COUNTRIES): PROPORTION OF EMPLOYED YOUTH WORKING IN THE LOW PRODUCTIVITY SECTOR, BY SEX AND EDUCATION LEVEL, SIMPLE AVERAGES

Years of schooling	Total			Men			Women		
	1990	2000	2005	1990	2000	2005	1990	2000	2005
Total	49.6	51.5	46.8	47.8	49.2	44.3	52.0	54.5	50.1
0-3	68.3	72.8	68.8	63.2	65.8	62.6	78.9	85.5	76.8
4-6	62.8	65.7	62.7	57.2	60.5	56.2	74.6	77.2	75.5
7-9	51.2	58.8	55.1	46.6	52.9	49.0	61.0	70.4	67.8
10-12	33.5	40.4	37.6	32.3	37.2	33.9	35.7	45.2	43.3
13 and more	15.9	19.1	17.4	16.0	19.4	17.0	15.7	18.9	18.0

Source: World Health Organization (WHO), Mortality Database; Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of ECLAC; and United Nations Population Division.

Note: Does not include Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua or the Dominican Republic.

Spatial distribution and dynamic of youth

Young people's geographic location affects their personal and family development opportunities. In the cities, residential segregation obstructs youth development, confining marginal or peripheral areas to

a lower range of education and employment, a higher risk of violence and fewer physical and social connection networks. In rural areas, the conditions of life for young people are more critical, which clearly encourages them to emigrate to the cities: there is a great incidence of poverty and indigence, lower levels of educational achievement, less institutionalized jobs and greater difficulty gaining access to productive assets for young people.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, around 80% of all Ibero-American youth was living in urban areas, slightly above the 77% recorded for the region's total population. Projections for Latin America show that this percentage will continue to rise. Although the increase will be slower in the coming decades, the degree of urbanization among the total and youth populations will exceed 83% by 2025. In general, there is a higher concentration of young people in the largest urban centres in each country, particularly those with a smaller urban proportion, and in border zones and new areas of colonization. A larger proportion of young women also tend to locate in urban areas, while young men dominate in rural areas.

There are several reasons why young people show a greater propensity to migrate than the rest of the population: less risk aversion in this phase of life, formation of new households with autonomy in major decisions, admission to university or jobs that involve shifts in terms of opportunities and capacities that cannot be promoted in the place of origin. In particular, young people are more likely to embark upon international migration for development opportunities and in response to growing exposure to messages from abroad. The negative face of the coin is that international migration involves risks especially for young women (exposure to trafficking), undermines the status of citizenship on arriving in countries where many young migrants are deprived of rights, and breaks cultural identity and affective ties.

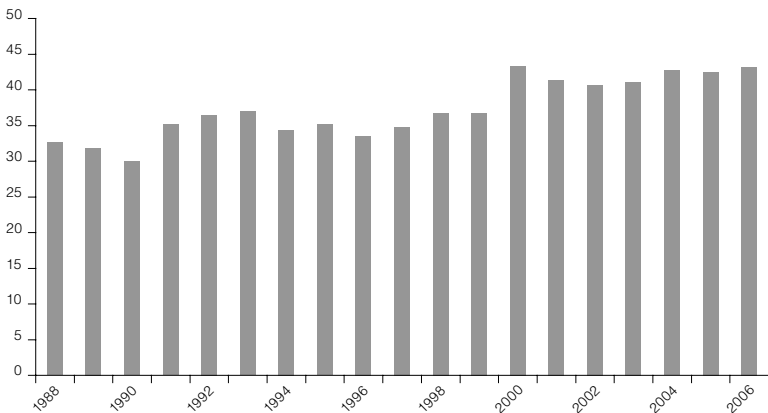
Over one fifth of all Latin American youth migrants move outside their country of origin. Latin American countries are currently areas of immigration, although a distinction needs to be made between emigration outside the region, essentially to the United States but with growing flows to Europe and particular the Spain (which can be seen as migration by the descendants of former overseas immigrants) and migration within the region (from and to Latin America), which is basically cross-border.

Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in the United States represent roughly three quarters of all international migrants from the region, some 19.3 million people as of 2005. According to the 1980 and 1990 United States censuses, the number of young people born in Latin American and Caribbean countries was around 900,000 and 1.6 million people, respectively, equivalent to 22% and 20% of all immigrants from the region at those two dates. There is a male majority in this group, essentially reflecting the behaviour of Mexican migration (ECLAC, 2000). More recent data (2007), show that roughly 5.5 million young people between 15 and 29 years of age from Latin America and the Caribbean, were living in the United States, representing over 25% of total immigrants from this region.

Spain is the leading migration destination in Ibero-America. According to data from the Municipal Inhabitants Census, in January 2004 there were 1.2 million people born in a Latin American country, a figure that had risen to just over 2 million by early 2007; and young people were the protagonists of international flows to Spain in the new century (see figure 7).

Figure 7
**SPAIN: IMMIGRANTS BORN IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
 BETWEEN 15 AND 29 YEARS OF AGE, COMPARED TO
 TOTAL INTERNATIONAL FLOWS, BY YEAR OF
 REGISTRATION, 1988-2006**

(Percentages)



Source: National Institute of Statistics of Spain (INE), Residential Variation Statistics.

At the two main destinations for international regional immigrant flows in Latin America, Argentina and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, young people accounted for a small proportion of total immigrants: 21.2% and 16.7% respectively. At the other end of the scale, countries with high proportions of young people among their regional immigrants included the Dominican Republic (41%), Costa Rica (38.1%) and Chile (37%).

Structure by age groups and place of youth in the demographic bonus

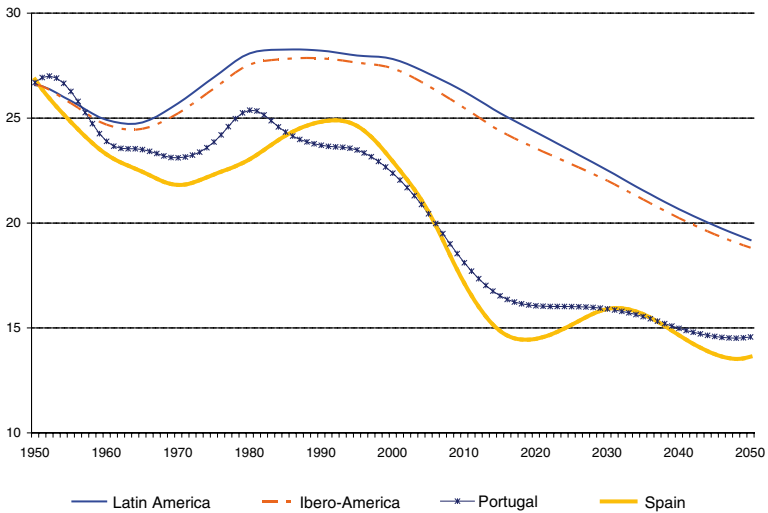
The change in the age structure also has a dynamic effect on the opportunities to which young people have access. All Ibero-American countries are living through demographic transitions, albeit in different phases, which means changes in the proportion of young people in the total population, in the relation between the percentages of the population that are in productive and dependent age-groups, the composition of families and the role of young people in them, in the congestion or decongestion of supply and demand for public goods such as health and education, and in access to employment and the relative weight of the different age groups in the demands made on the State.

In general, the demographic transition is characterized by a larger child population in its first phase, a relatively larger youth population in the second phase, and then in the third a relatively larger population in the adult productive phase, and lastly a relative increase in the elderly population. Countries with a relative increase in the proportion of young people compared to children, need to put greater emphasis on secondary and higher education, and on the education-employment transition. Moreover, the subsequent reduction in the proportion of young people provides a unique opportunity to improve youth employment alternatives, strengthen human capital among young people, and thus exploit the demographic bonus as a lever of development.

