

# CEPAL Review

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## The participation of youth in the development process of Latin America

### Problems and policies regarding labour force insertion, education and employment opportunities

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After a period of relative neglect the issue of the specific problems of 'youth' is gaining preeminence again in both developed and developing nations. In the closing years of the 1970s this concern was particularly evident in the industrialized North. Experts have produced a significant body of literature, policy-makers have given the theme considerable revaluation and international organizations have regularly incorporated it into the body of resolutions adopted at their major assemblies. This resurgence of interest in the problems of youth has spread most recently to Latin America as a consequence of the alarm at the exceptionally high rates of unemployment among youth, extensive school desertion, increased delinquency and increasing rejection of the existing social order by young people in the secondary and higher levels of education in certain countries of the region. On the basis of the few empirical studies carried out in Latin America on this subject, the present article examines the situation and needs of youth in Latin America from three vantage points: youth as a category of analysis and object of policy and planning; the insertion of youth into the labour force, and the interaction between education and employment possibilities.

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## I

### Youth as a category of social analysis and object of policy and planning

For analytical purposes the question of the problems facing the full participation of youth in the development process of Latin America<sup>1</sup> still encounters a major conceptual hurdle to be overcome. This consists in the selection of an adequate definition of youth. Does the conventional approach of considering those between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age to be in the 'youth' category represent a satisfactory solution? Of course, for some kinds of analysis and for statistical purposes it is useful; but for a study directed at the implications for social policy formulation, how adequate is such a concept? On the whole, in the developed nations 'youth' as a concept has pretty much been taken for granted. Although most sociologists recognize that youth is a variable and multidimensional phenomenon, studies have tended not to pursue the question of the variability of this concept.<sup>2</sup>

If the definition by age is rejected on the grounds that youth as thus defined does not constitute a real social group, then how can this category be described? There is a vast array of possible criteria and combinations of criteria for defining youth, ranging from certain biological changes to considerations of the aims and values of the political system. Though obvious, this is often forgotten and is worth mentioning here. The problem is complicated still further by the fact that the various criteria overlap and are only partly distinguishable

<sup>1</sup> As already noted, this subject is gaining in importance. After the discussion of policies and programmes relating to youth at several sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, International Youth Year has been announced for 1985. The OECD has held high level conferences on youth unemployment and programmes related to education, training and employment of young people have been implemented in Australia, Canada, Japan, the United States and most European countries. See Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Entry of Young People into Working Life* (Paris, 1977) and *Youth Unemployment* (Paris, 1978); Council of Europe, *Youth and Employment in Europe* (Strasbourg, 1979), and Eli Grinberg, "Youth Unemployment", in *Scientific American*, 242:5, May 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Leopold Rosenmayr and Klaus Allerbeck, "Youth and Society", in *Current Sociology*, 27:2/3, 1979, p. 9.

from each other. The psychological and social changes that may be used to define youth are to a certain extent related to biological changes, while the latter too may be influenced by the social environment. In this context it is important to look upon youth from a sociological rather than biological perspective. This approach views youth as covering two main phases —adolescence and young adulthood— defined by attitudinal systems and behaviour patterns related to a particular position in society. All special population groups linked to age status, particularly childhood, youth and old age, relate to biological facts yet are structured by social forces.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, there is some advantage in accepting the set of criteria contained in Carlota Bubler's definition of youth as an intermediate period which begins with the acquisition of physiological maturity and ends with that of social maturity: in other words the assumption of the sexual, economic, legal and social rights and responsibilities of the adult.

This working definition indicates that the start and the length of the period of youth varies considerably. The duration, position or quality of youth (adolescence and young adulthood) depends upon the systems of production, the technological and economic tasks involved, and the training and education needed to perform these tasks. Youth is further determined by the ideologies, the aims and values of the political system and by access to these conceptual and interpretative structures through education. It is a product of societal reproduction as well as a force in social change or social transformation. The degree to which young people cleave to reproductive channels or pursue paths of transformation depends on the particular historical constellation, on the

class structure, and on the degree of freedom they are able to obtain and handle within a given social system.<sup>4</sup> The period of youth is affected by the level of national development and differs widely from one social group to another. It is very long among the middle and upper strata (especially in highly-developed societies), shorter among workers, much curtailed among marginal urban groups, and often considered to be practically non-existent among peasants.

The question has been posed whether young members of some groups of the urban and rural lower strata constitute a generational group with its own identifiable problems and attitudes, because their transition from childhood to full adult responsibilities is so brief and early.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it must also be remembered that very large proportions of the young people from rural-agricultural families in Latin America continue to migrate to urban settings and that many who stay in the countryside, because of the combined rural processes of modernization, salarization and marginalization, no longer follow the traditional early transition to adult labour and family formation.<sup>6</sup>

For policy-making purposes the different subsets of youth —adolescence and young adulthood— represent groups in themselves with different environments and needs. But it is just as important to recognize that, particularly in Latin America, policy-oriented analysis and planning for youth must derive from due consideration of the fact that the conditions and issues concerning this group do not constitute a problem pertaining exclusively to it, but reflect the problems of the societies in which it is inserted. Accordingly, these conditions must be analysed in the framework of the overall process of economic development and social and political change in the region, with particular reference to the social, economic, cultural,

<sup>3</sup>Given the increasing attention of the United Nations to age-related special population groups, e.g., childhood, youth and the aged, Leopold Rosenmayr's basis for a conceptualization of age which combines sociology, social history and depth psychology in one interdisciplinary network is relevant: "Age is a socially and individually produced artefact, interacting with biological premises, and corresponding to the differentiated forces of society which express themselves through forms of production and the division of labour and through informative cultural transmission, communicative processes and political power, which thus act as a definite normative challenge to the individual". *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>See Adolfo Gurrieri *et al.*, *Estudios sobre la juventud marginal latinoamericana* (Mexico City, Editorial Siglo XXI, 1971). A detailed description of an extreme urban situation of street children and adolescents (known as "gamins") in Colombia is to be found in Virginia Gutiérrez de Pineda *et al.*, *El Gamin: su albergue social y su familia* (Bogotá, UNICEF, 1978).

<sup>6</sup>See Luis Jünemann, *Expectativas migratorias de la juventud campesina* (Santiago, PREALC, 1979).

linguistic and ethnic characteristics which together form the basis for identification of concrete, meaningful social groups existing under the catch-all umbrella of the general population category referred to as 'youth'.

Although the problems, specifically generation gap differences, are relevant, youth is by no means a monolithic group. Although it is true that for certain purposes generalizations on given issues which are valid for Latin America as a whole may be made, the concept of a Latin American youth has limited applicability. This is also pertinent within countries but may occasionally be lost sight of in the conventional listing by international organizations of priorities for programmes of measures and activities for youth.<sup>7</sup> Although in principle another reality may be recognized, in practice the actual formulation of guidelines for national and international action adheres to the more expedient approach of a common perception of the interests and needs which bind youth together. It is probable, moreover, that as International Youth Year approaches and the issue of youth receives worldwide attention as another major problem of development, small but articulate, vociferous and relatively well-contacted groups claiming to represent their generation will bring to the forefront of national attention the demands of their specific social strata, paying only lip service and obtaining only piecemeal or mere showcase solutions for the weak and, in conventional social terms, disorganized youth of the marginal segments of society. It is likely to become increasingly clear that not only is the objective situation of the indigenous youth of the Andean Highlands different from that of young people in the metropolitan centres of Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, but also the extent of common bonds between them is questionable, as is the degree of shared perception of interests and needs between rural youth in Mexico and Brazil and young people in Mexico City, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, or the depth of solidarity existing between the young people of the poorest and marginal areas of cities and their middle

and upper strata counterparts who actively participate in official youth organizations.

