

Policy Brief on Youth Empowerment and Intergenerational Justice

How can governments across LAC deliver policies, laws, institutional capacities, and governance tools to promote youth empowerment and intergenerational justice?

Key highlights

- Young people's transition to an autonomous life has been impacted by global challenges including the COVID-19 crisis, and ongoing social, economic, and environmental crises including the green and digital transition. Faced with an uncertain future, barriers to accessing housing, the labour market, and being vulnerable to risks including youth violence and adolescent pregnancies, young people tend to have lower trust in public institutions than older people. In 2022, on average 34.5% of the population aged 15-29 in LAC countries trusted the national government, compared to 43.1% of those aged 50 and over. In 2022, the largest differences in trust between the oldest and youngest cohorts were in the Dominican Republic (26 p.p.), Mexico (17 p.p.) and Colombia (14 p.p.).
- Involving young people across the policy cycle and ensuring their participation in policymaking fora is critical to deliver more responsive and targeted policies and services, ensure more socially inclusive growth and foster the well-being for all citizens. In 2024, 20–39-year-olds represent 48% of the voting age population in LAC, but only 27% of MPs are in that age bracket, a representation gap of more than 21 p.p. (2024).
- OECD evidence finds that in countries where inequalities across age groups are lower, rates of life satisfaction tend to be higher across all population groups. Embedding intergenerational justice considerations in the planning and delivery of policies and services is key to foster social cohesion, strengthen trust in government and deliver more inclusive government responses. Given the richness and diversity of LAC as a region, it is important that government decisions are inclusive and representative of young voices from different groups, including young people living in vulnerable circumstances.

Strengthening governance capacities to deliver policies and services for young people

1. Integrated approaches to youth policy and service delivery: Supporting young people in their transition to an autonomous life

Young people have specific needs and interests cutting across all policy and service areas and face complex and multi-sectoral challenges. A co-ordinated approach is needed to avoid policy fragmentation and delivering more cohesive, inclusive, and responsive policies and services. Governments can set in place policy and governance frameworks to support young people's transition to an autonomous life in a cohesive way.

Across OECD countries, governments often set their priorities and strategically plan their interventions in youth policy through national (integrated) youth strategies. As of 2020, 76% of OECD countries including Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico had an operational national or federal multi-year youth strategy in place. Other countries in the region, including Argentina, Brazil, and Peru also had a national youth strategy in 2020. Yet, adopting a national youth strategy alone is not enough. Governments need to ensure that these strategies are evidence-based, transparent and accountable, and that youth stakeholders from diverse background are involved in their design and implementation. Adequate resources as well as sound monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms are critical to translate strategic commitments into tangible outcomes.

2. Strengthening young people's relationship with public institutions

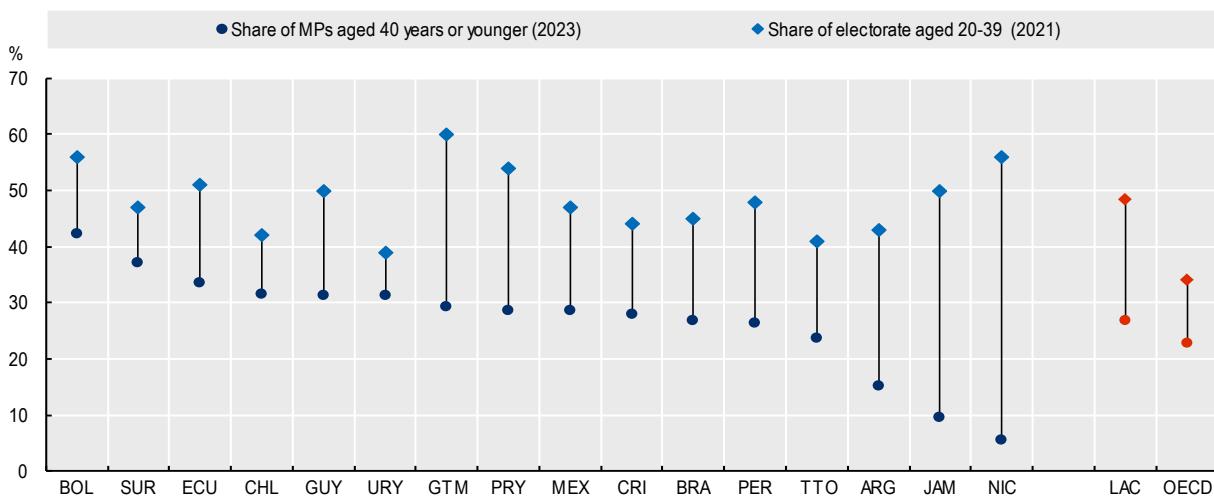
Young people in LAC tend to trust the government less than older people. In 2022, on average 34.5% of those aged 15-29 in LAC countries trusted the national government, compared to 43.1% of people aged 50 and over. In 2022, the largest differences in trust between the oldest and youngest cohorts were in the Dominican Republic (26 p.p.), Mexico (17 p.p.) and Colombia (14 p.p.).