The relative share of young people in the Ibero-American population fell slightly between 1950 and the mid-1960s, before growing until the mid-1980s, when it reached levels close to 30% (see figure 8). Since then, it has been falling steadily and is projected to do so until the end of the period under review (2050), by which time youth is set to account for less

than 20% of the total population. This dynamic has different timeframes in different Latin American countries (in which Cuba is in the most advanced phase and Guatemala lagging furthest behind), and above all when comparing the Iberian peninsular with Latin America.

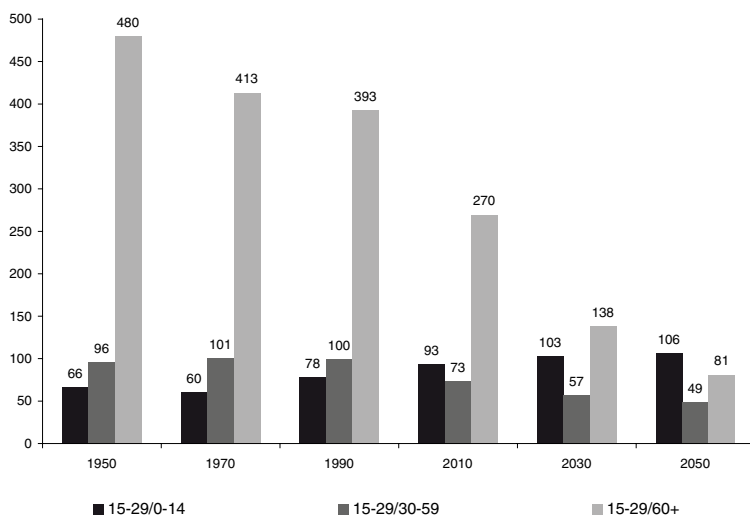
Figure 8
IBERO-AMERICA: PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE TOTAL POPULATION, 1950-2050
(Percentages)



Source: Latin America: Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) – Population Division of ECLAC, Population estimates and projections, 2007; Spain, Portugal: United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects, The 2006 Revision.

Figure 9 shows, for an extensive period and in terms of the Latin American average, the proportion of young people in the population compared to child, adult, and older adult population groups. The figure shows how, between the mid-twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the youth segment expands in relation to the child population, and then overtakes it; but from 1990 onwards it starts to retreat and will have shrunk to half the adult population by 2050. But the most dramatic projection is that while there were an estimated five young people for every adult of 60 years of older in 1959, by 2050 the region will have five adults of 60 and older for every four young people.

Figure 9
**LATIN AMERICA: RELATION BETWEEN THE YOUTH POPULATION
 (15-29 YEARS OLD) AND OTHER AGE GROUPS, 1950-2050**



Source: Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE) – Population Division of ECLAC, Population estimates and projections, 2007.

Thus the proportional reduction in the youth population is an ongoing reality, which is set to intensify in most countries. This raises numerous questions relating to youth opportunities, with some windows opening while others close: Will there be more opportunities for youth as their relative demands on the educational, training and employment systems decrease, i.e. as the expansion of these inclusion systems outpaces the expansion of the age group in question? With fewer children than young people in parental homes, will human relations change within the basic social reproduction institution, i.e. the family? How are relations between generations affected when the proportion of active individuals changes in relation to that of older adults? How will relations between the generations be reconstituted when most young people have the experience of living grandparents? How are memory and culture transmitted with a larger percentage of older people or a smaller proportion of young? From the social cohesion standpoint, the answers provided by history to these questions are of fundamental importance.

VI. Family, sense of belonging, and youth participation

Youth's sense of belonging and participation is a fundamental component of social cohesion for young people. Clearly, belonging can be understood and broken down into multiple levels and perspectives; but in this document we have decided to start with the restricted nucleus of belonging (the family), and then extend to broader nuclei (participation and communication by young people). But we also understand belonging as young people's membership of the wider society and youth's perception of its place in it.