Both in terms of establishing policy-oriented analytical constructs of youth and in the identification of those who occupy the various youth roles it is important not to overlook the role of the State. Age-groups and their position in society depend on the overall governmental system of social distribution, that is to say, on whether and in which way public funds are spent, and on the priorities defined concerning schools, universities, youth centres, youth movements, youth-oriented employment policy, social security schemes, etc... Roles are influenced to a significant extent by socio-political decisions. In this regard the French sociologist Nicole Abboud, who has studied the importance of the role of the State in the segregation of young people before the appearance of rebellion and revolt in the late 1960s in France, made the following observation: the greater the State's ability to bring about a political consensus in society, the less advanced is the politization of social practice in various institutions, and the less can 'youth' be said to exist as an active social category in the overall context of the political organization of society and also as an ideological theme.<sup>8</sup> Abboud sustains that an example of such a situation is provided by France between the two world wars. Young people did not exist as a separate social factor. The political organizations and religious groups all had their 'youth' movements, and the more the State endeavoured to "organize political and cultural life around it", the more youth was reduced to a mere 'age group'. According to Abboud this is the origin of the real 'alienation of youth'. She contends that in the technocratic-neocapitalist system prevailing in France up to 1967 young workers were placed in a category of youth which was viewed in completely abstract and empty terms and had no practical political relevance; in this way an attempt was made to consolidate a "false consciousness of belonging to a single 'age group'". This raises the question of the appropriate mode of State action in the process of providing social services

<sup>7</sup> See United Nations *International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace*, Report of the Secretary-General (A/36/215), 19 June 1981.

<sup>8</sup>Rosenmayr and Allerbeck, "Youth and Society", *op. cit.*, p. 39.

and the difficulties encountered in the definition and implementation of bureaucratic organization in the field of youth and participating models of action.

While this brief critique of past 'conventional wisdom' has some validity for examining the precise role of the State as an organizing force *vis-à-vis* the realities of the stratification of youth and the requirements, potentialities and limitations of effective participation in the case of Latin America, it is just as essential not to uncritically adopt the analytical categories employed by the developed nations nor the policy measures adopted by them to confront the problems of youth. Undoubtedly, their experience and the concepts they have developed can serve as useful points of reference and perhaps even as models for given problems of youth from a specific socio-cultural strata in certain countries, but in other cases the situation will be entirely different. Moreover, the well-known structural heterogeneity prevailing in Latin American societies magnifies the gap between the different situations among youth stemming from stratificational, cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity. It is thus not a matter of simply adopting the typology of

youth with special needs and problems often used in contemporary developed market societies, where they are divided into hard-core unemployed, underprivileged young workers and rebellious alienated students in institutions of higher education.

In this context, it is worth while recalling the observations of José Medina Echavarría, who said that while there can be no doubt that some of the questions examined and points discussed in relation to the industrialized societies may be valid and may be accepted without more ado for some of the countries of Latin America, the situation of young people in other countries which are still far removed from this state of affairs may be completely different. The study of Latin American youth, he said, provides a visible and dramatic illustration of what also applies in respect of other problems: the need to go beyond commonplaces and devote ourselves fully to the search for reality: a reality whose very special complexion gives grounds for believing that it cannot be adequately covered by handed-down categories or categories taken over unchanged from other environments which are more advanced or —much worse— still more backward.<sup>9</sup>

## II

### Insertion of youth into the labour force: present situation and future trends

One of the striking features of the Latin American labour force is the high proportion of youth in it (figure 1). In 1970 one-third of the economically active population consisted of young people between 10 and 24 years of age (table 1). This situation is in strong contrast to the situation in developed parts of the world and is even more accentuated in rural areas. Youth economic activity is highest in the female labour force, and the importance of the participation of young women becomes even more apparent as future trends by country are examined according to adolescent (ages 15-19) or young adult (ages 20-24) economic activity.

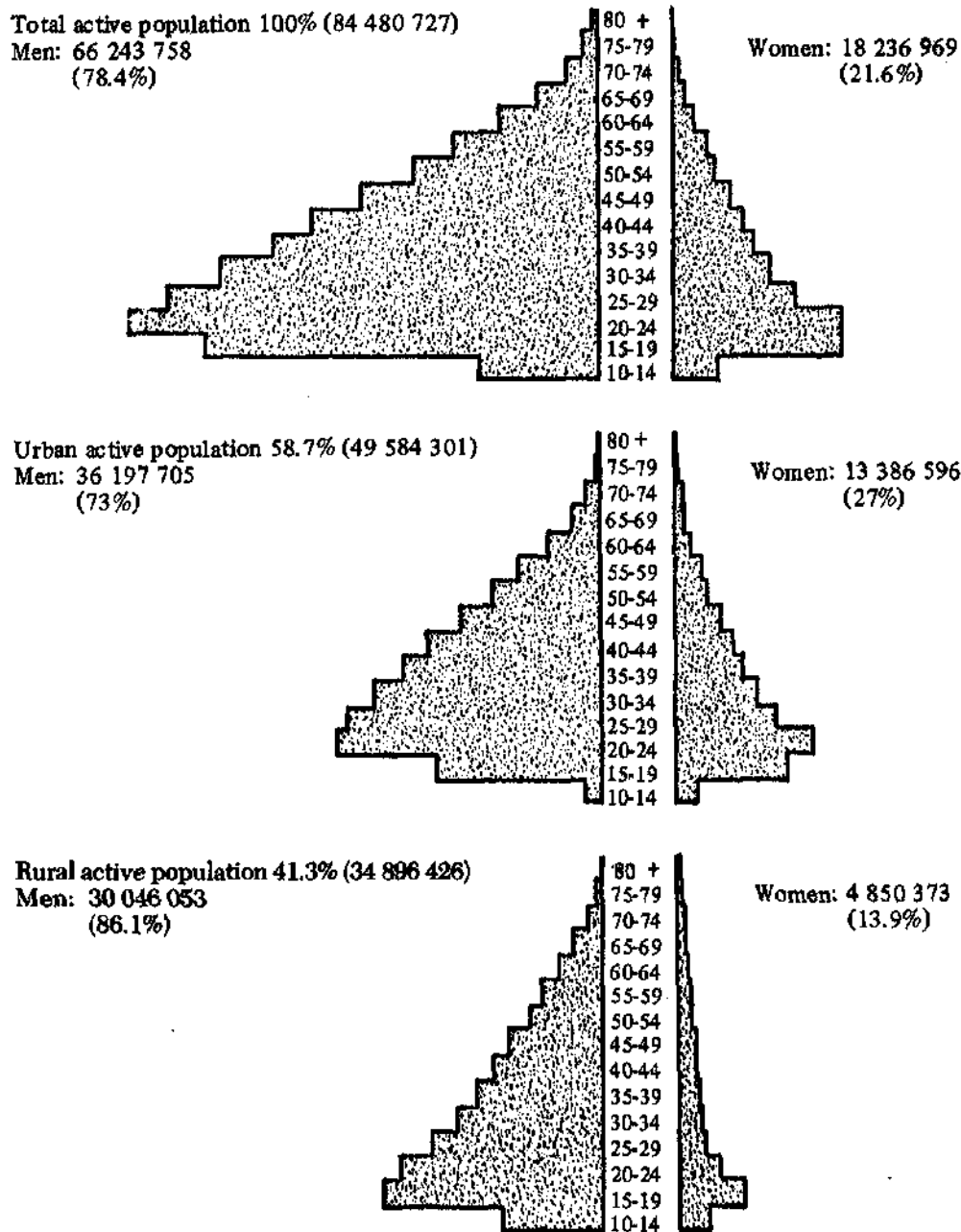
At the national level, the rates of economic participation for adolescents between 15 and

