

Youth in the young Latin America

Sylvie Durán Salvatierra

Minister of culture and Youth of the Republic of Costa Rica

Latin America is one of the regions in the world with larger numbers of young population: about 38% of the population in Central America is young, a multicultural and multi-ethnic region, with quite significant development gaps between urban and rural areas and a region characterised by high migration flows.¹

Bearing in mind this combination of a demographic load and high diversity, young people of this region face even higher challenges: regarding access to the job market; the young unemployment rate is around 11%, in contrast to the average 5% in the general scale.² This fact indicates the presence of informal and low-paid employment, as well.³

Regarding this last, the transition from the school to the labour market that indeed was already raising challenges regarding access and permanence in the educative systems. Nowadays, it adds the uncertainties in regard to the schemes and fields of the job of the future, as well as some socio-economic conditions increasingly precarious.

In view of this situation, answers are needed for that young population who nowadays has incomplete education and who has a lack of educative and labour alternatives – population that is majority in our countries –. Also for the children and their communities who in the future should count with better capabilities for the continuing education and the adaptation.

The recommendations to address these gaps in the education and the labour structures include assuming the informality, which marks the path towards employment of young people in order to create processes for a realistic formalisation of their work. While transforming in a big scale the training that does not meet the needs of young people from rural areas or low income young people who live in zones with more access to opportunities.

It is about crucial measures in light of the demographic bonus; that potential advantage that a society has during a period of time in which the number of people in a working age is higher than the number of economic dependent ones. During that period of time, theoretically, the productive potential of the economy is solid, the social and individual savings as well as the investment are sustainable and there is a window of a unique potential that is not simultaneous in all the countries and which is finite. In Central America, this period is expected to end between the years

¹ The age ranges that are defined as young, vary according to the different national laws: between 10 and 12 years to 35 years in Central American countries that go from Guatemala to Costa Rica, in Panama from 15 to 29 years old. Ibid.

² Estado de la Región (2016) Quinto informe sobre el estado de la Región. Sinopsis, San José: Programa Estado de la Región-Nación, 2016. <https://estadonacion.or.cr/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/cap-1-erca-2016-sinopsis.pdf>

³ This problem is increasing for the group of 15 to 19 years in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama

2035 and 2050 in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Belize and El Salvador, while in 2020 in Costa Rica and Panama.

Once this period is concluded, “a society gets old”, people who are considered to be in a dependent age become majority and it gets challenging to promote the development rates: the growth of the GDP gets slower, there are less primary savers and with it, less opportunities to accumulate and to invest. That is the situation that countries such as England, Italy, France, Germany and Japan are facing and that some countries like Canada, Australia, United States, Russia and Korea will be facing soon.

As we can see, our region is experiencing this potential stage with limitations that can drive us to higher exclusion gaps.

Strengthening institutionalism and policies through participation

Enhancing human development and social inclusion requires solid institutions, with an effective guiding capacity that encourages public investment. It requires an increasingly dynamic management that promotes the dialogue between the sectors and policies which impact we can evaluate and improve.

To face these challenges, in February of 2013, the Central America Integration System aimed to “have a regional space of convergence and generation of proposals of integral public policies for the youth.” Authorities and Youth representatives included, in the Agenda of the Regional Integration, the creation of a Central America Forum of Youth Institutions whose constitutive act raised the need of investing in the fields of health, employment, education, culture, sexuality and recreation

In Costa Rica, in 2017, once a higher participation from civil society and a variety of expressions in the institutional structures was acquired, the National Council of Youth was created, which the President of the Republic coordinates. This space brings together the National Assembly of the youth, the government authorities and observers from civil society for accountability and exchange.

Moreover, since 2018 our Council of the Youth introduced an updated public policy from a very consistent consulting process and our Vice ministry of Youth that works together with the Central America Agriculture Council on the attention of the young people in rural areas.⁴ This last associated with the strategies of two administrations:⁵ one focused on the eradication of poverty. The second one that evolves from there to an integral attention to the human security with some mainstays such as employment, agriculture promotion, violence prevention and the community development in vulnerable areas.

⁴ Project “Young Protagonists of Territorial Rural Development”, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and implemented through Procasur for Latin America and the Caribbean.

⁵ Administrations Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera (2014-2018) and Carlos Alvarado Quesada (2018-2022). The current President Alvarado was Minister of Social Welfare and Human Development, in charge of the design and establishment of the priority strategy “Bridge to Development” that evolves, under his mandate, as Presidential Articulation Area for Human Security. See <https://www.imas.go.cr/general/estrategia-nacional-para-la-reduccion-de-la-pobreza-extrema-puente-al-desarrollo> y <https://presidencia.go.cr/comunicados/2018/10/gobierno-anuncia-estrategia-de-seguridad-humana-en-districtos-prioritarios/>

Only a public policy managed in an integral way and with sense or urgency in youth matters will prevent us to inherit a liability hard to handle for the new generations and a reality with high risks in which nobody, no matter their age, could feel secure.