



International
Labour
Organization

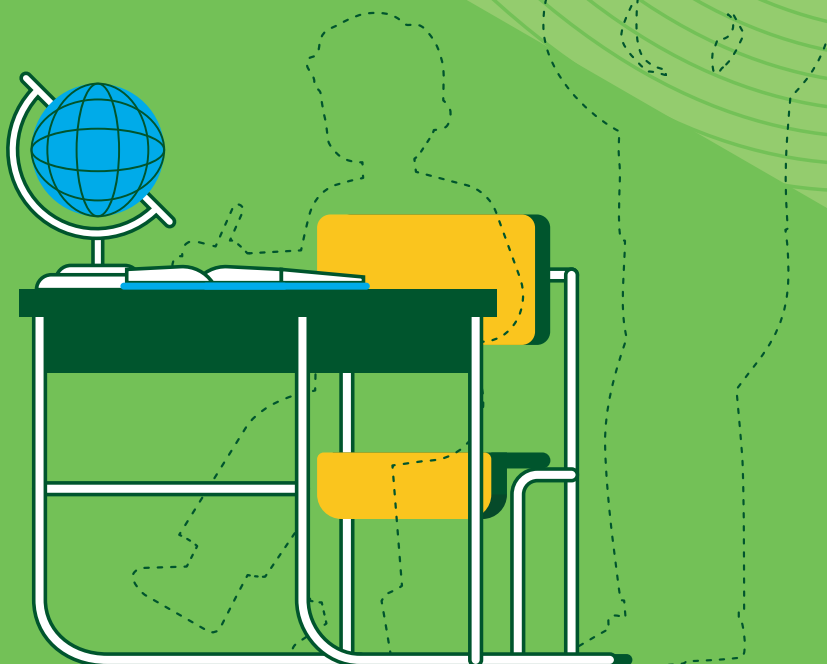


Regional Initiative
Latin America and the Caribbean
Free of Child Labour

► **Executive summary**

Prevention and reduction of child labour in Latin America and the Caribbean:

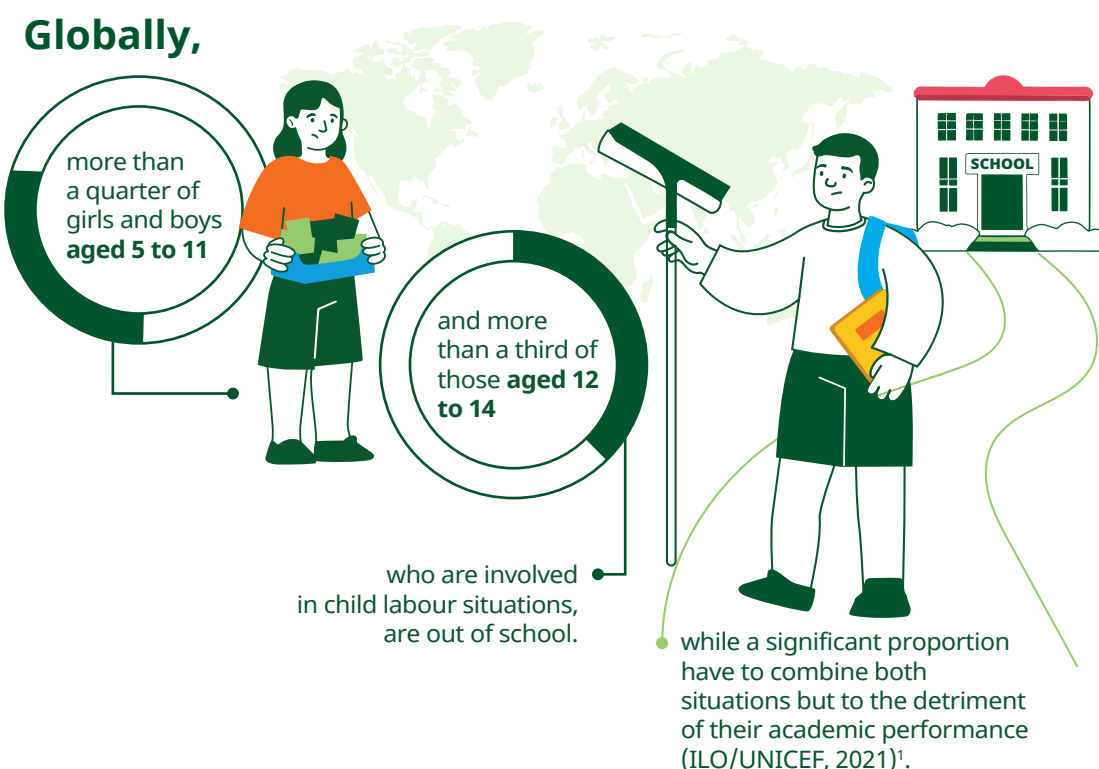
Strategies for retention, educational reintegration,
protection and labour reconversion for
adolescents of working age