19 years of age will continue to decline until the end of the century, as they have during the past decade (table 2). This process is a natural concomitant of urbanization and of the vast expansion of secondary and higher education which has occurred since the 1960s. In every country of the region, however, economic activity rates will increase over the next twenty years for young people between 20 and 24 years of age (table 3). For the region as a whole this group will continue to expand its participation at a rate slightly above that projected for

<sup>9</sup> José Medina Echavarría, *Filosofía, educación y desarrollo*, Textos del ILPES, Mexico City, Ed. Siglo XXI (second edition), 1970, p. 248.

Figure 1

LATIN AMERICA: STRUCTURE OF THE ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION, 1970



Source: UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP, project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, "La educación y los problemas del empleo", *Informes Finales No. 3*, October 1981, table 18, p. 78.

Table 1

LATIN AMERICA: LABOUR FORCE  
COMPOSITION BY BROAD AGE GROUPS  
ACCORDING TO AREA AND SEX 1970

(Percentages)

	10 to 24 years	25 years and over
Total both sexes	33.1	50.8
Total men	30.8	52.0
Total women	41.6	46.1
Urban both sexes	29.2	55.3
Urban men	25.8	57.2
Urban women	38.3	50.1
Rural both sexes	38.8	44.3
Rural men	36.8	45.9
Rural women	50.9	34.9

Source: UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP, project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, *La educación y los problemas del empleo*, Informes Finales N.º 3, table 18.

the entire labour force, i.e., just under 3% annually.

Perhaps the most significant increase to be observed at the national level is that of the participation of young women. Indeed, the future expansion of economic activity among youth 20-24 years of age derives almost exclusively from the rise in the economic participation rates of females (table 4). Activity rates for young men experience some decline in all countries of the region. This is again related to the expansion of higher education and merely reflects a delayed entrance due to continued schooling.

Projections for women 20-24 years of age show participation rates increasing substantially in all but one country in Latin America. Since young women are commonly the segment of the labour force most affected by unemployment, the problem of making possible an increase of 35% in these rates for the region between 1980 and 2000 under conditions of extensive overall unemployment and underemployment is undoubtedly one of the major challenges that will be facing Latin America in the present decade. In the case of some countries such as Brazil and Mexico, where these participation rates are expected to rise almost

Table 2

RATES OF ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION  
FOR ADOLESCENTS BETWEEN 15 AND  
19 YEARS OF AGE, 1970-2000

Country	1970 15-19	1980 15-19	1990 15-19	2000 15-19
Argentina	46.3	42.1	38.6	35.3
Bolivia	44.8	41.4	39.7	34.6
Brazil	43.2	39.8	36.6	34.1
Chile	29.1	26.6	24.5	22.5
Colombia	38.6	33.8	29.9	27.3
Costa Rica	45.7	41.4	37.6	34.4
Cuba	34.0	30.9	28.3	26.0
Dominican Rep.	37.1	34.0	30.6	27.0
Ecuador	46.2	42.4	38.5	35.0
El Salvador	45.7	42.3	38.9	35.6
Guatemala	45.4	42.0	38.2	34.2
Haiti	65.6	61.1	56.0	50.4
Honduras	49.8	46.8	43.2	39.5
Mexico	41.9	38.3	35.0	32.2
Nicaragua	45.4	41.8	38.1	34.4
Panama	46.0	39.9	34.8	31.3
Paraguay	51.0	47.3	43.3	39.5
Peru	31.0	28.7	26.6	24.9
Uruguay	45.2	41.1	37.5	34.2
Venezuela	35.7	32.6	30.0	27.6
<i>Caribbean</i>				
Barbados	45.6	41.9	38.4	35.0
Guyana	38.3	34.3	31.1	28.4
Jamaica	40.3	36.1	32.8	30.5
Trinidad and Tobago	38.0	34.7	31.7	28.7
<i>Latin America</i>	41.5	37.8	34.7	32.0

Source: ILO, *Labour force estimates and projections 1950-2000*, Geneva, 2nd. ed., 1977.

by half, the implications for employment policy are even more far-reaching.

Another policy-related issue which immediately catches one's attention after even a cursory examination of the composition of the labour force is the participation of young people below 14 years of age. Insertion into the labour force for pre- and early adolescents 10-14 years of age is almost insignificant in urban areas (see figure 1), where, as will be seen later, it is largely restricted to marginal groups. Yet in the rural areas of Latin America, almost half of the young people of that age group are economically active. This is related to the very low educational coverage which still persists in cer-



Table 3  
 RATES OF ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
 BETWEEN 20 AND 24 YEARS OF AGE, 1970-2000

Country	1970 20-24	1980 20-24	1990 20-24	2000 20-24
Argentina	65.3	66.1	66.5	66.6
Bolivia	59.6	60.2	61.8	64.4
Brazil	58.4	60.0	62.6	66.1
Chile	57.4	59.6	61.9	63.6
Colombia	58.8	58.5	58.6	59.5
Costa Rica	59.6	61.3	63.7	67.0
Cuba	55.8	57.2	59.4	61.3
Dominican Republic	53.5	53.2	53.3	53.8
Ecuador	60.3	61.4	63.3	66.3
El Salvador	59.5	60.0	61.2	63.5
Guatemala	54.3	54.6	54.9	55.7
Haiti	82.0	80.3	78.2	75.6
Honduras	57.6	57.1	57.4	58.1
Mexico	58.3	59.7	61.5	64.3
Nicaragua	59.2	60.1	61.8	64.5
Panama	68.0	66.5	66.1	66.8
Paraguay	62.3	63.7	65.9	69.3
Peru	54.6	55.9	58.2	61.3
Uruguay	67.1	67.8	68.3	68.3
Venezuela	56.3	58.2	60.3	62.0
<i>Caribbean</i>				
Barbados	74.4	75.6	76.7	76.9
Guyana	62.6	63.7	64.7	65.2
Jamaica	75.0	76.4	78.0	80.4
Trinidad and Tobago	65.9	67.0	67.4	67.6
<i>Latin America</i>	59.2	60.3	61.8	64.2

Source: ILO, *Labour force estimates and projections 1950-2000*, op. cit.

tain countries of the region, as well as to the fact that labour force activity of this age group is greatest where the household head is a peasant or independent subsistence farmer. Accordingly, it appears that the structure of production prevailing in household enterprises is one of the fundamental factors explaining why young people under 14 years old work.<sup>10</sup> Differences

exist among countries, but in the smaller nations and those with a large rural population this phenomenon is quite widespread. Such early entry into the labour force is also marked among indigenous groups in traditional agricultural communities, urban marginal sectors, or rural tribal communities, with entry age commonly as low as 4-6 years in the first case.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Marta Tienda, "Economic Activity of Children in Peru: Labour Force Behaviour in Rural and Urban Contexts" in *Rural Sociology*, East Lansing, Michigan, 44 (2), 1979, p. 388.

