



**Regional Initiative**  
Latin America and the Caribbean  
Free of Child Labour



International  
Labour  
Organization

Latin America and the Caribbean:  
**Towards the  
first generation  
FREE OF CHILD LABOUR**

.....  
An integrated and interdependent analysis of  
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
in relation to target 8.7



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PART 3

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**DECENT WORK  
AND CHILD LABOUR  
PREVENTION AND  
ELIMINATION WITHIN  
THE FRAMEWORK OF  
THE 2030 AGENDA**

Given the many causes of child labour, multiple issues should be addressed in relation to its prevention and elimination. To achieve the target by 2025, it will be necessary, among other things, to reduce poverty, improve education, promote gender equity and implement social protection policies. Conversely, progress in reducing child labour will facilitate progress on each of these issues.

Given this relationship, this section analyzes target 8.7 (on ending child labour) within the broader framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, considering first its direct link with Goal 8 (on economic growth and the creation of decent work) of which it is part.

The section then goes on to analyze the links between the target to put an end to child labour and the other objectives through which direct links are identified from a thematic correlation analysis based on empirical evidence in each area. Each target identified as having a “direct effect” is considered to be an impact in the relationship between child labour and the goal that contains it, so that the total number of impacts on each target establishes an indicator of the degree of interdependence it has with child labour. The outcome of the analysis performed is illustrated in the following figure.

**Figure 17**

Interdependence of target 8.7 on ending child labour and other commitments adopted within the framework of the SDGs



By applying the described criteria, the analysis of the links between the target on ending child labour and the entire set of SDGs will focus on 8 goals and 35 specific targets, ordered by their degree of interdependence:

1. **SDG 4:** Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education
2. **SDG 5:** Achieve gender equality
3. **SDG 1:** End poverty
4. **SDG 10:** Reduce inequality
5. **SDG 2:** End hunger
6. **SDG 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies
7. **SDG 3:** Ensure healthy lives
8. **SDG 13:** Combat climate change

Source: Author's elaboration.

## SDG 4: PROMOTING EDUCATION FOR ALL ENTAILS ELIMINATING CHILD LABOUR

**SDG 4:** Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning

The relationship between this goal and the fight against child labour is so apparent that school attendance rates are used as a proxy indicator to determine its existence and, consequently, “it is no surprise that since 2000, the rapid decline in child labour has coincided with a major increase in school attendance.”<sup>29</sup>

The economic benefit of the elimination of child labour as a result of increased productive capacity due to improvements in children’s educational outcomes “is difficult to dispute, yet it is also difficult to quantify. Ultimately, the economic value of expanded education will depend on other changes taking place within a country over the same period: the effectiveness and stability of its institutions, the creation of new enterprises organized to take advantage of higher levels of human capital, and economic policies to stimulate growth and development, among others.”<sup>30</sup>

29 IPEC (2013), p. 10.

30 ILO (2004), p. 13.



Policies aimed at promoting education for children and adolescents form a basic success triangle together with those aimed directly at combating child labour and enhancing social protection.

Access to free, quality public education is also a relevant factor for economic growth as it helps meet the market's demand for skilled labour, which in turn influences the quality of employment. In 2012, 58 million children of primary school age and 63 million adolescents of secondary school age were out of formal education.

However, mere access to school is not enough: In Latin America and the Caribbean, children and adolescents who work or live in poverty have high percentages of school attendance, but their status as workers and poor environment conditions do not allow them to secure the benefits of education on equal terms as their peers who do not work. This is illustrated in the following table.

**Table 2**

Average test scores in language and mathematics for Latin American and Caribbean countries, by country and child labour index (2003)

Country	Do you work outside your home when you are not in school?	Language test score (max. 19)	Percentage difference compared with the “always” group	Mathematics test score (max. 32)	Percentage difference compared with the “always” group
Argentina	Always	12.3	-	16	-
	Sometimes	13.3	8.1	17.6	10
	Never	14.5	17.9	18.9	18.1
Bolivia	Always	9.8	-	14.5	-
	Sometimes	10.4	6.1	15.1	4.1
	Never	12.3	25.5	17.2	18.6
Brazil	Always	11.4	-	14.6	-
	Sometimes	12.1	4.3	15.9	8.9
	Never	14	22.8	18.7	28.1
Chile	Always	11.6	-	13.8	-
	Sometimes	12.6	8.6	15	8.7
	Never	14	20.7	17	23.2
Colombia	Always	10.3	-	14.2	-
	Sometimes	11.5	11.7	15.6	9.9
	Never	12.8	24.3	16.4	15.5

Source: Sánchez, Orazem and Gunnarsson (2005).



