

Youth transitions in Latin America and the Caribbean: the role of families and policies

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I. Introduction

There is a growing recognition in Latin America and the Caribbean of the link between fluid youth transitions from education to the world of work and the future growth and productivity of countries, as well as the ability to respond more effectively to the demands of a changing labor market. This becomes even more relevant in the current context of the demographic dividend, as many countries in the region still have the ability to take advantage of this window of opportunity. Thus, youth transitions have become more visible in the public agenda as a focus of action. From another perspective, the rise of a rights-based approach in public policies calls for expanding access to the right to quality education and decent work for all young people, particularly those in situations of vulnerability and those who experience discrimination and exclusion, to provide them with the tools to build paths of inclusion and disrupt the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality.

Today these transitions take various forms, do not follow a standardized pattern and are often not linear. Irrespective of this, it is clear that transitions can be supported and promoted or, on the contrary, hindered by contextual factors. However, policies that seek to support the transition of young people tend to establish their locus of action on the youth themselves, with less attention dedicated to their context. This is the case of families, which, despite being an institution that is still central in the lives of young people, receives little attention in public policies and in the reflection and empirical research on youth transitions in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This paper attempts to fill this gap by providing an updated picture of youth activity in the region, as well as characterizing their family situation based on an analysis of household surveys and a policy review. We consider young people not only as members of families, mainly as sons and daughters, but also the situation of young people who are heads of household. The main question posed by this study is: what kind of policies can support families, both families that have young people among their members, as well as those that have young people as heads of families to build successful paths that lead to social and economic inclusion?

An approach to these issues would be deficient without recognizing the great diversity of Latin American and Caribbean youth. This is why youth trajectories and families are analyzed through the prism of the social inequality matrix that proposes five axes that structure inequality in the region: the socioeconomic stratum, gender, ethnic/racial condition, territory and stage of the life cycle, in this case, the youth (ECLAC, 2016). These axes intersect, accumulate and reinforce each other to configure structures of opportunities and situations of exclusion (or in contrast, inclusion). In this context, policies must assume and respond to the heterogeneous realities and experiences of young people and their families.

II. What do young people in Latin America do? An updated analysis of youth activity in relation to education and labour market insertion

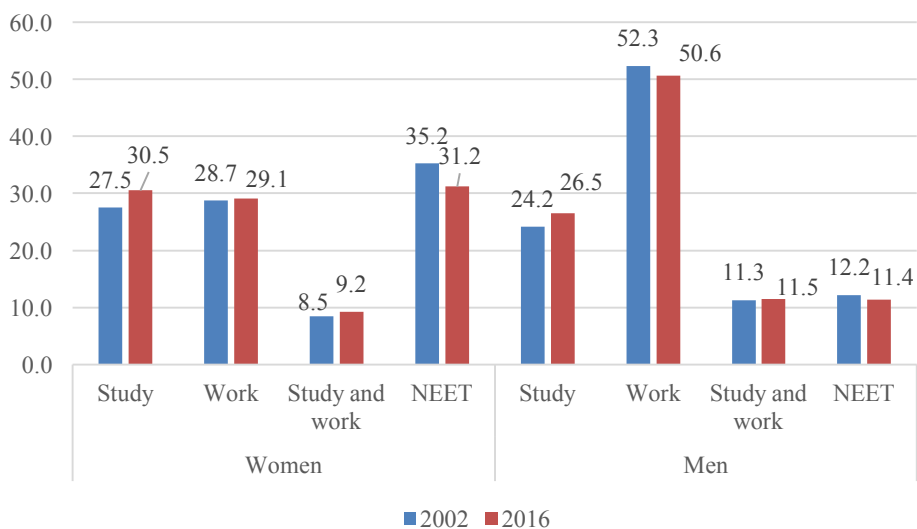
Historically, the transition from childhood to adulthood has been understood as a linear process whereby individuals advance move from one stage to another, each with its defined social and cultural role (education, entry into the workforce, the establishment of individual independence, marriage, parenthood). However, these notions are increasingly being questioned. First, uneven starting conditions and the opportunities available thereof, have generated a more heterogeneous set of paths for the transition to autonomy. It is also true that this process no longer exhibits the continuity that it once did. This branching-out of life paths is not only a result of young people's desire to continue their studies and put off certain

kinds of roles or activities that people used to undertake earlier in life; it is also —and perhaps mainly— a consequence of structural factors that are beyond individuals’ control, including the socioeconomic conditions in which they are raised, in other words, in their families (Espejo and Espíndola, 2015).

This section presents a statistical portrait of the distribution of young people in activities relating to the educational system and the world of work. It is important to note that, due to the characteristics of the data sources that are used, the classification of young people on the basis of their ties to these two links in the development chain (education and employment) is a static picture of the situation at a given point in time and as such we cannot comment on transitions per se.

As illustrated in figure 1, according to evidence from household surveys, the percentage of youth in Latin America who study exclusively has risen between 2002 and 2016, for both men and women, and it is young women who are participating exclusively in education more than men. This is generally encouraging, as it suggests an expansion in education opportunities for young men and women in the region. Other gender differences emerge. For example, a majority of young men, just over 50% works exclusively, while for young women, the main activity is more evenly divided, with just under a third in each category for studies exclusively, works exclusively and NEET. Clearly, these data indicate that the education advantage experienced by women is not translated into the labour market, suggesting the existence of barriers or challenges that hinder their transition to the labour market.