<sup>11</sup>Juan Pablo Terra, *Situación de la infancia en América Latina y el Caribe*, Santiago, UNICEF, 1979, pp. 258-269. Elias Mendelievich (editor), *Children at Work*, Geneva, ILO, 1979.

Table 4  
 RATES OF ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE  
 BETWEEN 20 AND 24 YEARS OF AGE, BY SEX, 1970-2000

Country	1970		1980		1990		2000	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Argentina	86.4	43.5	84.4	47.1	82.7	50.0	81.2	51.6
Bolivia	91.0	26.9	88.9	30.8	86.6	36.3	84.3	44.0
Brazil	88.6	28.5	86.3	33.8	84.1	41.1	82.1	50.1
Chile	82.9	31.9	80.8	38.3	79.1	41.5	77.6	49.5
Colombia	84.2	33.9	82.0	34.5	79.9	36.7	78.1	40.4
Costa Rica	91.0	27.9	88.6	33.1	86.3	40.3	84.3	49.0
Cuba	85.8	25.1	83.6	30.3	81.7	36.4	80.1	41.8
Dominican Rep.	93.1	12.9	91.1	14.5	88.9	16.8	86.5	20.1
Ecuador	93.0	27.0	90.7	31.3	88.3	37.5	86.0	45.9
El Salvador	92.1	26.1	90.0	29.5	87.8	34.4	85.4	41.3
Guatemala	92.2	16.0	90.2	18.0	88.0	20.8	85.7	24.8
Haiti	89.7	75.4	88.5	72.2	87.2	68.8	85.6	65.3
Honduras	94.8	19.2	93.1	21.0	91.2	22.3	89.0	27.1
Mexico	92.1	24.3	89.7	28.7	87.4	34.9	85.3	42.6
Nicaragua	92.2	26.0	90.0	29.9	87.7	35.5	85.3	43.2
Panama	92.6	41.9	90.2	41.7	87.8	43.3	85.7	47.0
Paraguay	93.3	31.3	91.3	35.9	88.8	42.5	86.4	51.7
Peru	82.2	26.2	80.1	31.2	78.0	37.9	76.2	46.1
Uruguay	61.8	28.1	88.6	46.4	86.8	49.2	85.3	50.8
Venezuela			81.1	34.8	79.3	40.9	77.9	45.7
<i>Caribbean</i>								
Barbados	90.8	57.5	88.6	62.2	86.8	66.0	85.3	68.1
Guyana	92.4	34.1	90.1	36.9	88.1	40.4	86.5	43.1
Jamaica	88.8	62.8	86.4	65.4	84.3	71.0	82.6	77.9
Trinidad and Tobago	90.8	42.1	88.6	45.5	86.8	48.0	85.3	49.6
<i>Latin America</i>	88.3	30.2	86.2	33.9	84.1	39.1	82.3	45.7

Source: ILO, *Labour force estimates and projections, 1950-2000*, op. cit.

### III

## Unemployment and underemployment among youth

Employment problems are the most critical and immediate issues for Latin American youth. Open unemployment is particularly acute among youth in urban areas and rates of 15% or more are common (table 5). In Venezuela (1958), 58% of all unemployed were between the ages of 15 and 24, while in major urban areas such as Bogotá and Mexico City from two-thirds to three-quarters of the unemployed are young people. The situation is not primarily

one of adolescent unemployment since, depending on the country, almost half of unemployed young people are in the 20-24 years age group. Available data indicate a varying pattern among the countries according to sex, with some countries registering a much higher incidence of unemployment among young women.

The fact that youth unemployment is the highest (usually two to three times as high as the average for all age groups) is observed

Table 5

## LATIN AMERICA: OPEN UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL UNEMPLOYMENT, BY SEXES

Country	Unemployment rate				% of total unemployment by sex		
	Age	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
Colombia (1978) seven cities	15-29	15.3	13.7	17.2	76.6	73.1	80.3
	15-19	23.0	21.7	24.5	30.7	29.9	31.8
	20-29	12.5	10.9	14.4	45.7	43.2	48.5
Bogotá (1978)	15-29	14.0	12.2	16.1	76.7	71.8	81.9
	15-19	23.0	21.6	24.4	31.5	29.6	33.4
	20-29	11.0	9.4	13.1	45.2	42.2	48.5
Mexico (1979) metropolitan area	12-24	13.5	13.3	13.8	66.0	65.4	66.2
	12-19	17.7	17.8	17.6	39.0	37.8	40.8
	20-24	10.1	9.9	10.4	27.0	27.6	25.4
Paraguay (1976) Asunción and surrounding area	12-24	11.8	12.6	11.0	60.6	56.8	70.4
	12-19	12.8	14.7	10.6	34.2	34.1	34.5
	20-24	10.8	10.2	11.4	26.4	22.7	35.9
Uruguay (1978) Dept. of Montevideo	14-24	20.0	15.0	26.5	48.1	51.7	46.0
	14-19	29.5	25.2	35.9	28.0	35.8	23.0
	20-24	13.7	7.9	21.0	20.1	15.9	23.0
Venezuela (1978)	15-24	9.9	10.6	8.1	58.1	56.5	63.5
	15-19	11.8	12.3	10.3	29.1	29.2	28.8
	20-24	8.5	9.2	6.9	29.0	27.3	34.7
Venezuela (1980) Urban areas	15-24	13.6	-	-	58.0	-	-
	15-19	17.1	-	-	27.3	-	-
	20-24	11.5	-	-	30.7	-	-
Jamaica (1975)	14-24	38.0	25.3	52.2	-	-	-
Barbados (1970)	14-24	30.0	22.0	40.0	-	-	-

Source: National household and employment surveys of the respective countries.

in both developing and developed countries alike. But the significance in the case of Latin America is different, since these unemployed young people are very seldom students seeking part-time or vacation employment. Nor does the existence of minimum wage laws seem to be a decisive factor in the high rates of youth unemployment, as is suggested in the case of Venezuela, where after the introduction of a minimum wage in 1974 no significant change in youth unemployment occurred.<sup>12</sup> Two other

findings with policy implications emerge from empirical research on Latin American patterns of youth unemployment: (a) a great deal of the present high youth unemployment is related to very high turnover rates among young people who are able to find only precarious or casual jobs and (b) the burden of youth unemployment is also unevenly distributed across young people, falling heaviest on those from the low socio-economic urban strata, who experience serious and prolonged difficulties in the labour market (table 6).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> IBRD, *Current Economic Position and Prospects of Venezuela*, Washington, D.C., Vol. III, 15 March 1977, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>In the case of youth 15-18 years of age in a low-income area of Santiago, Chile, the unemployment rate in

Table 6  
 YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT ACCORDING TO CONDITION  
 OF POVERTY: SELECTED COUNTRIES

(Percentages)

Age	Buenos Aires (1970)		Urban areas of Colombia (1975)		Urban areas of Venezuela (1971)	
	Critically poor	Not critically poor	Critically poor	Not critically poor	Critically poor	Not critically poor
15-19 Total	18.3	13.5	21.3	8.2	9.7	12.6
Men	11.8	7.8	21.1	13.4	14.3	16.8
Women	27.3	21.7	21.6	5.3	1.7	6.2
20-24 Total	21.6	7.3	15.1	6.3	16.6	12.6
Men	25.0	6.1	15.9	7.7	20.4	14.3
Women	16.0	8.7	13.8	5.2	9.8	8.6

Source: Fernando Galofré, *Perfiles de infancia y juventud en Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica y Venezuela*, CEPAL, August 1981. Tables E-14.