Country	Do you work outside your home when you are not in school?	Language test score (max. 19)	Percentage difference compared with the “always” group	Mathematics test score (max. 32)	Percentage difference compared with the “always” group
Dominican Republic	Always	9.5	-	12.6	-
	Sometimes	9.7	2.1	13.3	5.6
	Never	11.1	16.8	13.8	9.5
Honduras	Always	9.1	-	11.8	-
	Sometimes	9.7	6.6	12.6	6.8
	Never	11.8	29.7	14.6	23.7
Mexico	Always	9.6	-	13.8	-
	Sometimes	10.6	10.4	15.1	9.4
	Never	12.5	30.2	17.7	28.3
Paraguay	Always	11.2	-	13.9	-
	Sometimes	11.8	5.4	15.5	11.5
	Never	13.1	17	17.3	24.5
Peru	Always	9.1	-	11.6	-
	Sometimes	10.1	11	11.9	2.6
	Never	12.2	34.1	14.9	28.4
Venezuela	Always	10	-	12.2	-
	Sometimes	10.9	9	13	6.6
	Never	11.5	15	14.5	18.9

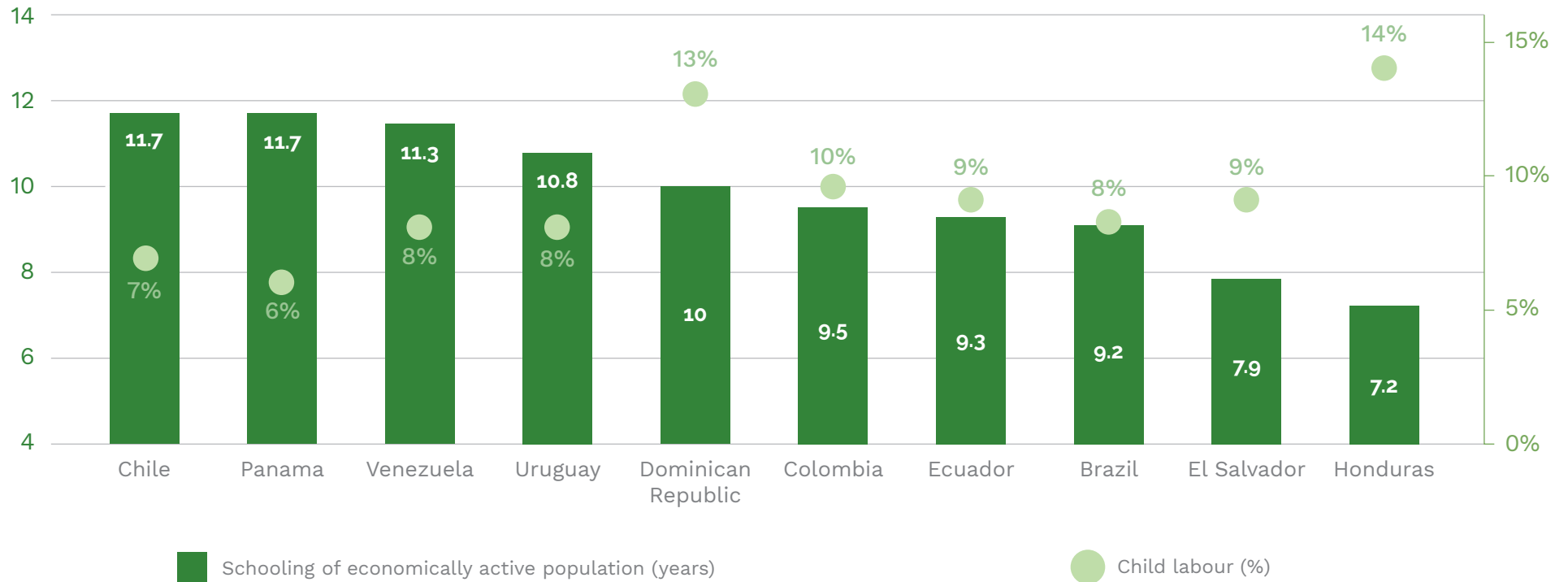
Source: Sánchez, Orazem and Gunnarsson (2005).