To rebuild young people's trust, and foster more inclusive societies, governments should consider ways to engage young people throughout the policy cycle and explore avenues to engage youth through non-institutionalised channels, including through hackathons, social media campaigns, and in partnership with youth community centres. In 2021, 14 countries¹ in LAC reported having a dedicated strategy or policy to encourage young people's participation in decision-making, but more is needed to better include the voices of disenfranchised and vulnerable young people, ensure youth consultations are impactful, and 'close the loop' with young people on how their perspectives informed policymaking.

Better representing young people in state institutions and in the public sector workforce is key to strengthen their relationship with public institutions and to achieve more socially inclusive outcomes. On average, central government workforces in LAC countries include employees from all working-age groups, and have a slightly younger average age than the average for OECD countries. 22% of central government employees in LAC countries on average were aged 18-34, compared to 19% in OECD countries. Across the public sector, employees aged 55 and over account for 26% on average in OECD countries and 21% in LAC countries. Regarding representation in Parliament, in 2023, only 27% of parliamentarians were less than 40 years old on average in LAC countries. As 48% of the population in the region is aged between 20 and 40 years, this shows a representation gap of more than 21 p.p.

¹ ARG, CHL, COL, CRI, DOM, ECU, GTM, HND, JAM, MEX, PAN, PER, PRY, URY. Source: OECD-IDB (2022), Survey on Open Government; OECD (2021), Survey on Open Government

Figure 1. 12.13. Share of members of parliament aged 40 and under, and people aged 20-39 as a share of the voting-age population, 2023



Source: Parline database on national parliaments (<https://data.ipu.org>). United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, Online Edition. OECD calculations based on OECD Demography and Population (database). Data for the OECD average are for 2022.

While less engaged in institutionalised forms of political participation (e.g., voting, running for office), young people in LAC are often active in their local communities and online, and frequently engage in social movements, signing petitions and taking part in protests. OECD surveys to youth organisations in 2022, however, point out that 55% of respondents lack financial resources as a challenge for youth work.

3. Delivering fair and inclusive outcomes for all generations

The notion that each new generation will fare better than their predecessors is being challenged by global phenomena, including economic crises, threats to democratic institutions, climate change and the rise of AI. In some cases, such challenges have in fact exacerbated generational inequalities, as seen during the COVID-19 crisis. There is a strong case for governments to address this, as countries where inequalities between generations are smaller also report higher levels of life satisfaction overall. In 2020, the OECD introduced a framework with five pillars to embed considerations of intergenerational justice into policymaking. These pillars include 1) Political commitment, 2) Strategic vision, 3) Accountability and oversight institutions, 4) Anticipatory and adaptive tools, and 5) Age diversity in public life and decision-making.