Note: The critical poverty line for urban areas is defined here as twice the indigency line, which in turn applies to those low-income urban families who spend half or more of their total income on food.

Because of its highly visible nature, open unemployment is the indicator most often referred to in discussions of youth employment problems. It is by no means the most significant issue in Latin America, however, where conditions of underemployment comprise the greatest part of the employment problem. Entrance of youth into 'dead-end' jobs and the plight of young people who are not active in the labour force but are not attending school either help to extend critical poverty to future generations. In this context, dead-end jobs are not exclusively low-wage positions, since these can also be transitional jobs. Their distinguishing characteristic is that most often they offer precarious occasional employment with little prospect either of a stable career pattern or useful training and experience. It is this factor,

coupled with the fact that the young people employed in them have little or no skills or education, which distinguishes them from jobs that may offer low wages to youth initially but compensate by increasing their skills.

Marginal youth and those from low income strata are commonly to be found in these circumstances. Data on youth employment in a marginal area of Santiago, Chile, for 1975 show that among young people in the 15-18 year age group who were employed, 43% were either in casual jobs or ones with fluctuating income (table 7). Another 14% worked as domestic servants and 12% in the government Minimum Employment Plan. Only 25% had regular jobs with steady incomes, and of these half worked as messenger boys or maintenance workers. Of those who were reported as not in the labour force, 15% had no activity at all. An analysis of results from the year-end 1979 First Community Census of Uruguay is indicative of the particularly critical situation of urban marginal youth. Of the non-employed youth of both sexes from marginal areas of Montevideo, 100% had either dropped out of school or were more

1975 was 34%; of those without jobs, 56% had held previous jobs. See Margarita Gili and Marta Illanes, *El empleo juvenil en una comuna del Gran Santiago. Un estudio de caso*, Chile, Ministerio del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Instituto Laboral y de Desarrollo Social, pp. 56-57.

than four years behind in their studies by the age of seventeen.<sup>14</sup>

The scarce prospects of upward mobility for rural and marginal urban youth are also exemplified in the Brazilian case, where it has been estimated that less than 2% of young people whose fathers are rural labourers can expect to reach higher occupational or income levels. Almost 90% of the children of manual urban workers and 60% of the children of non-manual urban workers occupy positions similar to those of their fathers. Even in the case of slightly better-off families, only 20% of students enrolled in the secondary 'gimnasio' level come from families whose parents hold manual jobs (including those in manual supervisory positions).<sup>15</sup>

Young women among the lowest strata face even more obstacles to intergenerational occupational mobility. If only men are consid-

ered it may be seen that a somewhat greater degree of mobility exists than indicated by the global data for Brazil just referred to, and that mobility is mainly to be found at both extremes of the scales of income distribution and social stratification. The upward mobility for low-strata young men indicated here is primarily related to rural-urban migration, which at least provides access to manual jobs in the secondary and service sectors for those coming from the countryside.

In spite of the somewhat greater degree of mobility which may be discerned from a more detailed analysis of the data, the vicious circle affecting low-strata youth remains strong. For these young people the possibilities of upward occupational mobility are still quite limited. Findings from the analysis of Brazil indicate much higher levels of insertion at an early age into the labour force in the case of young people from the poorest families. Eighty-two percent of the children from these families begin working before 14 years of age and 95% are in the labour force before 17 years of age. This contrasts with children from other income categories, of whom 45% had labour force experience before age 17 and only a small minority before 14 years of age.<sup>16</sup>

The Santiago, Chile, data show that the participation rate for youth in the 15-18 years group from the same low-income area referred to above was over 80% more than for the same age group in the entire metropolitan area, and the participation rate of young people from families whose total income was less than the legal minimum wage was 45.6% —almost two and a half times that of young people in the same area whose families earned the minimum wage or above.<sup>17</sup>

From the preceding information it is clear that family income is a highly influential variable in determining the age of incorpora-

Table 7

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF YOUTH  
15-18 YEARS OF AGE ACCORDING TO  
TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT SITUATION,  
LA GRANJA, SANTIAGO (CHILE)

Employment situation	Percentage
Fixed wage employment	25.0
Fluctuating income employment	11.8
Domestic service	14.5
Non-paid family workers	5.3
Occasional workers	31.6
Minimum Employment Plan	11.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: Gili and Illanes, *El empleo juvenil*, *op. cit.*, table 19.

<sup>14</sup>Ernesto Schiefelbein and Reynaldo Franco, *Elementos para la definición de una política social y educativa para comunidades marginadas*, Santiago, Centro Interamericano de Enseñanza de Estadística, 1981.

<sup>15</sup>Victor Tokman, *Dinámica de los mercados de trabajo y distribución del ingreso en América Latina*, Santiago, Programa Regional del Empleo para América Latina y el Caribe (PREALC), 1979; David L. Wiñar, *Educación técnica y estructura social en América Latina*, Buenos Aires, UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1981.

<sup>16</sup>Tokman, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>Gili and Illanes, *op. cit.* Other data from Chile show that only 3% of those children whose parents are illiterate finish secondary education, 10% reach eighth grade; 43% of children whose parents have a primary education finish elementary education and 12% secondary education. See Ernesto Schiefelbein and María Grossi, *Antecedentes para un análisis de la educación media en Chile*, Santiago, 1981, Corporación de Promoción Universitaria.

tion into the labour force. Recent studies have concluded that it is also a determining factor regarding the *conditions* of incorporation, particularly with respect to hours worked and continuation of school attendance. In this context a strong contrast has been found between the characteristics of young workers 15-19 years of age in Latin America and their counterparts in developed countries. In the latter countries there are indications of an increasing blurring of the distinction between being in school or in the labour markets as young people search for part-time work, especially in the secondary labour market, while remaining in school.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, youth who choose such a school/work option—which, given the structure and functioning of labour markets in developed economies, probably eases their transition into working life—exercise a primary role as students. In Latin American countries such as Brazil and Chile the reverse has been found to be the case; in terms of the hours and conditions of each of these activities such young people are primarily workers who study, usually part-time in evening programmes designed for adult and not youth education needs.<sup>19</sup>

Family income level and unemployment of the head of the family are not the only variables affecting a young person's choice between continuing regular daytime schooling or entering the labour market. Studies for Latin American countries have shown a broad set of other variables to be operating. From the perspective of policy foundation it is also significant that the relative influence of all variables changes according to the age of the young person, rural or urban residence and sex. Among the most significant of the other variables are: family structure, including size of the domestic group and the type of headship; social background (particularly the educational level of parents and existence of household enter-

prise); prevalent attitudes of parents and the different incentives received by the young person derived from his relation with them; cultural and institutional restrictions; labour market conditions, and degrees of information as to jobs available.<sup>20</sup>

In urban areas family income levels, family social background, social values and legal restrictions are determining factors for those approximately in the 10-14 years age group. The implications with regard to public policy are that the primary focus is probably best placed on labour markets and on improving the incomes of household heads or principal earners. From these perspectives, policies concentrating on reducing underemployment would seem to be more effective than providing more job opportunities, particularly for those families that consist largely of children and have little or no unemployed adult labour potential. Such households could also be helped directly by policies aimed at improving children's welfare.<sup>21</sup>

For the 15-19 years age group, the attitudes and the differences in the incentive relationship existing between the young person and his mother or father and the specific characteristics of the educational system take on much greater importance, together with family income level. In the case of young people 20-24 years old labour market conditions, salary levels, perceived opportunity costs, and social and occupational expectations weigh more heavily in their choice between post-secondary schooling and entrance into the labour market. This last

<sup>18</sup>OECD, *Youth Unemployment - The Causes and Consequences*, Paris, 1980.

