



Latin America on youth employment

*by María Nieves Rico**

In its “Trilogy of Equality” (ECLAC, 2010, 2012 and 2014a), ECLAC maintains that Latin America must harmonise economic, social and environmental sustainability with a strategy that focuses on development. In this strategy, equality is the ultimate aim to be achieved through structural change effected in politics. With this in mind, the “Trilogy of Equality” proposes making the labour force more inclusive, views equality from a perspective that goes beyond the distribution of income, and factors equalisation into the availability of opportunities and the capacity to seize them. Therefore, developing the skills base of new generations is one of the cornerstones for progress. Two main areas are key: education and work. Together they make up the nexus for development, based on the assumption that equality must be the constitutive principle and the ultimate aim of its reorientation. This life-cycle approach allows for the extrapolation that young people are the artifice of all these processes.

In Latin America in 2012, 37% of young people between 15 and 29 years of age were enrolled in an educational institution (around 49.9 million young people); a little over 50% were employed, and 22% declared that they were not involved in either of these areas, exclusively or simultaneously (ECLAC, 2014b). When public policies aimed at social inclusion for young people are being formulated, it is vital to disassociate unemployment and non-participation in education from laziness, lack of interest in participating in society, or disaffection with work. The majority of the 29.7 million “excluded” young people, especially in the case of women who, because of cultural norms and lack of political support, dedicate themselves to non-remunerative care and domestic work – an extremely worrying fact, especially for adolescents (Rico and Trucco, 2014). Others who are unemployed (in search of remunerated work), or waiting for a job, are in this situation momentarily and are symptomatic of the existing initial barriers that encumber integration into the labour market. It is worth noting that the rate of unemployment among young people is three times higher than for adults, a longstanding and structural issue on a global scale (ECLAC/OIJ, 2014). Another group that must be mentioned is young people who have some sort of disability that prevents them from entering the labour market or from participating in education.

All these situations cannot be explained in terms of subcultures of crime, drugs or gangs (ECLAC, 2014b). This information, which does not shy away from revealing that there is a group (3.3% of the total number of young people) for whom there is no explanation for their exclusion, is a warning against the stereotypes and stigmas that



usually accompany analyses of young people, and which ultimately make it very difficult to formulate efficient policies.

Work placement for young people reveals that 79% of the 76 million young people employed draw a salary, and the majority work in the tertiary economic sector (Espejo and Espíndola, 2015). Participation increases with age: those between 15 and 19 years of age register at 39%, while those between 25 and 29 years of age register at 80%. This is a positive trend given that a late incorporation to the labour market allows more time to remain in education and to improve the qualifications that will be used in the future to enter the market, to draw a salary and to contribute to productive change (ECLAC, 2014b). Youth employment is characterised by its high levels of turnover, segmentation and precariousness. Also, social security cover is low for employed young people, and much lower when compared to adults (only 27.5% of the group between 15 and 19 are signed up for social security). This indicates discrimination in the labour market towards young workers precisely at a period in their lives when, as well as enjoying rights at the present time, contributions to welfare systems also become a factor because of the length of accumulation and the future return of those funds.

The current Latin American labour market does not offer workers many opportunities for promotions or stable labour relations, nor does it satisfy workers' need for autonomy or to exercise their economic rights. This poses a considerable political challenge because workers' desire for salaried work, to contribute to overcoming poverty and their domestic wellbeing, and to build a life based on their job, is encumbered by a discriminatory labour market with very few opportunities.

For all of the reasons outlined above, policies and programmes must generate programmes that help manage the transition from education to quality employment. There must be an emphasis on technical and vocational training and in improving employability through training and competencies with programmes that support the search for work and directly create jobs for young people. In this context, it is important to have legislation available that takes into account the heterogeneity and the intersecting inequalities that affect young people, and which actively support young women, young indigenous people and people of African descent, people who live in rural areas, who come from poor homes or are afflicted by some sort of disability. Every one of these efforts will contribute to closing social gaps and improve productivity.

The de-stigmatisation of young people goes hand in hand with acknowledging the difficulties that they face when trying to reconcile job opportunities with their domestic life. This means it is indispensable to recognise non-remunerative domestic work and to incorporate policies that promote men and women's shared



responsibilities in the home, and also support both men and women's struggle to strike a balance with their family life, thus contributing to the substantiation of equality in both public and private spheres.

To achieve all of this, there is a need to continue progressing towards a pact for equality in the workplace (ECLAC, 2014a) that will contribute to closing the gap in productivity, salary and in the quality of employment, as well as contributing, synergistically, to the reinforcement of governmental institutions, in this case, labour institutions such as those that represent the interests of young people and the policies oriented towards this section of society.

* **María Nieves Rico** is the Director of the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). Her field of expertise is social policy with emphasis on gender and human rights, social protection and child poverty. She has acted as advisor to Latin American and Caribbean Governments on social protection and family schemes. Nieves Rico has published over 70 papers.

This paper is a contribution to March 2015 edition of the EU-LAC Foundation on Youth Employment. This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the EU-LAC Foundation. This is a translation of the responsibility of the EU-LAC Foundation; to read the original version in Spanish please follow the link: <http://eulacfoundation.org/es/documentos/américa-latina-en-torno-al-empleo-juvenil-mar%C3%ADa-nieves-rico-cepal>

Bibliography

CEPAL (2014a), *Pactos para la igualdad. Hacia un futuro sostenible*, Santiago de Chile, Naciones Unidas.

CEPAL (2014b), *Panorama Social de América Latina 2014*, Santiago de Chile, Naciones Unidas.

CEPAL (2012), *Cambio estructural para la igualdad: Una visión integrada del desarrollo*, Santiago de Chile, Naciones Unidas.

CEPAL (2010), *La hora de la igualdad. Brechas por cerrar, caminos por abrir*, Santiago de Chile, Naciones Unidas.

CEPAL y OIJ (2014) *Invertir para transformar. La juventud como protagonista del desarrollo*, sep.

Espejo, Andrés y Ernesto Espíndola (2015) *La llave maestra de la inclusión social juvenil: educación y empleo*, Santiago, Documento de trabajo, División de Desarrollo Social, CEPAL.

OEI (2012) *Estado del arte sobre empleo juvenil en América Latina y Europa*. Encuentro intersectorial de intercambio y programación "Inserción laboral de los jóvenes. Estrategias innovadoras para facilitar la transición escuela- trabajo".



EU-LAC Foundation
Fundación EU-LAC

OIT (2013), *Trabajo Decente y Juventud en América Latina*, Lima.

Rico, Ma. Nieves y Daniela Trucco (2014), *Adolescentes, derechos a la educación y al bienestar futuro*, Serie Políticas Sociales No 190, CEPAL/UNICEF, Santiago.