Figure 1. Latin America (18 countries): main activity of youth ages 15 to 29 by sex, 2002 and 2016
(Percentages)



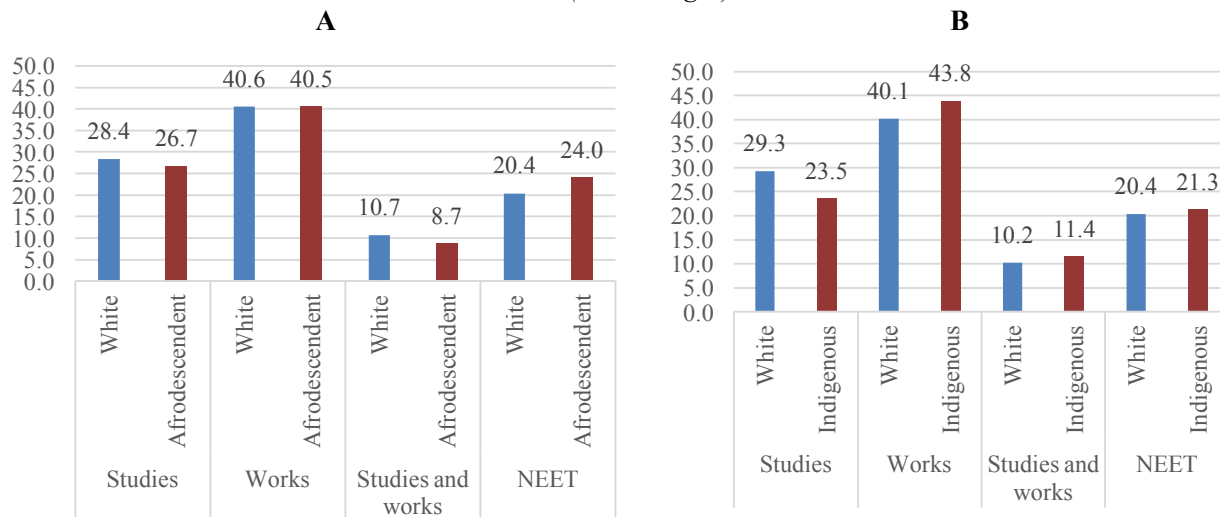
Source: ECLAC based on special tabulations of household surveys.

A commonly invoked statistic for the region is that 1 in 5 Latin American youth in neither in education, training or employed (NEET). This figure, however, conceals marked gender disparities, as can be appreciated in figure 1. Indeed, almost three times as many women than men are NEET, although the percentage of youth in this category declined between 2002 and 2016 for both young men and women. Many of these women had to stop working or studying to care for their children or other family members, in the absence of other options for reasonably priced high-quality care services.

Just as the trends vary by sex, they do so as well by other axes of the social inequality matrix. For example, afrodescendent youth are less likely to be studying and more likely to be NEET than white youth (figure 2

panel A). These patterns are consistent with those seen for indigenous youth, who also are more likely to be working than white youth (figure 2 panel B).

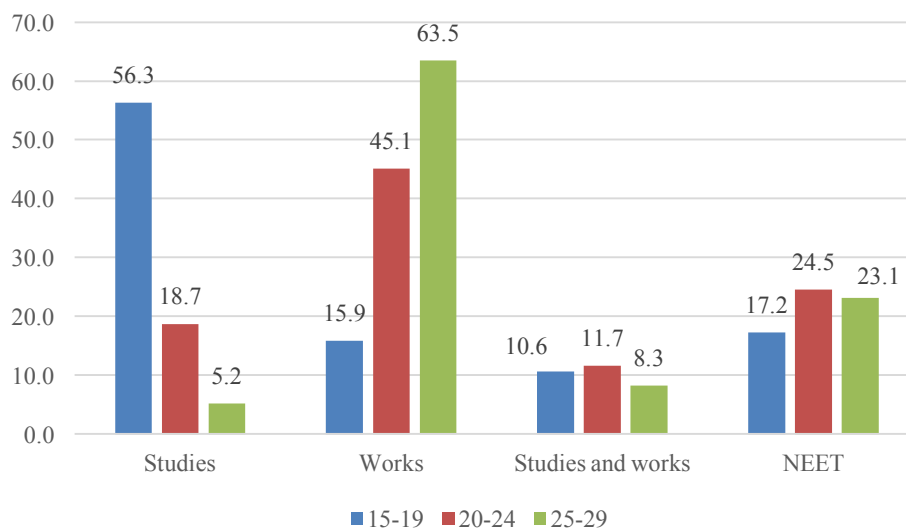
Figure 2. Latin America: main activity of youth 15 to 29 years of age by race (A – six countries) and ethnicity (B – ten countries), 2016
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC based on household surveys of the following countries: A Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay; B: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay.

A final dimension of analysis is age (figure 3). Some expected patterns emerge here. For example, youth 15 to 19 years of age tend to be studying exclusively, whereas youth 25 to 29 are more likely to work exclusively. A similar percentage of youth are involved in both activities, regardless of their age, around 10%, and NEET youth are concentrated among older youth, suggesting that it is in these age groups, 20 to 24 and 25 to 29 where transitions can stall.

Figure 3. Latin America (18 countries): main activity of youth by age group, 2016
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC based on special tabulations of household surveys.

This section provided a statistical portrait of the main activity of youth in the region, and as expected, the heterogeneous experiences of youth along the axes that structure inequality in the region were observed. These results shed light and provide clues as to aspects that will be important to consider when developing and implementing policies to facilitate youth transitions. Indeed, it is important to draw out these differences, to have a more precise picture of the situation of youth, so that policies may be adequately tailored to respond to the specific challenges.