The family

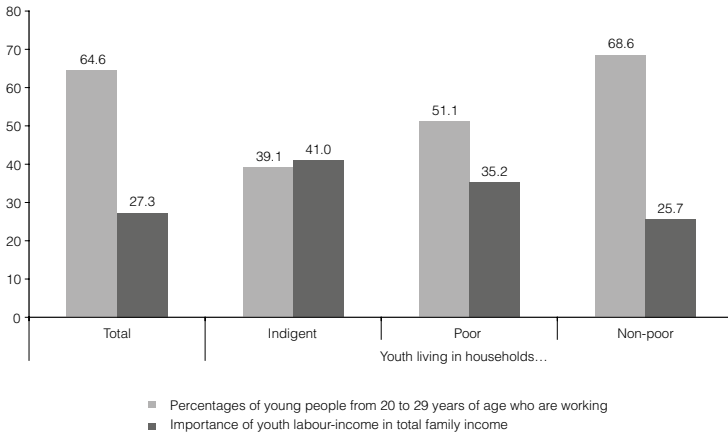
Young people are distributed in different family structures and are the protagonists of rapid change in intra-family relations, in the processes and rhythms of becoming autonomous and the reorganization of gender roles. Young people themselves also recreate perceptions of the role and rules adopted in the family. This is fundamental for social cohesion, since it constitutes the daily practice of learning and coexistence, socialization of norms, ways of distributing and legitimizing authority, and definition of gender and age-based roles. Thus, the relation between youth and family is a crucial part of young people's perspectives of social cohesion; and gender roles are particularly important here, since they are marked by their initial and secondary distribution, which occurs in the family nucleus.

In Latin America, most young people from the region's urban zones live with their families in nuclear households (60.6% of the total), either with both parents (45.5%) or in single-parent families (11.1%). Of the total number of households, just 12.2% are headed by young people of which 9.3% have male and 2.9% female heads. Between 1990 and 2006, fewer households have been set up with male heads, while those with female heads has increased; at the same time the rate has declined for young heads of household generally, but has increased for young female heads. In addition, the pronounced masculinization of the population in rural zones, particularly among youth, makes it harder to form couples.

The presence of young people in the home beyond 18 years of age, and still economically dependent, can become an economic burden for the family. Nonetheless, if they work, they can contribute to family well-being and help to keep poverty at bay, particularly in low-income households. Survey results confirm this two-way relation of protection and support from parents to children and from young people to their families, particularly in poor families. Thus, although the proportion of young people between 20 and 29 years of age still living live with their parents in poor and indigent households is less than in the rest of the population, their contribution to family income is significant, particularly in indigent families, amounting to 41% of total (see figure 10).

Opinion surveys reveal the importance that young people between 18 and 29 years of age continue to attribute to their families. Young people who set up independent households do not necessarily associate them with new family ties formalized by law, or paternity and maternity whether effective or expected in the short term, or to lifelong cohabitation projects. The larger share of women in the generation of family incomes contributes to the fact that they participate more in decision-making within the family and, little by little, to a redistribution of activities in the family nucleus. Nonetheless, changes in values and culture with respect to the place of women, are lagging behind changes in women's role as income earners.

Figure 10
IBERO-AMERICA (18 COUNTRIES): LABOUR INCOME OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM 20 TO 29 YEARS OF AGE WHO WORK AND LIVE WITH THEIR PARENTS, IN RELATION TO TOTAL FAMILY INCOME, BY POVERTY STRATA, AROUND 2006
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the basis of special tabulations of household surveys conducted in the relevant countries.

In the period 1990-2006, the incidence of poverty in all households decreased by 10 percentage points, but by just 3 points in households headed by young people. The incidence of poverty and indigence among households headed by young women is also more than 14 percentage points above that of households headed by adult women; and, in the case of young male heads of household, the incidence of poverty is 11 percentage points higher than among those headed by adults. Indigence is also greater among young households and particularly those headed by young women. This more precarious economic situation confirms the difficulties faced by young people in setting up their own homes, since a large proportion of persons in households headed by young women constitute extended families (22.2%), compared to 13.7% in the case of households headed by young men.