<sup>19</sup>José Paulo Zeetano Chahad, *Participação dos jovens na força de trabalho de São Paulo*, Master's Thesis, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of São Paulo, 1975. In Santiago, Chile, 62% of the students attending adult evening education classes are under 26 years of age, 23% are under 16 years and only 30% have a stable job. *El Mercurio*, Santiago, 23 June 1980.

<sup>20</sup>Zeetano, *ibid.*, pp. 12-18; Gili, *ibid.*, pp. 34-51; Henry Kirsch, "Employment and the utilization of human resources in Latin America", *Economic Bulletin for Latin America*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 and 2, pp. 56-57; John Paul Walker, *The Economics of Labour Force Participation of Urban Slum-Barrío Youth in Cali, Colombia: A Case Study*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1970; Marta Tienda, "Economic Activity of Children in Peru", *op. cit.*, pp. 379-391.

<sup>21</sup>Philip Musgrove, "Household Size and Composition, Employment and Poverty in Urban Latin America"; in *Economic Development and Cultural Change*; Fernando Galofré, *Formulación de políticas de infancia y juventud en familias pobres*, paper presented to the CEPAL seminar on policies to achieve a minimum welfare level, 2-6 November 1981; Schiefelbein and Franco, *Elementos para la definición de una política social y educativa para comunidades marginales*, *op. cit.*

point raises the question of the relation between education and employment for youth in a region characterized by long-standing segmentation, social differentiation and rigidity in its social systems. Whatever mobility has existed, it has not been equal for all groups. The access channels have changed and are narrowing in given national situations.

Not even post-primary technical schools give the assurance of higher occupational levels and social mobility for the lower strata that was expected of them. Although technical education has permitted some mobility, the characteristics of the occupational structure maintain a low and relatively unyielding ceiling over youth from low urban strata who have completed these courses of study. Post-primary technical schools may even receive a significant enrollment of middle, and in cases upper-strata youth, as has been discovered in studies for Argentina and Brazil. Conversely the children of skilled manual workers have been found to be under-represented in total secondary education and a very limited proportion of young people from unskilled manual labour families are found in technical schools. In Colombia students with only primary education were differentiated from those with post-secondary technical training or secondary education on the basis of the socio-economic level of the parents, and the data suggest that post-secondary education was associated with the condition of parental modern sector employment.<sup>22</sup>

What becomes apparent when dealing

with the problems of youth in Latin America is the need for an integrated long-range strategy that focusses on global structural aspects of youth from the perspective of interaction with the family and on the changing importance of the various intervening variables according to social strata and the age of the young person.

More immediately, it would also appear that such typically short-run measures as lowering the minimum wage for youth, as has been recommended or applied recently in some countries of the region which have applied stabilization measures with concurrent increased open unemployment, are unsatisfactory policy responses. Policy measures must go beyond the mere creation of more employment possibilities, many of which, especially in the case of Latin America, may be expected to be 'dead-end' jobs in the informal sector. In any event, in addition to relative wage costs, non-wage labour costs especially relevant for the formal sector, such as payroll taxes for unemployment insurance, health and other social security benefits, pension contributions, training costs, fringe benefits such as holiday pay, etc., must be considered. If enough empirical evidence can be mustered to show that trends in the relative real cost of youth labour account for part of the present youth employment problem, any desired reduction could be achieved by direct wage subsidies tied to the employment of youth, the payment of apprenticeship allowances, or by negative subsidies such as lowering or abolishing payroll taxes on youth.

## IV

### Education and the range of employment opportunities for youth

One of the thorniest problems now under intense debate in Latin America is the adequacy of existing educational systems and structures as a meaningful vehicle for preparing youth to participate fully in the development process of

the region.<sup>23</sup> Such participation must be understood in a total sense, first in terms of the intellectual growth *per se* of the individual, then from the perspective of its effects on societal

<sup>22</sup> D. Wiñar, *Educación técnica, op. cit.*, pp. 19, 39, 44, 55.

<sup>23</sup> CEPAL, together with UNESCO and UNDP, has sponsored a project on Development and Education in Latin America which, up to its conclusion in November

relations, and finally as a preparation for livelihood. Here only the third will be discussed.

The vigorous expansion of education in Latin America since the 1960s is certainly one of the most striking social changes that has occurred in the region. Previous CEPAL studies have indicated that for the State the concentration of this expansion in secondary and higher education seemed to be the least expensive and least conflictive means of responding to social pressures and postponing decisions over the redistribution of power and wealth, while at the same time generating developmental dividends in terms of improved employment opportunities and labour force productivity. A glance at the present situations in most of Latin America, however, demonstrates that the changes in the region's labour markets stemming from the structurally heterogeneous style of development prevalent until now have had effects on the role of education that raise formidable questions concerning the future viability of its evolution along the lines hitherto pursued.<sup>24</sup> Education must be considered within the context of the social and economic processes which have conditioned its development in the region. Moreover, education should not be criticized for not having single-handedly solved problems of unemployment and underemployment which require broad-based structural changes.

At one extreme, the expansion of higher education has gone far beyond the correction of a situation of inequitable and self-perpetuating distribution of opportunities to acquire the qualifications needed and rewarded by the prevailing style of development, and has led to an entrenchment of spurious education leading to deteriorating levels of entry into the labour market. At the other extreme, primary education of such poor quality as to be equally spuri-

ous confirms the marginalization of much of the population from a style of development that in any case has little need for them.<sup>25</sup>

As regards the problem of open unemployment among youth, comparative data which include detailed age groupings and schooling levels are available only from the 1970 census round. These data indicate that the situation varied from country to country (table 8). Generally, however, it appears that the expected positive relation between higher educational levels and lower rates of unemployment is found to exist. This trend is clearly confirmed at the level of capital city and other urban areas (table 9). Since open unemployment is predominantly an urban phenomenon and not very common in the rural areas, the lack of a stronger association at the national level between low educational levels and high unemployment is not surprising. Once again, at all educational levels, open unemployment for the 20-24 years age group is much higher than for those 25-29 years of age.

A certain stepwise pattern seems to emerge in urban areas (table 9). For men, open unemployment declines gradually with increased elementary schooling. Completed basic education appears to represent a plateau. Those who leave school with incomplete secondary education have somewhat increased difficulties and considerably less unemployment is registered at completed secondary levels. For young women, however, completed secondary education is associated with very high levels of unemployment. The relatively lower unemployment rates among illiterate and poorly educated women probably reflect their high degree of participation in domestic service jobs, cottage industry and other informal sector occupations where education is not a decisive factor. Such jobs are more available in the metropolitan areas and this probably explains the overall high unemployment among women in other urban areas. Educated young women with secondary or higher education encounter more difficulty than their male counterparts in

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1981, has published over fifty studies. For the 1980s UNESCO is launching a major effort in this problem area in the form of a principal project on education in Latin America.