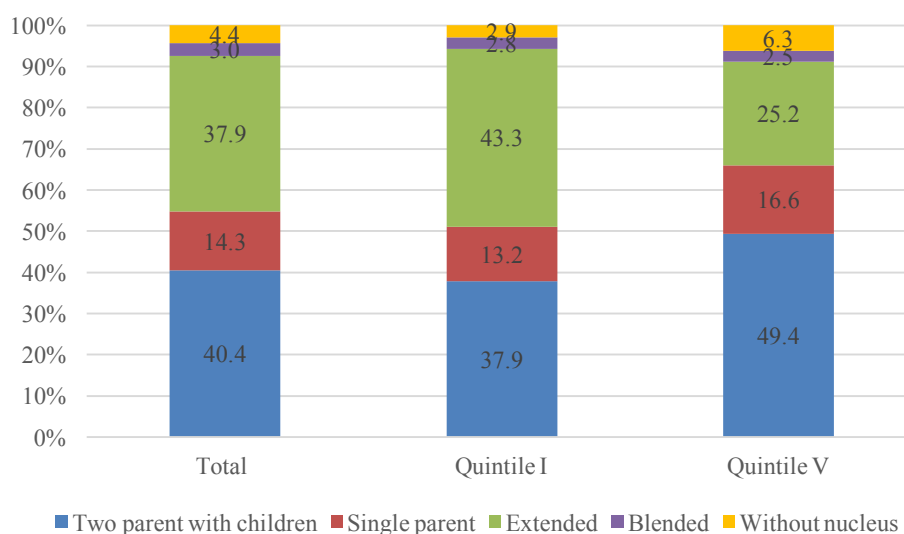
III. Youth and families

Families provide the basic economic, physical, social and emotional resources that youth need to thrive. Family members can set expectations, serve as role models and provide access to social capital (information, networks and contacts) that can promote more fluid transitions from education to the world of work.

Families in Latin America have undergone significant changes over the past decades and thus, the experience of youth in families is increasingly diverse and dynamic. The most striking change is that compared with 20 years ago, two-parent nuclear households now comprise fewer than half of all Latin American families. In contrast, the relative share of unipersonal, single-parent nuclear, and to a lesser extent nuclear families without children have all increased. The proportion of extended families has not changed significantly, however, this type of family configuration continues to be very prevalent, accounting for almost 1 in 5 families in the region, and being even more common among families in the lower end of the income distribution (Ullmann, Maldonado and Rico, 2015).

In what type of families do youth in the region live? Figure 4 provides an initial approximation to this question. The majority of youth live in two-parent nuclear households, followed by extended families and almost 1 in 6 youth in the region live in single-parent nuclear households. However, there are two notable differences that should be kept in mind – youth from the poorest quintile tend to live in extended families, whereas those belonging to the wealthiest quintile tend to live in two-parent nuclear households.

Figure 4. Latin America (18 countries): young people between 15 and 29 years of age who are not heads of household or spouses by family type and income quintile, 2016
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC based on special tabulations of household surveys.

In many policy analyses and proposals, the family is given a central role, both in explaining individual behaviors and in providing safeguards against various social problems and shocks. As such, importance is given to strengthening the family, which is considered to be the intermediary between individuals and public policy, usually with a model family type based on the two-parent home with a male breadwinner. Clearly, however, families today do not necessarily conform to this ideal family type. Moreover, the circumstances that give rise to some of these changes in family structure, for example, marital dissolution and migration, can result in insecurity and increased economic vulnerability for the family (Ullmann, Maldonado, Rico, 2014), which in turn can have adverse impacts for youth living in those families.

With regard to extended families, it has been noted that this configuration plays an important role to diversify and broaden the sources of income for those at the lower end of the income spectrum and thus safeguard against various types of shocks. These types of households can also serve an important function with respect to care, either in the case of young mothers with young children (and thus enable their continued school attendance or participation in the labour market), as it is equally the case that young people, and in particular young women, in these households may contribute to the care of other household members and domestic housework responsibilities. This last point, the care and domestic housework that youth provide is not restricted to those that reside in extended families. This is particularly true in poorer households that have a limited ability to meet these needs on the market.

In addition to care, generating income is another type of support that youth provide in poorer households. Indeed, the contribution of the labour income earned by youth who are employed and are sons or daughters in a household account for close to a third of the total household income (figure 5). For youth 25 to 29 years of age, this percentage increases to almost 40% - that is, 40% of the household's total income is generated by a youth son or daughter. As would be expected, when the youth is the head of household or the spouse/partner of the head of household, this share increases.

Figure 5. Latin America (18 countries): weight of labor income of youth who are employed in the total income of the household, by family relationship, 2014
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC based on special tabulations of household surveys.

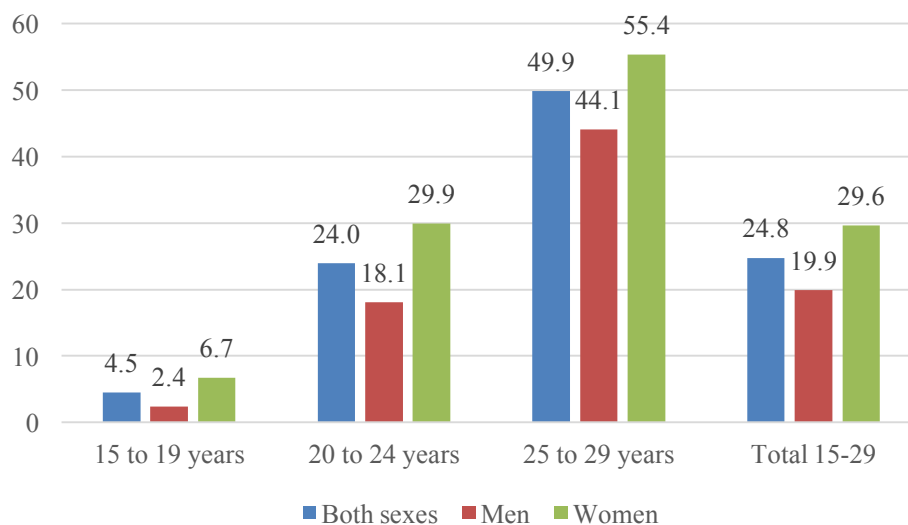
The discussion up until now has primarily centered on youth as children within families of various types. However, it is also germane to consider the situation of youth who have families of their own, including

those who have emancipated from their families of origin and are heads of household themselves (or spouses/partners of heads of household), as well as those who have formed families that are part of extended households.