Social cohesion and the sense of belonging

The sense of belonging consists of adherence to shared values, recognized forms of participation, willingness to recognize others, perceptions on discrimination, new communication practices, and trust in social structures and alternatives for the future. These domains of belonging are, at the same time, the subjective counterpart of social inclusion, i.e. ways in which youth expresses its expectations and values in the face of the alternatives available to them to mitigate risks, and develop skills and capacities and capitalize on opportunities.

In general, it is noticeable that young people identify less with the secular referents of identity than adults (nation, politics, religion), although the largest generational divide is a lack of commitment towards these identifications. Nonetheless, a large proportion of young people from different countries still feel part of that imaginary community which is the nation, although they do not feel particularly proud of the issue of equality. This could be a sign of a weakening of the “us” in the imagery of youth.

Young people tend to participate less than adults in political parties and vote much less frequently in elections. This situation begs the question as to the affiliation felt by young people for political democracy. On this point, data from the 2005 Latinobarómetro survey showed the attitudes of young people (18-29 years of age) towards democracy (see table 5). Satisfaction with democracy is highly variable, with 80% or more of young people in some countries feeling dissatisfied with it (Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru), while levels of dissatisfaction are below 50% in other countries (Spain, Uruguay and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela).

Young people today are more inclined towards an informal, less structured and less institutionalized type of participation. The classical vision of representative politics and delegation of power to someone else, in which politics takes on forms of direct action, network logic and/or territorial nuclei of articulation, has been displaced. Another type of participation that is growing daily involves youth volunteer action, which includes actions and forms of association in which collective trust is built, along with inter-generational bridges, greater symbolic recognition and clearer participation in collective well-being.

Table 5
SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY, YOUNG PEOPLE OF 18 AND 19 YEARS OF AGE, 2005
(Percentages)

Support for democracy	18 countries (average)	Spain (2006)
1. Democracy is preferable to any other form of government	58.2	79
2. In some circumstances, an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one	17.5	5
3. For people like us it makes no difference whether the political regime is democratic or non-democratic.	24.4	11

Source: Latinobarómetro Survey 2005, Santiago, Chile; and Youth Observatory in Spain, *Informe anual: Jóvenes 2006*, Madrid.

Over the last few decades, there have been various forms of informal youth groupings that the literature has baptized as “urban tribes”. Groups of this type construct collective identification codes on the basis of aesthetic reference points (music, graffiti, tattoos, animation, design, fan clubs), and on ethical ones (adherence to values and also anti-values). In addition, incorporation of the Internet into young people’s daily life is having a profound impact on how the sense of belonging develops. Over the last few years, millions of Internet users worldwide have joined communities that have arisen in the communication, information and entertainment domains. Given the ease with which they assimilate ICT languages, young people have led the integration of these virtual communities consisting of members who identify with and share complex, values and the norms of the community.

The sense of belonging also relates to expectations for the future. According to information obtained from the Latinobarómetro survey for 18 Latin American countries in 2007, a larger proportion of young people have optimistic expectations for their own future than for the future of their children. The information also reveals more optimistic expectations for intergenerational social mobility among young people than among adults: 56% of young people expect their children to live better than them in the future, compared to 50% among adults.

VII. Youth institutional and policies

The superficial diagnosis performed in the foregoing pages highlights uneven levels of progress and backwardness. Youth today forms an age-group with higher educational and connectivity levels, but also faces greater obstacles in terms of job opportunities. Young people move, migrate and recreate their reference points of belonging, but at the same time are assailed by risks and uncertainties. All of this calls for progress to be made in institutions and public policy on development, participation, and the well-being of youth.

Institutional framework

Since the 1980s and 1990s, all of the region's countries have set up government youth institutions, building a sound foundation that helps to make youth policies more efficient and effective. Despite this progress, the nature of the institutions created is heterogeneous in terms of administrative dependency. In some cases, they are national institutes with some degree of autonomy in their operations, while others operate as ministerial departments, presidential programmes and State secretariats.