<sup>24</sup>CEPAL, *Structure and Dynamics of Development in Latin America and Their Implications for Education*, document presented at the Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and those Responsible for Economic Planning of Member States in Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico City, 4-13 December 1979.

<sup>25</sup>Marshall Wolfe, *Styles of Development and Education: A Stocktaking of Myths, Prescriptions and Potentialities*, UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development, and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, September 1980, p. 3.



Table 8

## LATIN AMERICAN: OPEN UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG YOUTH, ACCORDING TO EDUCATIONAL LEVEL, FOR SEVEN COUNTRIES OF THE REGION CIRCA 1970

(Percentages)

Country	Years of study	20 to 24 years		25 to 29 years	
		Unemployed over labour force of same educational level	Distribution of total number of unemployed	Unemployed over labour force of same educational level	Distribution of total number of unemployed
Argentina	00-03	3.05	13.36	1.51	14.44
	04-06	2.53	12.85	1.86	20.22
	07-12	3.44	68.45	1.55	57.51
	13 +	2.33	5.34	1.26	7.83
Chile	00-03	5.43	14.28	4.28	22.58
	04-06	6.04	35.40	4.24	40.30
	07-12	7.83	46.08	3.25	32.27
	13 +	7.27	4.24	2.45	4.85
Colombia	00-03	1.71	23.46	1.58	30.79
	04-06	0.36	35.58	2.58	33.06
	07-12	4.33	35.86	2.57	26.58
	13 +	6.22	5.10	3.80	9.56
Costa Rica	00-03	6.52	25.48	4.77	38.83
	04-06	5.25	45.72	3.56	41.76
	07-12	5.11	25.48	2.18	17.58
	13 +	4.17	3.32	1.18	1.83
El Salvador	00-03	18.31	54.97	13.09	62.09
	04-06	19.74	30.69	12.47	26.26
	07-12	20.66	14.02	9.74	9.78
	13 +	8.33	0.32	10.62	1.87
Honduras	00-03	1.45	28.15	0.80	39.82
	04-06	3.65	40.17	1.86	38.05
	07-12	7.07	30.50	1.93	22.12
	13 +	3.88	1.17	-	-
Mexico	00-03	3.90	39.01	3.61	57.01
	04-06	4.82	39.35	3.42	33.09
	07-12	4.13	14.80	1.81	6.29
	13 +	7.97	6.84	2.11	3.60

Source: UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, *La educación y los problemas del empleo*, Informes Finales N.º 3, October 1981, table 47.

keeping out of the ranks of the unemployment.

For countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia and Costa Rica, the concentration of unemployed youth among the unskilled

and poorly educated has policy implications for setting priorities which coincide with those of the last section in terms of the need for more schooling. In countries with wider middle and

Table 9  
LATIN AMERICA: OPEN UNEMPLOYMENT  
RATES AMONG YOUTH 20-29 YEARS OF AGE,  
BY SEX AND AREA, ACCORDING TO  
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

(Percentages)

Educational level	Total country	Capital	Other urban	Rural
<i>Both sexes</i>				
No education <sup>a</sup>	5.7	9.7	8.9	5.0
1 to 3 years <sup>a</sup>	5.8	8.4	7.8	4.5
4 to 6 years <sup>a</sup>	6.9	8.1	7.6	5.3
7 to 9 years <sup>b</sup>	5.6	5.3	6.2	3.5
10 to 12 years <sup>b</sup>	7.3	6.9	6.4	2.7
13 and over <sup>b</sup>	5.9	5.8	6.3	6.9
<i>Men</i>				
No education <sup>a</sup>	4.9	13.5	8.9	3.7
1 to 3 years <sup>a</sup>	4.9	10.0	7.7	3.3
4 to 6 years <sup>a</sup>	6.3	8.4	7.2	4.2
7 to 9 years <sup>b</sup>	5.9	5.8	6.6	3.2
10 to 12 years <sup>b</sup>	9.2	7.9	7.8	3.9
13 and over <sup>b</sup>	5.1	4.8	5.7	4.7
<i>Women</i>				
No education <sup>a</sup>	8.1	6.3	8.5	8.4
1 to 3 years <sup>a</sup>	8.8	6.3	8.0	10.2
4 to 6 years <sup>a</sup>	8.8	7.6	8.6	10.3
7 to 9 years <sup>b</sup>	4.9	4.3	5.5	4.6
10 to 12 years <sup>b</sup>	4.5	5.3	4.6	4.7
13 and over <sup>b</sup>	7.3	7.5	7.3	9.5

Source: OMUECE 1970, Programa Uniforme, table 20. UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, *La educación y los problemas del empleo*, Informes Finales N.º 3, October 1981, table 29.

<sup>a</sup>Average of 15 countries: Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela.

<sup>b</sup>Average of 6 countries: Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Paraguay.

higher educational coverage, such as Argentina and to a lesser extent Chile, the unemployed with some or even complete secondary education account for a high percentage of all the unemployed in the 20-24 years age group.

The vastly expanded supply of people with higher education in such countries has set in motion pressures for 'acceptable' jobs for

which high school graduates and dropouts are in respectively worse positions to compete. The possibilities of upward mobility for secondary graduates have become curtailed with the rising importance of the large private and State enterprises. Varying combinations of capital intensity and technological and administrative complexity limit their possibilities of gaining employment with such employers, who prefer university graduates. On the other hand the substantial increase in the supply of university-educated young people has led them to compete in segments of the labour market traditionally reserved for graduates of secondary education.<sup>26</sup> In the case of women it is by now a well-known fact that in the region, as elsewhere a higher educational background is usually demanded of them than of men. Also, the general academic curriculum often imparted to lower-middle and middle-middle strata girls provides them with no marketable skills in a labour market which, in any case, has a narrow range of job opportunities open to them.

In summary, for many countries open unemployment among educated youth did not seem to be the most important aspect of the youth unemployment problem at the beginning of the last decade. It is also important to recall that for some cities of Latin America at the end of the 1960s empirical studies have shown education to be a highly significant discriminatory variable, particularly at the level of completed primary education in relation to poverty.<sup>27</sup> Already by the beginning of the last decade those between the ages of 20 and 29 who had less than three years of elementary schooling were practically excluded from jobs in the modern tertiary sector. They had great difficulty in obtaining jobs as drivers and industrial workers, and for the most part are only to be found in agriculture and in the urban informal sector.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Viñar, *op. cit.*, pp. 34 and 55.

<sup>27</sup>Philip Musgrove and Robert Ferber, "Identifying the Urban Poor: Characteristics of Poverty Households in Bogotá, Medellín, and Lima", in *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1979.

<sup>28</sup>Juan Pablo Terra, *Alfabetismo y escolarización básica de los jóvenes en América Latina*, UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1980, tables 42, 43 and 44.