This latter group, youth who have formed their own families that reside within extended households frequently includes young (sometimes single) mothers. In this respect, it is important to note that Latin America and the Caribbean has adolescent fertility rates that are second only to those of sub-Saharan Africa. These rates are much higher than what would be expected given the region’s level of economic and social development. While there is some diversity in the paths that can lead to adolescent motherhood and while this kind of motherhood involves both planned and unplanned pregnancies, it is a phenomenon with marked social stratification: it is most prevalent among indigenous youth, young Afro-descendants, young people in rural areas and, above all, poor young women (ECLAC, 2016). Thus, residing within extended families, either in the origin family of the young mother or young father, should he be present, is a strategy that may help reconcile care work, education and/or paid work for young people.¹

Another category of youth is those who have emancipated and formed their own households, either as heads of household or as spouses/partners. Although there are trends indicating a delay in union formation and an increase in the mean age at childbearing for some population sub-groups and in some specific countries, studies have found that there is a certain stability in these indicators (Esteves and Florez- Paredes 2014) and an increase in cohabitation is noted among younger cohorts, at least in some countries (Cabella and Fernandez-Soto, 2017). On average close to 1 in 4 of youth 15 to 29 years of age are either heads of household or spouses/partners (figure 6). The percentages of young women in this situation is higher across all age groups.

Figure 6. Latin America (18 countries): youth 15 to 29 years of age that are heads of household or spouse/partner of head of household by sex, 2016
(Percentages)

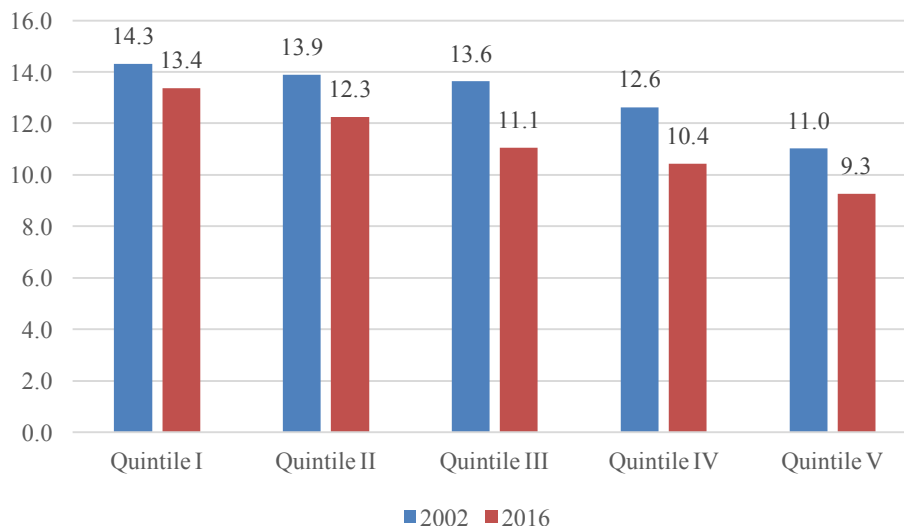


Source: ECLAC based on special tabulations of household surveys.

¹ Unfortunately, the household surveys used in this analysis make it difficult to detect these nested families, which limits our ability to further explore their characteristics.

However, the percentage of youth 15 to 29 years of age who are heads of household differs significantly by income quintile, as can be seen in figure 7. Although the percentage of youth in this situation has declined between 2002 and 2016, this decline was greater for wealthier youth.

Figure 7. Latin America (18 countries): youth 15 to 29 years of age who are heads of household by income quintile, 2002 and 2016
(Percentages)



Source: ECLAC based on special tabulations of household surveys.

The ability for youth to emancipate and form their own households, either as household heads or as spouses/partners, likely responds to a variety of factors including differences in fertility and family formation patterns, educational and labour market differences, and differences in housing availability.

IV. Policies to support youth and families in Latin America: what we have, where we need to go

The youth institutional framework in Latin America and the Caribbean: an overview

Latin America and the Caribbean has made important strides in solidifying an institutional framework around youth rights and youth policies (Trucco, 2017). In the past decades, the region has witnessed the consolidation of at least three aspects of the institutional framework - the normative framework, institutions, and policies. With respect to the normative framework, while no international instrument exists that sets forth a comprehensive system for protecting the specific rights of young people, there have been initiatives in this direction. In Latin America, the most important of these is the Ibero-American Convention on Young People’s Rights of 2005 signed in the framework of the Americas Summit. At the national level, the 18 countries of Latin America all have general legislation on youth. These laws serve many functions, including defining the type of specialized agency that is responsible for ensuring the rights of young people (Trucco, 2017). These institutions take various forms and have diverse objectives, such as promoting a greater articulation and enhance the visibility of their specific needs and aspirations, especially on issues related to staying in school, the school-to-work transition, job training, access to health care, the availability of care services, prevention of violence and protection against it, and possibilities for participation and access to culture (Trucco, 2017).