OECD support

- The [OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People](#) ("OECD Youth Recommendation") orients governments to adopt government-wide strategies and policy principles to improve measures and outcomes for young people in all relevant areas. These areas include skills and competencies, labour market outcomes, social inclusion and youth well-being, and young people's trust in government and public institutions. The Recommendation also guides governments to address age-based inequalities by promoting their participation and representation in public and political life and reinforce government capacities to deliver youth-responsive services. A Youth Policy Toolkit will be launched at the end of 2024 to support adherents to implement the Youth Recommendation.

- The OECD provides bilateral support to countries to enhance public governance arrangements to empower young people, (re-)build their trust, strengthen institutional capacities and address gaps in outcomes across age groups through peer reviews, collection of good practices, peer-learning and capacity-building workshops, development of targeted recommendations, and provision of guidance documents (e.g., roadmaps, action plans).
- Comparative reports and policy studies are prepared to identify common challenges and policy recommendations. These include, among others, the flagship OECD Report [Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?](#) and OECD policy papers on youth and COVID-19 ([2020](#); [2022](#)).
- The OECD provides fora to promote policy dialogue on youth empowerment and intergenerational justice, including the [high-level regional LAC launch](#) of the OECD Report *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*

Example from LAC countries: National Youth Survey of Costa Rica

National youth surveys are important tools to shed light on the outcomes and lives of young people and provide policymakers with evidence to inform decisions. In Costa Rica, the National Council for Public Policy on Young People (CPJ), a decentralised body attached to the Ministry of Culture and Youth, has a statutory mandate to conduct research on young people. With this mandate, the CPJ has undertaken national youth surveys in 2007, 2013 and 2018 to analyse young people's perspectives on the exercise of their rights and provide insights to guide policies for young people aged 15 to 35. The survey design, fieldwork and data analysis are led by the School of Statistics of the University of Costa Rica, in co-ordination with the Council of Young People. Survey results provide policymakers, academics and related authorities with reliable data guide the formulation and improvement of policies for young people. For instance, data on young people collected in 2018 informed the 2020-2024 Public Policy on Young People. Previous National Youth Surveys have been used to monitor young people's access to public facilities, gender gaps among young people, healthcare outcomes, among others, to inform national strategies on healthcare and service provision.

Suggested Policy Actions

To promote youth empowerment and intergenerational justice, governments across Latin America and the Caribbean could consider:

- Supporting **youth in their transition to an autonomous life** through developing and reviewing of comprehensive, evidence-based **youth strategies** that are participatory, cross-sectoral, and supported by political commitment, with adequate resources and effective monitoring. Governments could also ensure the **promotion of integrated approaches to youth policymaking and service delivery** by equipping policymakers with necessary skills and developing co-ordination mechanisms, as well as **lowering barriers to accessing public services**, providing **targeted policies to under-served young people**, and **gathering age-disaggregated data** to track and address inequalities.
- Strengthening **young people's relationship with public institutions** by addressing legal and administrative **barriers to young people's representation** and participation in political life and public institutions, **fostering age diversity in the public sector workforce**, strengthen youth **consultation, engagement and co-creation** with young people, developing **volunteering and youth work** strategies and promoting their practice, and providing opportunities for young people to strengthen their civic and citizenship literacy

- Fostering **intergenerational justice** in the context of global challenges through **strong political commitment**, integrating intergenerational justice considerations in **laws, policies and strategies**, creating **oversight institutions** to monitor intergenerational justice, and building **policymaker capacities**.

Further reading

- OECD (2020), *Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for All Generations?*, OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c3e5cb8a-en>
- OECD (2020), *Gobernanza para la Juventud, Confianza y Justicia Intergeneracional*, (Resumen y traducción del documento original), OECD Public Governance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris [573223-oecd-brochure-youth-spanish-sm.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1787/573223-oecd-brochure-youth-spanish-sm.pdf)
- OECD (2024), *Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2024*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4abdba16-en>