In terms of reducing poverty and improving human welfare, eradication of illiteracy among youth and the expansion of primary school coverage, particularly to young people in rural areas, could hardly fail to be the subject of *immediate priority attention* by governments. As has already been seen, such measures would have to be placed within a broad range of policies designed to improve family income levels and the welfare of children if more than piecemeal or mere showcase effects are to be achieved.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the 1980s as the rural-urban shift continues, young people with a secondary education are no longer only a small percentage of their age group in many countries of the region.<sup>29</sup> Enrollments in higher education have increased rapidly in the region, and the term 'massification' has been applied to this process in many countries, where over 10% of the 20-24 years age group are enrolled in university.<sup>30</sup> Youth are now confronted by increasing tension of maladjustment between higher educational credentials and inadequate availability of middle and upper-strata employment opportunities. Although the current recessionary economic climate certainly does not help to reduce the problem, the basic reasons are more structural in nature, as better-educated young people for some years now have been finding that their credentials do not earn the privileges, social mobility or income levels anticipated. At the same time that a greater portion of 20-24 year-old young people in middle-strata occupations and above have higher education, relatively fewer of the better-

educated youth have been able to gain employment at these levels (table 10).<sup>31</sup>

In the modern or growth sector numerous changes of both a social and economic nature have conditioned the educational requirements for entry into such jobs. Education now tends to act as a proxy variable for the social and behavioural traits which indicate the adaptability, learning potential and discipline required in modern, hierarchical and bureaucratic enterprises. The presence of a rapidly expanding educated labour force has produced a situation in which the demands for more years of education are outpacing the rate at which the real cognitive requirements for accomplishing formal sector jobs are expanding. In the industrial sector, recruitment criteria have undergone substantial modifications and the mere number of years of schooling appears increasingly important. Although in some cases of technical advance jobs have become more complex and require higher scientific-technical skills, in others the tasks have been simplified, are merely repetitive, and require primarily the ability to accommodate oneself to the work rhythm imposed by the machine. Furthermore, the assumption that formal education is the instrument which effectively provides the necessary skills for satisfactory performance in the new jobs created through technological development has been seriously questioned. In the case of Argentina, for example, it has been shown that in the industrial sector the same kind of jobs are carried out by individuals with the most diverse educational levels. On the other hand, a given type of education (in this case, technical) qualifies a person for access to a wide variety of jobs, the majority of which have no relation to the formal training received.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of the poor interaction between educational output by type of skills and the real

<sup>29</sup>In Ecuador in 1965-1966, only 13% of the 15-19 years age group were enrolled in secondary education, but in 1977 over 30% attended secondary school, while university enrollment had grown from 3% of the 20-24 years age group to 12% in 1975. See Gladys Pozo de Ruiz and Ernesto Schiefelbein, "Los problemas de la expansión acelerada: el caso del desarrollo del sistema educacional del Ecuador", in *Estudios Sociales* (Santiago, Chile), No. 26, fourth quarter of 1980, table 5.

<sup>30</sup>In 1978 the group included Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Jamaica, Uruguay and Venezuela. See UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook, 1980*. Also see Jaime Rodríguez, *El concepto de masificación*, UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, *Fichas* No. 4, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> See also Carlos Filgueira and Carlo Geneletti, *Estratificación ocupacional, modernización social y desarrollo económico en América Latina*, CEPAL, Social Development Division, November 1978, pp. 163-175.

<sup>32</sup>Juan Carlos Tedesco, "Algunas características de educación e industrialización en América Latina", paper presented to the first seminar of the UNESCO/CEPAL/UNDP project on Development and Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, Quito, 13-17 September 1977; Wiñar, *Educación técnica*, *op. cit.*

**Table 10**  
**CHANGES IN THE INSERTION OF YOUTH 20-24 YEARS OF AGE**  
**WITH 13 YEARS AND MORE OF EDUCATION INTO MIDDLE**  
**AND UPPER STRATA OCCUPATIONS, 1960-1970**

(Percentages)

Countries	1960		1970	
	% of middle/ upper strata 20-24 year old jobholders with 13+ years of education	% of 20-24 year old group with 13+ years of education in middle/ upper strata jobs	% of middle/ upper strata 20-24 year old jobholders with 13+ years of education	% of 20-24 years old group with 13+ years of education in middle/upper strata jobs
Argentina	12.6	76.4	19.7	76.7
Chile	7.1	93.1	12.1	83.8
Colombia	3.7	92.4	7.9	84.6
Costa Rica	16.2	92.2	14.8	89.9
Mexico	2.4	82.5	10.8	69.0

Source: OMUECE 1970, Special Programme, table 4;  
 OMUECE 1960, Special Programme, tables 2 and 3.

technical needs of the economies, formal educational requirements unrelated to substantive work requirements are used as screening devices, thus reserving the more desirable jobs for the social strata whose children are able to acquire these credentials. It is not yet entirely clear how schooling differentiates labour. Number of years of education is certainly a prime consideration but the relationship is not one-dimensional and linear. A diploma of completed secondary school education, for example, opens the door to non-manual occupations; achievement of literacy brings obvious advantages to many informal sector workers and minifundistas, and graduation from a prestigious university is of prime importance in those countries where the number of institutions of higher education has mushroomed in the last two decades. But to the extent that middle and higher education expand more rapidly than the supply of appropriate jobs, higher educational barriers are continually applied in respect of lower-status clerical jobs and even manual occupations. The relative 'over-expansion' of

middle and higher education has been accompanied by cosmetic changes in the names and legal status of occupations, reflected in a differential growth of urban middle and upper occupational strata whose real meaning in terms of improved employment levels and productivity is thereby obscured.<sup>33</sup> 'Workers' are reclassified as 'employees' or 'technicians'; sub-professional specializations receive professional titles. This trend, together with the fact that educational supply creates its own demand, has already had significant consequences for the expansion of public bureaucracies whose contribution to the development process has been questioned. For example, it has been estimated that in Brazil the public sector has been absorbing almost 50% of total 'white-collar' employment in the non-agricultural sectors, while between 1970 and 1975 public sector employment in Argentina ex-

<sup>33</sup> CEPAL, *Desarrollo humano y cambio social y crecimiento en América Latina, Cuadernos de la CEPAL* Series No. 3, Santiago, 1975, pp. 31-36 and 46-48.

panded at an annual rate of 5.6% compared with 0.9% in the period 1960-1970.<sup>34</sup>

Yet another problem is that the rapidity of growth in the number and enrollments of middle and higher institutions often results in a general deterioration of the quality of instruction, with a wide gap between the quality or prestige of the titles issued by different institutions. To the extent that formal educational qualifications for employment become divorced from work needs, there is no external check on the dilution of quality. Likewise, to the extent that employers seek real technical qualifications, they give credit to the diplomas of only a few elite institutions, and increasingly support

private institutions so as to obtain a dependable supply.

Consequently, an increasing proportion of better-educated young people in Latin America are finding themselves barred from entering jobs of the social prestige and income level that they had expected. Meanwhile, the possibilities for the absorption of the output of higher education graduates into bureaucratic jobs which provide some degree of status, even if not satisfying salary aspirations, may be reaching their limit. Various governments have begun to react by restricting university enrollments, while at the same time anti-bureaucracy campaigns have made inroads on this sector of the labour market. The foregoing elements form the basis of yet another source of future social tension as a higher proportion of educated youth, continually increasing through demographic growth and the momentum of middle-strata expansion, confronts the mismatch between their expectations and the level of occupations open to them.

<sup>34</sup>Paulo Renato Souza, *La segmentación del mercado de trabajo urbano y las disparidades de salarios en economías subdesarrolladas*, Santiago, PREALC, 1977, p. 32; Juan José Ilach, "Estructura ocupacional y dinámica del empleo en la Argentina: sus peculiaridades 1947-1970", in *Desarrollo Económico*, 17:68, Buenos Aires, January-March 1978.