Many of the public youth institutions have mechanisms in place to promote youth participation. Clearly, strengthening youth participation is essential to make decisions more relevant, sustainable and legitimate.

Nonetheless, as ECLAC has noted, participation channels for young people to play an active role in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies are insufficient and they fail to capture the voice of youth in an inclusive and efficient manner. Although some participation channels operate through youth organizations, these usually lack resources, and the coordination between them tends to be weak or non-existent. Frequently, the implementation of public policies does not encourage participation by young people continuously throughout the process, but only in the final stages and in an ad hoc manner. Moreover, these participation mechanisms only operate with policies that are directly linked to the youth population and not other areas (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015).

One way of involving civil society youth organizations in decision-making processes would be to include them formally in the institutional framework. Most countries have a formal structure for this purpose, which take on different modalities, be it an advisory role, a consultative network or youth assemblies. Fifteen out of eighteen Latin American countries have one or more mechanisms or citizen groupings that have representation in the main public youth entity (Trucco, 2017). In the Caribbean, sixteen of the seventeen countries whose national youth policies were available for review provide for the establishment of, or support to, youth-led movements to ensure youth participation in decision-making for policy, which typically take the form of youth councils, youth parliaments, and youth ambassadors (Catamarinhas and Eversley, forthcoming).

The level of participation of these entities varies. It may be purely consultative, or else it may involve a greater influence in decision making. On this point, it should be noted that most countries have participation mechanisms at a decision-making or even joint management level. At this level, people and groups are not only involved in decision-making, but also in implementation and follow-up, to ensure that decisions are properly implemented (Sandoval, Sanhueza and Williner, 2015). There are also other types of organization where the level of participation of the citizen youth body is of a decision-making nature, and the individuals and groups that participate have a direct influence on decision making (Sandoval, Sanhueza and Williner, 2015). The result of the process is binding for the public entity that implements youth policy. Lastly, there are institutions that only have a consultative role, where the objective of the consultation process is to ascertain opinions, proposals and interests of the people and groups that participate. In this case, the consultation is not binding on the authority. In some countries, the members of these councils are appointed, but in several cases, they are elected by vote. In most, the level of representation is national or intermediate (regional or state), and fewer have local or community representation (Trucco, 2017).

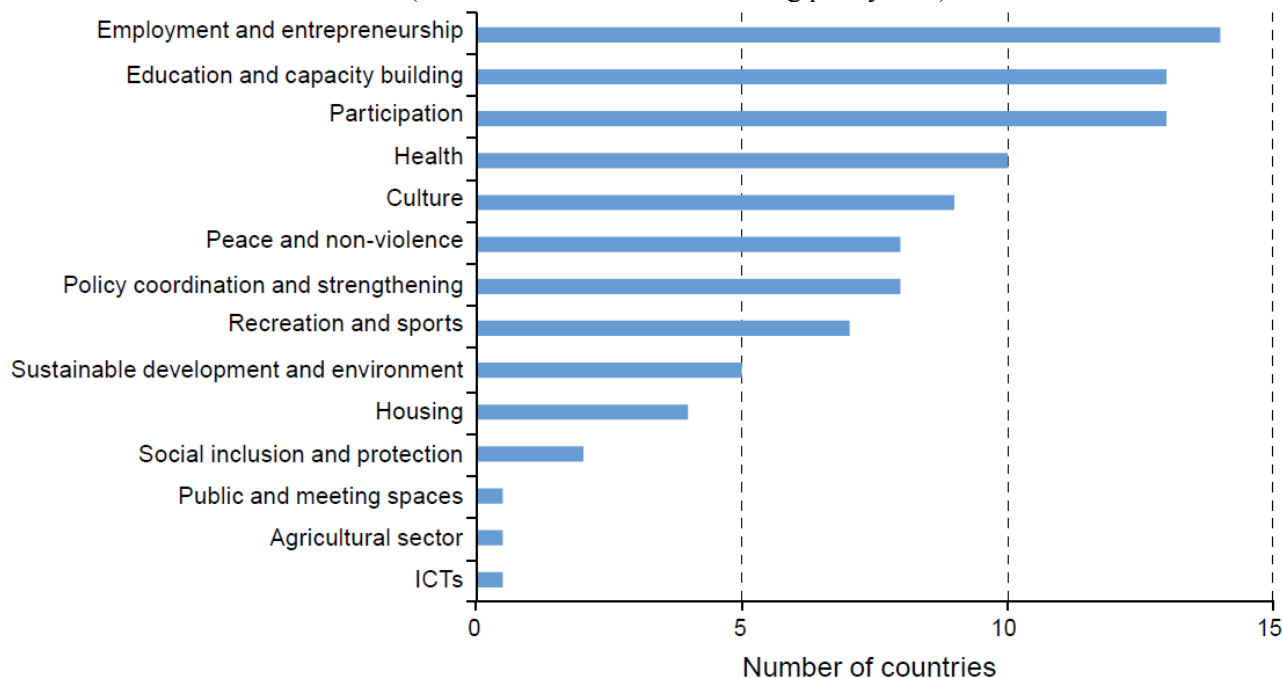
With regard to the last dimension of the institutional framework, youth policies or plans, at the regional level, there are several plans or policies worthy of mention. In 2016 during the America's Summit, the countries of Ibero-America subscribed to the Ibero-American Pact for Youth, which places an accent on young people's participation in the global development agenda, the recognition of the rights of young people established in the Ibero-American Convention, the need to develop initiatives in the area of equality and inclusion and to strengthen institutions related to youth, among other issues. The main regional youth framework in the Caribbean is the CARICOM Youth Development Action Plan (CYDAP) 2012-2022.