These institutions have generally suffered from low budgets and have directed their efforts in ways that fail to define a strategic orientation for medium and long-term youth policies. The basic policy recommendation here is to increase budgetary appropriations for organizations dealing with

youth issues. It is also necessary to develop institutional strengthening centred on the planning of investments in programmes and objectives for youth promotion and development.

As well as creating various types of government institutions to develop youth plans and programmes over the last two decades, the countries of the region have created, implemented and redesigned a variety of instruments to increase knowledge and perceptions on youth and improve the effectiveness and orientation of public policies in this field. The signing and ratification of the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth, along with the passing of legislation, design and monitoring of plans and programmes, the holding of national surveys, creation of youth observatories and the development of youth information centres and Internet portals are among the instruments frequently used to support and implement often diverse efforts included in policies in this domain. Youth legislation has aimed to organize and modernize current laws; specific surveys seek to improve situational diagnostics; observatories aim to systemize the monitoring and evaluation of sectoral plans and programmes; and youth information centres focus on processing and disseminating information on the subject.

In general, there is a relative lack of explicit policies for youth, and a crosscutting policy prevails that has mainly been developed by sector-level public agencies which address issues that are relevant for the youth population, within their areas of competence. This is a youth policy in the broad sense, with long-term measures, such as education, health and employment policies. National policies on youth encompass four dimensions of the characteristics of the youth phase (Krauskopf, 2003): Youth as a preparatory period (which defines youth in terms of crises); youth as a problematic stage (a negative view of youth, confined to issues such as delinquency, drugs, violence, school dropout, among others); youth citizenship (a comprehensive perspective that prioritizes the full rights of young people to participate in youth policies and programmes); and the approach that sees youth as a strategic development actor (aimed at forming human and social capital, such as skills and capacities in leading development in the productive field).

The institutional framework is based on the construction of the “youth problem”, the “youth potential”, and the youth actor” in public discourse and policy. It is thus intended to promote new orientations

that highlight youth protagonism, contextualize young people in their life surroundings and promote social capital networks to make the most of their development. There is a need to strengthen youth organizations (whether institutes or national secretariats), and to provide them with greater multisector coordination capacity. It is recognized that there is much to do to promote adequate systems for obtaining information on youth to be used in programme design, and more specific definition of youth in terms of legal status, rights and national legislation.

Youth policies

The aim here is not to provide an exhaustive account of the range of sector policies that affect the conditions of life and opportunities for young people, but to highlight a number of key areas for social cohesion based on the alternatives available to young people.

(In terms of *capacity-building*, intervention is required in at least five domains: Make progress in terms of young people's education development through secondary school and complement this by expanding access to tertiary and technical-vocational education; Focus efforts on equalizing educational opportunities, guaranteeing a fairer and meritocratic system to which all belong equally; Ensure a better flow and adaptation between the worlds of education and employment, making it possible to update students expectations and give timely reward to capacities and knowledge acquired; Combat forms of discrimination that may arise in school socialization and in educational contents, making education a route to collective learning in terms of respect for diversity and reciprocity of rights, and exploit the broad public school coverage to give children and young people connectivity who do not have this in their homes, and incorporate new ways of accessing information and knowledge into teaching practice, which means expanding access, training teachers, and integrating ICTs into the curriculum.

Completing the secondary education cycle today is a condition for labour market entry making it possible to attain acceptable welfare thresholds. Quality improvements also improve young people's chances of accessing higher education and training, with more equal opportunities. This increases the sense of belonging, which is a key aspect of social cohesion.

Greater educational progress at the secondary level should be coordinated with an expansion of post-secondary, non-vocational and university education supply. To ensure more equal opportunities at this level requires policies that compensate for a lack of monetary resources and time among young people graduating from secondary school, who have to work to survive or contribute to their family incomes. For this group, policies could include cross-subsidies in higher education to provide exemption from course fees for those who cannot pay them and make it possible to finance; Flexible class hours with evening and night-time modules, and systems of non-university training that are attractive and coordinated with changes in productive systems and labour markets.