The challenges in accessing free, quality public education faced by children and adolescents in child labour end up reinforcing the vicious cycle of poverty: Participation in child labour is associated with lower levels of training and jobs that do not adhere to the basic criteria of decent work. “Young people who were burdened by work as children are consistently more likely to have to settle for unpaid family work and less likely to enjoy paid employment.”<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, there is a continuation through the generations: parents with low schooling levels or lacking sufficient time or knowledge to assist their children with extracurricular tasks are factors that prolong poverty and contribute to the structural conditions that enable child labour.

31 IPEC (2015), p. xiv.

**Figure 21**  
 Years of schooling of economically active population and percentage of child labour presence  
 for selected countries in Latin America (according to household surveys, circa 2013)



Source: Compiled from the Unicef Global Database.

**Target 4.1** calls on all States to “Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.”

Early entry into the labour market is among the obstacles to staying in school and completing compulsory school cycles. According to ILO data, 70 per cent of child and adolescent workers attend school, compared to 94 per cent of those who do not work.

In a study that measures the costs and benefits of eliminating child labour, the ILO (2004 and 2014) demonstrated that the benefits of achieving this target outweigh the associated costs.

**Table 3**  
Total economic costs and benefits of eliminating child labour  
in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2025, in billions of dollars

	Costs			Benefits			
	Gov't Cost		Household costs	Annual benefits		Rate of return	
	Total Gov't (*)	% of GDP	Opportunity cost	Education (2019-2068)	Health (2015-2025)	Net economic benefit	Net financial benefit
<b>Latin America (17 countries)</b>	<b>5.738,4</b>		<b>715,3</b>	<b>3.882,0</b>	<b>80,6</b>	<b>13,9</b>	<b>5,2</b>
<b>Mesoamerica</b>	<b>2.827,6</b>		<b>237,0</b>	<b>1.290,7</b>	<b>30,6</b>	<b>13,9</b>	<b>3,1</b>
Costa Rica	21,8	...	1,8	9,8	0,3	16,8	3,0
El Salvador	85,7	0.3	8,5	46,1	1,0	11,7	4,0
Guatemala	620,9	1.1	47,9	265,0	5,6	10,9	2,8
Honduras	376,9	1.9	13,0	71,0	1,9	6,8	-0,8
Mexico	1.303,2	0.1	139,0	752,4	18,6	18,0	4,3
Nicaragua	175,8	1.5	11,7	63,6	1,4	11,8	2,0
Panama	48,3	0.1	2,8	15,5	0,4	8,0	1,4
Dominican Republic	194,9	0.3	12,3	67,4	1,6	10,9	1,8

Source: Compiled by author based on ILO data (2015).

	Costs			Benefits			
	Gov't Cost		Household costs	Annual benefits		Rate of return	
	Total Gov't (*)	% of GDP	Opportunity cost	Education (2019-2068)	Health (2015-2025)	Net economic benefit	Net financial benefit
<b>Andean Region</b>	<b>1.556,0</b>		<b>288,6</b>	<b>1.572,9</b>	<b>25,9</b>	<b>13,3</b>	<b>7,7</b>
Bolivia	230,6	0.7	66,2	359,8	4,8	19,8	10,3
Colombia	797,2	0.2	83,9	459,0	8,9	8,1	4,4
Ecuador	212,0	0.2	18,2	100,0	2,1	12,4	3,3
Peru	316,1	0.1	120,3	654,1	10,0	17,4	12,7
<b>Southern Cone</b>	<b>1.354,9</b>		<b>189,6</b>	<b>1.018,4</b>	<b>24,1</b>	<b>14,7</b>	<b>5,8</b>
Argentina	266,9	0.1	26,2	143,0	3,4	5,4	4,1
Brazil	860,0	0.0	138,5	739,6	17,4	19,5	6,5
Chile	36,5	...	10,0	54,5	1,3	20,0	10,0
Paraguay	186,1	0.6	10,7	58,7	1,5	10,6	1,4
Uruguay	5,5	...	4,2	22,6	0,6	20,7	17,5

(\*): Education supply + direct transfers + transfer management + direct interventions.