Most countries in the region have published a national policy or plan in this area in recent years, and a majority of these adhere to the principles set forth in the Baku Commitment. A review of official documents posted online from the 18 Latin American countries reveals that seven have a youth policy and nine have relatively up-to-date sector plans (just two have programmes only). An analysis of 14 of these youth policies and plans reveals a number of common elements. For example, many state that actions related to this population group must be adopted from a rights-based perspective. Moreover, some documents explicitly mention the gender perspective and declare an intention to enhance the role of youth and its contribution to development. The main lines of action are also broadly similar. In the 14 documents that were analyzed, the theme of decent work, labour-market inclusion or entrepreneurship features as one of the main lines of action (figure 8). Secondly, and in a similar number of cases (13 out of 14), the pillars of education or

capacity building (often closely linked to the employment pillar) and citizen and democratic participation stand out (Trucco, 2017).

Figure 8. Latin America (14 countries): main pillars of youth policies

(Number of countries mentioning policy area)



Source: Trucco, 2017.

A recent review of national youth policies in the Caribbean found that twenty-three of the twenty-nine Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) member and associate member countries have some form of a national youth policy. In some cases, these are recently-passed measures, current, in draft or in incipient, but active, stages of development (Catamarinhas and Eversley, forthcoming). In terms of their thematic focus, these policies emphasize the same areas as those in that exist in Latin America.

The challenges associated with the implementation of national youth policies are common to most countries, and mostly relate to the absence of an enabling framework and coordinated supports and adequate investment for youth development. For example, transitioning from the existence of a policy to a concrete action plan, complete with indicators for follow-up and subsequent monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, there are clearly neglected priority areas, such as hunger and poverty, a mainstreamed gender focus, and intergenerational relationships, including families, as detailed below.

Families and youth policies

While it is clear that youth development can be promoted or hindered by contextual factors, most of the actions called for in youth policies are focused on the youth themselves as the locus of action, with less attention devoted to their context. This is the case for families. Despite the fact that they still play a central role in the lives of youth in Latin America and the Caribbean, the issue of families is largely invisible in national youth policies. Of the national youth policies in Latin America, very few (7 of 18) mention families at all. In these cases, general mention is made of the importance of families. In other cases, mention is made of the relationship between families and violence, either in reference to intrafamilial violence or the role of families in generating the conditions to prevent youth from engaging in violent activities.

Another guise in which families are mentioned is the need to ensure family support for specific groups of youth, such as youth with disabilities. Only one of the policies analyzed includes families as a specific intervention area.² A few of the policies highlight the importance of providing youth with the education, labour market opportunities (including access to social protection) and housing they will need in order to establish their own families.³

The situation is a little more encouraging in the Caribbean, where a greater number of countries mention families in their national youth policies. In the areas of education and health, for example, provisions recommend building capacities of parents as agents of positive health and well-being for youth and to provide enhanced opportunities for parents to participate in the lives of their children in order to build their resilience and protective factors (Catamarinhas and Eversley, forthcoming).⁴ But even in these cases, these mentions appear in general provisions and not placing families as a key factor to promote the integral development of youth and support them in their trajectories.

The analysis thus far yields the following conclusions:

1. Young men and women are increasingly participating in education, which is encouraging. However, a majority of young men work exclusively. The main activity for young women is more diversified. Nonetheless, racial and ethnic differences are observed, as well as age differences within the 15 to 29 age range. In order to be effective, policies that aim to support positive youth trajectories must respond to this diversity.
2. Care and domestic responsibilities pose a serious obstacle for young women to reap the benefits of their educational attainment and these responsibilities (either for the care of the own children or other family members) often force young women out of school and/or the labour market, truncating their paths.
3. Youth live in two-parent nuclear families or in extended families. This latter configuration is especially prevalent among poorer youth, suggesting that this type of living arrangement allows family members to reconcile various needs – economic, social protection, care.
4. About 1 in 4 of youth are heads of household or spouses/partners and youth heads of household tend to be more common among poorer youth.
5. Based on our review of national youth policies we conclude that families are a largely invisibilized policy issue; not only from the point of view of supporting families so that they may provide the conditions that will favour positive transitions for the youth in their families, but also supporting families headed by youth.

In light of these conclusions, the following section provides an overview of policies that can promote more fluid transitions for youth and support families.

V. Policies to support youth and families to promote favorable transitions

² For example, in Honduras the text of the national youth policy states: “The National Youth Policy recognizes that Honduran families are the context in which youth grow, develop their capacities and build their identities and therefore families require effective actions of the State to support them in their obligations to exercise the human rights of their children. It is therefore a priority to promote within families the redistribution of roles and the power to make decisions, between women and men, in order to make equal relationships and equal opportunities possible for all its members. The National Youth Policy is also geared towards intergenerational and intrafamilial communication, promoting relationships of mutual support within the family and strengthening the capacity of adults to support young people to make freer and more responsible decisions.”

³ With respect to the regional youth policy instruments, the Ibero-American youth pact makes no mention of families. In terms of the Caribbean, the 2012-2017 CYDAP includes families as an action area under its “Goal 2: protection, safety and security: enable the creation of protective environments to foster resilience and ensure adolescent and youth safety and security”, where it calls for the development and dissemination of information and guidelines to strengthen the protective role of families and to build capacity among families. The most recent iteration on the CYDAP was not available for review.

⁴ These mentions are made in the national youth policies of: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, The Bahamas, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Turks and Caicos.