In terms of *creating opportunities*, employment is the source of opportunities for young people's development and well-being. Providing job opportunities to young people is, therefore, an imperative that can no longer be ignored. Social cohesion requires gaps to be narrowed in terms of access to quality jobs: gaps between generations, between young people according to education level and household income, and between young men and young women.

Although better labour-market participation among youth, as in any other age group, requires an appropriate macroeconomic setting and sustained economic growth, the organizational, technological and social changes that have occurred over the last few decades call for improvements in the institutional framework governing the labour market, together with tools to make sure the labour market functions properly and protects its weakest participants. Within this framework, there is a wide ranging menu of policy alternatives to promote labour-market participation among young people.

In terms of youth employability, human capital (education and good quality training) needs to be combined with skill recognition and practical employment opportunities for young people. Moreover, combining education and employment (young people who study and work at the same time) requires breaking out of a vicious circle and entering virtuous one. In the first case, early employment, forced by the precarious nature of household incomes, ultimately results in huge disadvantages in time available for education, and often undermines learning and its continuity. In contrast, in the virtuous circle, work, ideally part-time, is an initial experience, a way of complementing learning by doing, and a way of

increasing social capital and relational networks, making it possible to empower educational achievements to a much greater extent.

Vocational training, training for work, and support for low-income youth entrepreneurs requires greater investment in the quality and coverage of these programmes, a qualitative leap in adapting formation-training to new labour-market demands, and technical change and participation by multiple actors —universities, entrepreneur and employer corporations, funding agents, among others. A national formation and training system, with internships in firms and links to employers, technically up-to-date and relevant to changes in the supply of jobs, which also is up to date in terms of information society skills, can substantially improve alternatives for young people who do not go to university. It is also essential to help youth entrepreneurs set up microenterprises or small businesses that are sustainable over time, by providing access to financing, information and networks, since much of the employment generated in the region today is provided by small enterprises. A key challenge in this area is labour training, and the development of initial work experiences. This would address two of the main causes of youth unemployment, namely lack of experience and lack of training.

Generally speaking, employment policies, specifically those targeting young people, need to adopt a gender mainstreaming approach, recognizing the multiple obstacles and inequalities confronting women in access to the labour market and in the world of employment itself. These problems are partly caused by discriminatory attitudes that need to be identified and addressed. Policies to promote youth labour-market participation should take account of the specific needs of different groups of young women. Combining work in the home with participation in the labour market should not be viewed as pertaining to women alone.

Protection and prevention in the face of youth risks involves addressing risks associated with external causes, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and undesired pregnancies, on a timely basis and using a youth-rights approach.

In general, the most effective health policies for young people focus on prevention, given the essentially external nature of their causes of morbidity and mortality associated with more risky conducts and situations. A specific policy to avoid these risks is the promotion of permanent STD prevention programmes for young people. Active

prevention policies within education policies are a complementary aspect to this. In this regard, the inclusion of content dealing with sexuality and reproductive rights in normal school curricula provides powerful tools to prevent the risks associated with STDs, teen pregnancy, inappropriate consumption of alcohol and drugs, and eating habits that encourage obesity or malnutrition.

In all of these areas, truthful and timely information needs to be provided that is adapted to the forms of communication used by young people, so as to generate spaces of trust in which messages are received and concerns are raised openly. In general, information tainted with ideology or Manichaeism is not seen as valid by many young people, and thus the sources of such messages (teachers and experts) lose their legitimacy. In the health domain, clear messages are needed that do not exaggerate but warn, inform without distorting, and empower young people to autonomously deal with the risks in question.

Health policies should endeavour to give young people access to the services, professionals and medicines they need to take care of their health and risks. Here it is important for health workers in public services (hospitals and consulting rooms) to have a friendly disposition and consider the importance of treatment and support when dealing with young people suffering from problems of alcohol, drugs, STDs, unwanted pregnancies, and injuries caused by violence and accidents. It is essential to promote a holistic health approach that combines open and timely information, support for young people with problems, emphasis on resilience and suitable referral to care services.