Inequalities, education, and child labour

Child labour constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights and obstructs the development of girls, boys, and adolescents, threatening their physical, psychological, and social well-being. Furthermore, it perpetuates poverty for generations, and reproduces or amplifies inequality by preventing social mobility based on education.

Child labour and educational exclusion go hand in hand.



In the last two decades, Latin American and Caribbean countries have made significant efforts to guarantee access to and completion of secondary education. However, the data show that important inclusion challenges still persist, especially in upper secondary school: more than a quarter of people of official age to attend upper secondary school in 2020 were not doing so (ECLAC, 2022)².

¹ ILO and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). 2021. Child labour: Global estimates 2020, trends and the way forward, Geneva and New York, 2021.

² ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean). 2022. Social Panorama of Latin America 2022.

The relationship between educational inequalities and child labour.

The axes of the social inequality matrix are expressed in the incidence of child labour and school dropout rates, since girls, boys and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean show differentiated patterns according to their age, sex, territory, ethnic-racial status, income level, immigration, and disability status, among other variables:

1

According to official data, child labour is carried out mainly by male adolescents, largely motivated by the economic needs of their family

However, it is important to highlight that the gender difference would be significantly reduced by including domestic and care tasks in the analysis, which are mainly performed by women in the region. Female participation in child labour is underestimated in the available statistics, this owing to the fact that it is difficult to accurately estimate the prevalence of child domestic work both in the homes of third parties and in their own homes, since there is a significant invisibility of domestic chores and care, especially leaving girls and adolescent women particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. However, in most countries in the region, women have higher access and completion rates than men in secondary education, which would indicate a tendency to work and study simultaneously. While, in 2020, the upper secondary completion rate among women was 73.3 per cent, this percentage was 67.2 per cent among men (ECLAC, 2022)³.



2

Girls, boys, and adolescents who live in rural territories are exposed to greater risks of educational abandonment and child labour

74 per cent of rural children and adolescents access secondary education compared to 80 per cent of their urban counterparts. This gap deepens even further when comparing completion rates, where the difference widens to a little less than 30 percentage points (ECLAC, 2022)⁴.



³ ECLAC, 2022.

⁴ ECLAC, 2022.

3

The incidence of child labour is higher among girls, boys and adolescents who are of African descent or who belong to indigenous peoples

Both indigenous and Afro-descendant people are in a disadvantaged position in terms of access to secondary education: both populations present access gaps of more than 4 percentage points compared to the non-indigenous or Afro-descendant population (ECLAC, 2022)⁵. Regarding the completion rate, in the case of the indigenous population, this gap widens to more than 20 percentage points compared to the non-indigenous or Afro-descendant population (UNESCO/ECLAC/UNICEF, 2022)⁶.



4

Child labour is concentrated in the lowest income quintiles

Girls, boys, and adolescents belonging to the lowest income quintile in the different countries of the region show access rates that are more than 10 percentage points lower than those belonging to the highest income quintile, a gap that approximately quadruples when analysing completion rates.



5

Girls, boys, and adolescents with disabilities, whether intellectual, psychological, physical and/or emotional, are especially vulnerable to child labour.

Even though there is information for only four countries in the region (Costa Rica, Chile, Mexico, and Peru), the evidence indicates that, in terms of completions, girls, boys and adolescents with disabilities are also at a disadvantage with respect to the population without disabilities: the gap between the two is close to 15 percentage points to the detriment of the former (UNESCO/ECLAC/UNICEF, 2022)⁷.



In short, child labour is a problem generated by multiple factors that affect different population groups in different ways and that must be addressed comprehensively, with attention to differences and from an intersectional perspective.