Care services

The lack of support for care, as well as other factors (such as pervasive discrimination) operates as a barrier to the integration of young women in the productive world. Care demands, which used to be met exclusively as part of women's unpaid work, put pressure on the traditional sexual division of labour and formed a "care crisis". This crisis is highlighted by the many obstacles faced by families (and their female members) in reconciling productive life and paid work with motherhood and childrearing. Moreover, there is a heavier workload of unpaid childcare among poor women - who have higher fertility rates and limited opportunities to pass on care to other people or purchase this service in the market, in contrast with the options enjoyed by middle- to high-income women (Rossel and Filguiera, 2015a).

Evidence indicates, for example, that labour participation has increased significantly more among the higher earners than among the poorest 20% of the population. Furthermore, from 2002 the difference in labour participation between women with young children (up to age 5) and those with children aged 6 to 14 has widened, which conforms that having young children is a barrier to entering the labour market that has a strong impact on the most disadvantaged groups (Rossel and Filguiera, 2015a). As a corollary, in view of the union and age fertility patterns in Latin America and the Caribbean discussed in the preceding section, it is young women who tend to be the mothers of young (under age 5 children). Therefore, in the absence of suitable and tailored care policies, the care burden —particularly in terms of young children— in the region is shouldered primarily by poor young women.⁵

It is also true that in the absence of such policies (which is the norm in the countries of the region), the care burden may push lower-income young women into informal employment, which may provide more flexible work conditions (with fewer, flexible and self-determined hours, albeit with limited stability, lower wages and lack of access to social protection). Despite the reduction in informal employment, informal work rates among low-income women with young children have remained largely unchanged in the past 20 years. This is in contrast with the sharp decline in informal employment among middle-income women (a fall of 10% between 1990 and 2009) and high-income women (rates down 20% in the same period) (Rossel and Filguiera, 2015a).

Some countries in the region have made headway to address the care crisis (Rossel and Filguiera, 2015a) nonetheless a youth-focus is absent from these initiatives, although it is precisely during this stage that the need for conciliation may be greatest – as young people (especially young women) care for their children, conclude their studies and try to establish a career.

Social protection for families with youth and new families

Social protection measures aim to guarantee a basic level of economic and social well-being for all members of society. In pursuit of this global objective, social protection focuses on three fundamental actions: basic welfare guarantees, insurance against risks or social problems derived from the context or life cycle, and moderation or repair of social damages corresponding to those risks or social problems (Cecchini et al., 2015). In this sense, social protection responds not only to the risks faced by the entire population, but also to structural problems, such as poverty and inequality. In general terms, social protection is organized around three components: the non-contributory pillar (social assistance), the contributory pillar (social security) and labor market regulation measures.

⁵ It is important to note that young women may also be engaged in the care of other family members or non-family members, in addition to their own young children. Thus, universal, integral care systems may free them from these responsibilities so that they may continue or complete their education and enter the labour market.

Non-contributory social protection mechanisms can support vulnerable youth and their families. One example of non-contributory social protection that have become an important component of social protection systems in many countries of the region are Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes, which act on several simultaneous fronts to reduce poverty by increasing families' monetary resources and promoting the development of their members' capacities. Since these programmes target families with children and adolescents (and, to a lesser extent, those above the age of 18) living in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty (albeit not exclusively), they have reoriented the social protection systems towards ensuring well-being at those stages of the life cycle (ECLAC, 2017). By conditioning the monetary transfer on school attendance for all children and adolescents in families that participate, these programmes may support continued school attendance among young people at the secondary level. In some countries, this age limit is increased. Other programmes provide specific grants for youth in economically disadvantaged households to remain in school or grants for post-secondary education (for example the Jovenes en Accion programme of Colombia, the Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH) of Jamaica and Prospera of Mexico). Yet other programmes provide bonuses for scholastic achievement (for example, the Ingreso Etico Familiar of Chile). These programmes create an incentive structure that keeps young people in secondary school, or facilitates tertiary school attendance, while increasing the consumption base of the household.

It is important to note, in view of the analysis of youth family structures presented in the previous section that extended families have access to social protection schemes through non-contributory mechanisms more so than the other family types, with close to 1 in 5 of these family types relying on non-contributory mechanisms (Ullmann, Maldonado, and Rico, 2014), highlighting the importance of this type of social protection for the family type in which poor youth most frequently reside.

Related to another area of social protection, health insurance, many young people in the region lack access to health insurance coverage, which is related to several factors (Ullmann, 2015). On the one hand, young people lose coverage under their parent's health insurance when they reach a certain age, and they underestimate their own need for medical care and health insurance because they perceive their risk of disease as low. In addition, often, young people's labour-market participation (in unstable, part-time jobs and in the informal market) does not provide access to health insurance. Although this pattern holds for the youth population overall, there are considerable gaps between young people from different economic strata. Because parental employment is a major route to health insurance coverage for young people, it is reasonable to think that young people in lower economic strata lack health insurance because their parents do as well. Thus, a key issue for young people as they emancipate from their families of origin and as they begin to form families of their own is the extent to which they are able to access health and other types of social insurance.

Housing policies

In Latin America and the Caribbean, access to housing has lagged far behind demand, particularly for the poor and most vulnerable population groups; and this has led to the formation and constant growth of informal peripheral settlements in Latin America, along with increased urban inequality and socioeconomic residential segregation. The rapid urbanization process experienced by the region has been characterized by a substantial housing deficit and insufficient and inadequate provision of basic infrastructure for city residents. Population growth in the urban areas of Latin America and the Caribbean has not been guided by a broad-based process of planning and investment to assimilate it (Bonomo, Brain and Simioni, 2015).