Prevention and protection against violence should consider the multiple and complex nature of its causes and consequences among young people. Lessons learned in terms of good prevention and treatment practices show that it is better to accentuate prevention and rehabilitation rather than mere repression; that the social causes which fuel violence need to be addressed, prioritizing a rights approach in dealing with violent youth; that it is better to engage the entire environment of young people in these policies; and that rehabilitation should be promoted by considering the motivations of young people themselves.

Lastly, public policy should support rather than exclude pregnant youth and adolescents, making their right to education compatible with helping to raise their child. Discrimination in school is very serious,

because it forces adolescent mothers to curtail the development of their capacities, condemning them to exclusion throughout their life cycle. There is a need to strengthen adolescents' capacity for reflection, control and negotiation to avoid risky conducts leading to unwanted pregnancies in their active sexuality. Such capacity can be developed through a variety of awareness-raising programmes, including workshops for adolescents, propaganda and awareness-raising through other neighbouring actors, and the transmission of these attitudes and knowledge in education (college) and health services (hospitals and consulting rooms). Adolescents of both sexes should be made aware of their right to reproductive health and be able to enforce it.

In terms of *participation and the sense of belonging*, the challenge is to make a wide range of youth policies participatory. Young people should be both the object and subject of policies and feel that they are the protagonists of their own development processes.

Participation in policies should be cross-cutting. Bridges need to be built where languages are different, especially among the administrator and promoters of public policies and youth groups themselves. It is also important to make the most of the mechanisms young people use to participate. Approaching young people from their areas participation means putting programmes and policies within their reach, i.e. at the local level and in coordination with the third sector (non-governmental organizations, voluntary groups, among others).

Examples of voluntary actions that are publicly coordinated include a number of programmes to combat poverty and construct minimum quality housing, literacy campaigns, maintenance of parks and public squares, construction of infrastructure, information campaigns on reproductive rights and STDs (especially HIV/AIDS), gender violence and the promotion of different rights. For all of the above reasons, it is essential for States to include voluntary action and citizen participation in their youth policies and programmes.

VIII. A favourable scenario in the international and Ibero-American framework

In its dual profile of promise and threat, youth has become the focus of attention on the global and Ibero-American scale. Both the United Nations and other international cooperation mechanisms have recently produced global reports on youth. In the Ibero-American domain, progress on the institutional framework for youth and its recognition by States has been notable over the last two decades, including the legal/political establishment of institutes, undersecretariats or national ministries for youth in nearly all countries. Today, youth is experiencing a period of major recognition, as confirmed by the fact that 2008 has been declared Ibero-American Youth Year; youth and development is the subject of the 2008 Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government; and a growing number of countries are ratifying the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth.

This convention today is the main Ibero-American instrument for protecting and promoting the rights of almost 110 million people between 15 and 24 years of age, distributed among the 22 countries of the Ibero-American region. It is simultaneously a legal instrument and a voice in the collective conscience. It recognizes youth as a subject of law and a protagonist in the challenges of economic and social development in Ibero-American countries. It covers both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, coordinating, in a single instrument, freedom, participation, access to the means of autonomy and well-being,

capacity development and the creation of opportunities for young people of both sexes, and the right to affirm one's own identity.

Given the above, turning opportunities into rights, with instruments designed to be enforceable, is an essential part of our future as Ibero-America. Often deprived of political voice and representation, youth today is the centre of attention, through this convention that gives it visibility and legal resources. Clearly, the challenges are not few. Young people need to be the subjects and effective beneficiaries of development, i.e. to build their own life projects in societies that include them in their opportunities and protect them from risks, while at the same time allowing them to participate in building a common "us". In other words, they need to be protagonists of the new indicators of social cohesion. The invitation is on the table: youth and social cohesion, a model in the making.

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