⁵ ECLAC. 2022.

⁶ UNESCO OREALC, UNICEF and ECLAC. 2022. The crossroads of education in Latin America and the Caribbean, SDG4 regional monitoring report - Education 2030.

⁷ UNESCO OREALC, UNICEF and ECLAC. 2022.

Catalyzing factors of child labour and school dropout.

Among the catalytic factors of child labour are the characteristics of the home, the contextual characteristics of the country or territory and the educational factors that encourage students to drop out of school. Many times, these factors operate simultaneously and in intertwined ways, contributing to generating hard cores of vulnerability.

Regarding the characteristics of the home:	Regarding contextual and institutional characteristics:
▶ The situation of poverty and socioeconomic vulnerability is an important factor to explain the incidence of child labour. Although, in general, child labour is more sensitive to changes in permanent household income than to transitory phenomena, this type of work is used as a response by households to cushion income in times of crisis, whether crisis of the economy in general or household crises, such as those that originate from unemployment situations or health problems. ▶ Migration can be a protective or risk factor for child labour, depending on the individual and family conditions of children and adolescents, as well as the contextual and institutional factors in the countries of transit and destination. Migrant girls, boys and adolescents are at greater risk of child labour when the mother or father is an irregular migrant, cannot find paid work or the income is insufficient to satisfy basic needs; or if the minor is not accompanied by his or her family. ▶ The presence of domestic violence is also a factor that encourages child labour, because, in situations of constant violence, the minor usually escapes from home having to work to cover their expenses, leaving them exposed to the worst forms of child labour.	▶ The economic and productive development of countries impacts the incidence of child labour, since it has an effect on the quality of employment and household income and increases the demand for quality goods whose production requires greater labour skills. Furthermore, the importance of agriculture usually decreases with economic development, which, added to the technological advances linked to its modernization, has a positive impact on the reduction of child labour. ▶ Labour institutions, which broadly include the current legislative framework and labour inspection capabilities to protect fundamental labour rights, impact the opportunities for access to decent work in a given country or territory, which has a correlation with the incidence of child labour, either through household income and/or the possibility of involvement in dangerous work. ▶ Inadequate access or lack of access to social protection, that is, the absence of guaranteed income during periods of unemployment, as well as the presence of obstacles to access health and decent housing, among other benefits, impacts the vulnerability of homes and, in this way, encourages child labour. This is especially true in the face of economic shocks, when - as mentioned above - male and female minors in the household can function as a mitigating element against the drop in income. ▶ Tradition and sociocultural norms affecting, in particular, domestic work and work in agriculture such as debt bondage and the perception that the employer is part of the extended family; the increasing need for women to have a “substitute” in the home (due to the increase in the number of women entering the labour market); and the idea that domestic service and agricultural activities offer working girls, boys and adolescents an opportunity for education, also function as catalysts of child labour.

In addition to the catalytic elements already mentioned, other factors that encourage school dropout are related to the obstacles to accessing free, relevant, and quality education:



These can come from the educational supply side, such as, for example:

- ▶ high educational costs.
- ▶ the lack of relevance of education to the demands of the labour market (which reduces the real and perceived returns to education).
- ▶ the insufficient presence of educational institutions in certain rural territories and the distance from school to home.



Relate to contextual elements, such as:

- ▶ the presence or absence of transportation alternatives.
- ▶ violence on the school-home journey, among other factors (Arias Ortiz et al., 2022)⁸.



Or be related to the student's performance

whether in terms of learning, behavioral problems, or the presence of truancy, and to the characteristics of the school, such as the quality of teachers, the number of students per classroom, the presence of support tools to promote assistance and learning and the institutionalization of communication channels with families (Arias Ortiz et al., 2022)⁹.

In sum, the **factors that catalyze child labour are inherently related to those that encourage school dropout**. In this way, improvements in quality, relevance and aspects related to educational inclusion play a central role in the prevention and reduction of child labour. Furthermore, considering the various socioeconomic, contextual, institutional, and cultural factors that underlie both phenomena, **policies to prevent and reduce child labour and school dropouts require a comprehensive perspective** that takes care of the multiple factors that catalyze both phenomena.