In this context, emancipation for young people from the household of origin is still an essentially family and individual event that depends on the capacity to earn income in the market or receive family subsidies making autonomous daily life feasible from an economic standpoint (Rossel and Filguiera, 2015b). One major obstacle for youth wishing to emancipate and form their own families is the structure of the rental

and housing market in the region, and the limited access to credit. Simultaneously, there are few or no policies relating to housing, credit or regulating or subsidizing rent for youth, or policies of monetary support for youth who wish to emancipate as well as a lack of financial support or housing policies for new families. (Rossel and Filguiera, 2015b). Indeed, a policy review in this area revealed that while low socioeconomic status and other vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, elderly) are often the target of the few existent housing policies, youth are conspicuously absent from these policies.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

Families are central in the public discourse on the well-being of youth. Yet in order to move away from the purely rhetorical, if the family is truly taken to be a primary avenue through which social policies improve the overall well-being of youth, including supporting their transitions, we must first have a better understanding of youth family dynamics, the socioeconomic characteristics of different family types in which youth reside and the specific challenges these families face. Families are a space where the confluence of the axes of the social inequality matrix are expressed, shaping youth opportunities and potentially setting a course for the formation of the next generation of families. This is not to say that the family conditions in which youth are born and raised are deterministic. Instead, it means that with active, pertinent and targeted policies to support families and provide youth with opportunities, trajectories of exclusion can be reverted.

One key policy area to advance in this direction is social protection, both contributory and non-contributory. Diverse social protection mechanisms can increase consumption and access to services that are important for youth development, including education, health and care services, and buffer against shocks such as the loss of employment by adult family members and health crises, which can place economic constraints on the household that might force a young person to abandon their studies or work. While many social protection schemes, particularly those in the non-contributory pillar focus on families with children (under the age of 18), it is important to gain a better understanding of the extent to which families with youth (up until age 29) are able to access social protection in order to better address gaps in social protection coverage to promote well-being among these families and to progress towards the progressive universalization of the right to social protection.

It is imperative to promote decent work policies for young people, including access to social protection. This point underscores that the “problem” of youth vis-a-vis employment is not limited to high unemployment rates, but to the quality of the employment that youth have access to, in order to construct trajectories of decent work and inclusion, which will enable them to start new families, or contribute to their families of origin. In this regard, and in the context of high labour informality among young workers in Latin America and the Caribbean, efforts towards formalization must be strengthened, to ensure that young workers and their families have access to contributory social protection, including those who are self-employed and own-account workers, against a backdrop of major changes in the world of work. Countries in the region have recently introduced a wide range of instruments for formalizing and easing eligibility criteria for contributory coverage (ECLAC, 2017) but much remains to be done.

Policies that aim to facilitate smooth transitions between education and the world of work often focus on strengthening the supply side (ensuring that youth have relevant hard and soft skills to enter the world of work), the demand side (that seek to shape demand -through direct job creation programmes, company subsidies for the creation of jobs for youth and affirmative action measures for the hiring of young people, especially those facing multiple forms of exclusion and discrimination) and mechanism to intermediate or bridge those two sides. The role of families, either those to which youth belong, or those headed by youth are absent. Thus, these policies are neglecting a central element in youths’ lives and an element that can exert pressure, for time and energy, on youth. Therefore, some recommendations for achieving a better

reconciliation between education, the world of work and unpaid care and domestic responsibilities for young people include:

- Create mechanisms that allow access, continuity and reintegration into school for young mothers and young parents.
- Build or expand care systems, geared not only to children, but also to elderly people and people with disabilities, as part of universal social protection systems; these care systems should provide high-quality, flexible and affordable services.
- Implement policies that promote co-responsibility between young men and women, not only in care, but also in domestic work so that the burden does not fall exclusively on young women, limiting their ability to pursue education, training or work opportunities.
- Expand and respect maternity and paternity leave, as well as licenses and special study hours for male and female students, according to the provisions of the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the License Agreement Paid for Studies, 1974 (No. 140) of the ILO.
- Create more flexible mechanisms for organizing work days for young student workers, to prevent the increase of informal and precarious links.
- Improve the mechanisms for intra-urban mobility and create new mechanisms, in order to facilitate travel between places of study and work and home, as well as reduce their duration.
- Take advantage of digital technologies to promote work and education from home for young people.

Participation mechanisms must exist across public entities, not only youth-specific ones, that should actively seek to engage youth. Every issue considered by public policies is a youth issue, therefore a youth-focus should be mainstreamed. Engaging youth directly could deepen policy-maker's understanding of the challenges faced by youth in forging their transitions from education to work vis-à-vis their family responsibilities.

For youth who wish to emancipate, that path is frequently obstructed by a lack of housing policies. The path to emancipation and the creation of new families requires housing policies that are geared specifically towards young people.

Finally, policies must not only address and respond to the diversity of youth, but also the multidimensionality of this stage, which is not only about education and transition into the world of work. The reality for many youth in Latin America and the Caribbean is that they have already formed a family, or that they provide support to the family of origin. In addition to this, for all of the policy areas mentioned above (social protection, decent work, conciliation, participation, housing), it is imperative to incorporate an approach that addresses the multiple, simultaneous and accumulating inequalities arising from the social inequality matrix. This lens challenges us to think about youth and the complexity of their experiences and circumstances, not in a compartmentalized manner, and the need for policies to be sensitive and responsive to these differences. In this regard, policies that are universal, but sensible to differences, must be sought. This means implementing policies that are universal, from a rights-based approach, but that have complementary targeted measures towards specific sub-population groups of youth and their families.

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