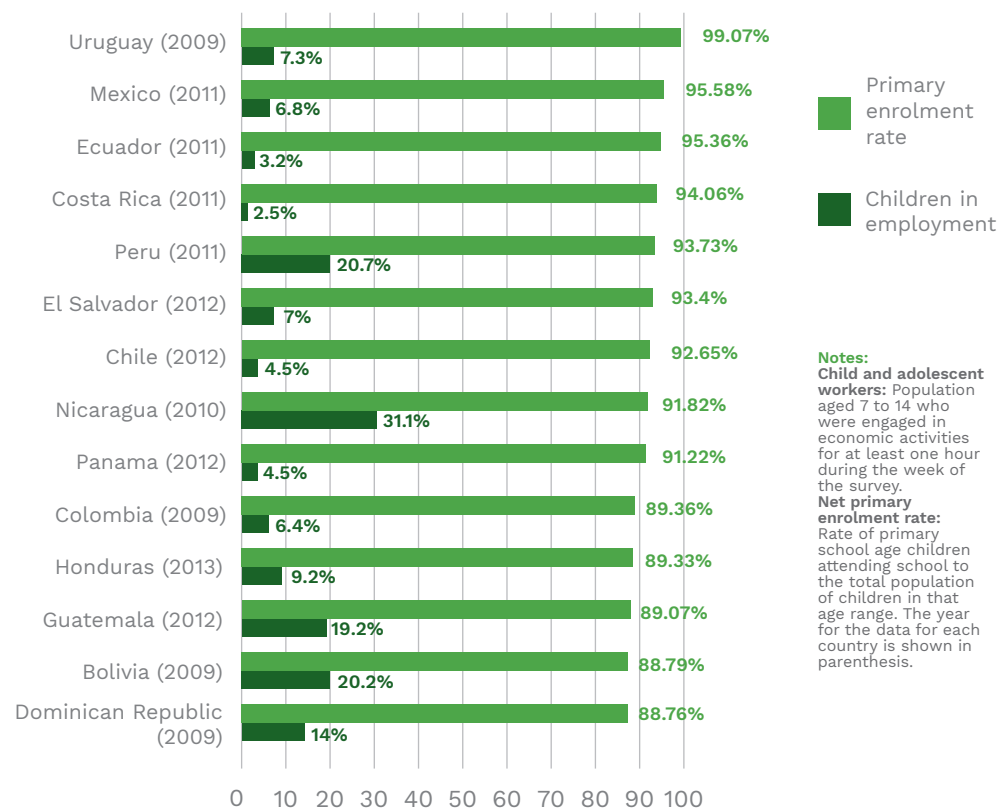
Source: Compiled by author based on ILO data (2015).

The above target also clearly indicates that this is not only an issue of attendance and retention, but also of school quality and educational outcomes. School attendance by children and adolescents in child labour is high in primary school, but the outcomes of children and adolescents who work are worse than those who do not work.

The following figure shows that in Latin America and the Caribbean, net primary enrolment rates are, as a general rule, inversely proportional to the percentage of children engaged in economic activities. This highlights, once again, both the strong correlation between the two issues and the need for an integrated approach.

**Figure 22**

Relationship between net primary enrolment rate and percentage of children engaged in economic activities for selected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean



Source: Compiled by author based on World Bank data.

The reasoning used for preventing child labour and promoting the skills required for employment and decent work –with its effect on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth– is the same reasoning behind **Target 4.2**: “Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education”. As Heckman and Masterov (2007) demonstrate, early social interventions aimed at minimising the effects of adverse environments in the early years of life can reverse some damage, thus reducing the disadvantages during children’s’ growth. This produces a high economic return by generating benefits not only for the beneficiaries themselves, but also for their descendants and for society as a whole.

**Target 4.3** covers technical, professional and higher education opportunities, and expresses the commitment to: “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.” Child labour breaks or hinders this commitment.

One of the reasons for the unemployment rates –particularly among young people– is the disparity between supply and demand for skills. In view of this, “child labour is a particular concern,”<sup>32</sup> because it prematurely disrupts the educational process or prevents its full utilisation (see Table 2). It deprives children and adolescents from developing the skills necessary for working life, limiting their participation in the labour market to informal or low-paid jobs.

<sup>32</sup> Unesco (2012), p. 12.



**Target 4.4** commits all States to “Increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.” As noted, the level of schooling achieved is directly related to the likelihood of obtaining decent work<sup>33</sup> and with child labour: It represents an obstacle to achieving this target by hindering education or influencing children and adolescents’ achievements.

**Target 4.5** commits all States to, “By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.” There is a greater occurrence of child labour among vulnerable groups since there are higher incentives for using child labour. This analysis will be expanded later when addressing the SDGs on gender equality and reduction of inequalities.

**Target 4.6** strives to, “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy”, which can be understood as a continuation of the previously-described target, but should also be considered in the light of the effects of child labour on obtaining life skills and essential skills for employment (see Figure 8).

**Figure 23**  
The vicious cycle binding child labour,  
low education levels and poverty



Source: Author’s elaboration.

33 IPEC (2015).



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