⁸ Arias Ortiz, E., Eusebio, J., Pérez Alfaro, M., Vásquez, M. & Zoido, P. 2022. Educational Information and Management Systems (SIGED) in Latin America and the Caribbean: the route towards the digital transformation of educational management, Inter-American Development Bank, Washington.

⁹ Arias Ortiz et al. 2022.

Educational and labour strategies to prevent and reduce child labour: main lessons from the regional experience.

The different countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have implemented important measures to prevent child labour, through strategies that aim to prevent and address school dropouts, and that seek to create a low-risk work environment for adolescents of working age.

Regarding strategies to prevent child labour, broadly speaking, it is possible to identify five groups of programs that overlap with each other in synergistic ways:

1. **Programs to strengthen educational trajectories/ journeys**, whose objective is to provide students with tools, resources and/or support spaces so that they can successfully complete their school year. Among the different interventions are tutoring to reinforce learning; the creation of spaces or instruments to deliver information that allows them to value education, strengthen the bond with the school and develop the confidence to face the challenges they will encounter throughout their educational trajectories; and the implementation of educational flexibility actions in order to respond to the needs of different types of students. These programs are usually highly valued by students and various investigations have highlighted their cost-benefit: they do not necessarily require large investments and show important impacts in strengthening the bond with school and reducing the risk of dropping out. Furthermore, they are particularly relevant for migrant girls, boys, and adolescents, since, in general, national efforts have focused on access to the educational system and there has been little focus on what happens once they achieve incorporation (for example, regarding the way in which diversity should be addressed to promote an inclusive environment or the implementation of support through tutoring to reinforce learning).

 2. **Teenage pregnancy prevention programs and support for adolescent mothers and fathers**, which reduce the risk of child labour and allow educational continuity for mothers and fathers of school age.

 3. **Early Warning Systems (EWS)**, which ideally combine various individual, institutional, and contextual indicators in a unified platform to detect in time students at risk of dropping out of school.

 4. **Conditional transfer programs or school scholarships**, which make it possible to strengthen the income of those sectors of the population in a situation of greater vulnerability, and avoid child labour, either by incorporating it as an explicit conditionality or by increasing the opportunity costs of not carrying the children to school. The evidence shows that, in general, conditional transfer programs have positive impacts in reducing child labour and increasing enrolment at primary and secondary levels; however, this does not occur in all countries and the same effects in educational continuity are not necessarily observed, in the prevention of school dropouts, or in educational performance.

 5. **Changes in the educational offer for school reintegration**, whether in the institutional format, or in other specific aspects related to the curriculum or the organization of the contents to make it more attractive and easily accessible to girls, boys and adolescents who have dropped out. It must be considered, however, that although the modifications to the traditional format seek and manage to better accommodate the needs of those students who have dropped out, in many cases the quality they offer is under suspicion.
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Regarding strategies to create a low-risk work environment for adolescents of working age, in general terms, it is possible to identify three groups of programs:

- 1. Apprenticeship contracts or apprenticeship programs**, which allow combining theoretical training and practical experience in a protected work environment to allow adolescents to access better-paying jobs, with greater opportunities for professional growth. In general terms, impact evaluations of these programs show positive results for participants. In addition to their immediate effects in terms of income, evidence shows that these programs can help reduce informality, improve the school-work transition, and encourage the enrolment of participating adolescents in tertiary education.

 - 2. Training programs**, which provide adolescents of legal working age with alternatives for their training and professional development, promoting the continuation of their educational trajectories. Although some training programs also contemplate an internship in companies, the main difference with learning contracts or apprenticeship programs is that in the latter the legal framework defines the apprentice as an employee within the company. The results of the impact evaluations are not completely conclusive and the evidence shows that these programs are not necessarily the most cost-effective strategy.

 - 3. Employment subsidy programs**, which seek to provide incentives to companies to hire people in vulnerable or disadvantaged situations in the labour market. In this type of initiative, the private sector are in charge of qualification of positions and the hiring processes and the cost of hiring is shared between the private sector and the State. Empirical evidence shows that, in general, wage subsidies for working-age adolescents and young people in Latin America and the Caribbean have not had the expected effects in terms of reducing informality and long-term improvements in the working conditions of adolescents of working age.
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Among the lessons learned from abandonment prevention experiences in the region, it stands out that:

- 1. Educational programs alone are not enough to guarantee continuity and academic performance in the population they seek to benefit.** In this way, the need to implement comprehensive support for the students' trajectories is evident, once re-entry has been achieved. For example, in terms of reinforcing and supporting learning processes and creating bonds with their schools (for example, through individual or group tutoring), and greater coordination of educational efforts with other public policy areas, such as health (especially in the case of adolescent mothers and fathers) and social protection (see below).
- 2. The amount of the (cash) transfers is not necessarily sufficient to respond to the economic needs of adolescents belonging to the most vulnerable households.** This is particularly relevant during economic or inflationary crises, since in these periods the transfer decreases in real value and/or increases the socioeconomic vulnerability of families.
- 3. It is necessary to have a clear diagnosis about the needs of students at risk of dropping out.** For this, it is particularly relevant to ensure the interoperability of the different sources of information in the EWS of the region in order to respond to the multi-causal factors of school dropout and child labour.



Regarding the lessons learned from the experiences related to the creation of safe work environments for adolescents of working age in the region, the following stand out:

1. **The need for the conditions to access benefits to be clear, accessible, and adequate.** When too many conditions are required for businesses to participate in programs and for teens to be eligible, it may be difficult to find willing employers and eligible teens. For example, usually adolescents of working age who require apprenticeship programs are precisely those who stop studying to work and thus lose two of the most common requirements to access these benefits: not having previous work experience and not being schooled. Furthermore, evidence suggests that employment subsidy programs may have selection biases, that is, that adolescents who tend to participate in them are those who would face fewer difficulties in finding jobs. For example, participants are largely urban, and hazardous child labour is usually concentrated in rural sectors in the region and in unpaid family work.
2. **The importance of greater participation incentives explicitly aimed at adolescents and employers, integrating the needs of employers in terms of the competencies in demand with the interests of adolescents.** This involves working collaboratively with businesses to understand their needs and provide training and experience that are relevant and useful to them; and involve adolescents in the design and development of the programs, to ensure their participation and commitment to them.
3. Since these apprenticeship contracts and training allow adolescents to gain theoretical and practical experience in the labour market, **it is important that the programs provide a certificate of training and experience that is recognized at the national level.** This will help teenagers prove themselves in the job market and improve their future employment prospects.

In general terms, it is possible to conclude that:

- 1** **Child labour is a multi-causal phenomenon that requires the coordination of different public policies.** In particular, the articulation of educational systems with social protection systems to address the material deficiencies and care deficiencies of children, adolescents and their homes with (i) special protection policies for children, to address issues of domestic violence and other violations of rights; (ii) health policies, particularly sexual health, to prevent teenage pregnancy; (iii) productive development and labour market policies, to promote the economic development of the territories and at the same time reduce the mismatch of skills between the supply and demand of workers; (iv) transportation and infrastructure policies, to facilitate the school-work journey in rural areas; and (v) legislative policies, to facilitate the recognition of previous studies of migrant girls, boys and adolescents and to allow their entry into educational systems even in situations of irregularity, among many others.
- 2** The importance of carrying out an **adequate diagnosis of the problems faced by girls, boys, and adolescents at risk of child labour, and of incorporating constant monitoring and evaluation** into the design of the programs that allow interventions to be adapted in search of greater effectiveness.
- 3** **It is necessary to strengthen the territorial dimension in the fight against child labour,** improving the coordination between the different levels of State institutions and developing local and coordination capacities to manage, in a comprehensive and synergistic manner, the measures to eradicate child labour in the different locations.
- 4** **The relevance of complementing the previous actions with measures to promote social and cultural change** and combat those beliefs that perpetuate child labour. This requires considering the traditional gender norms that are manifested in the incidence and type of child labour carried out by girls, boys, and adolescents, as well as the fact that a little less than half of those who participate in child labour do so in family work and in rural jobs.
- 5** Finally, it is crucial **to strengthen labour inspection mechanisms,** not only to ensure adequate working conditions for adolescents of working age, but also to guarantee access to decent jobs for the rest of the adult members of the family nucleus, given the socioeconomic conditions of households have an impact on the incidence of child labour.

In short, combating child labour requires a comprehensive and coordinated strategy that involves different actors from the public (national and subnational) and private sectors, to identify cases of child labour and to design and implement solutions and support.



