

## MINIMUM AGE FOR COMPULSORY EDUCATION

- The minimum age for the end of compulsory education refers to the end of the minimum period in which children are supposed to attend school.
- It refers to the age at which adolescents are deemed to have acquired the skills, knowledge and maturity to economically contribute to society and act as responsible citizens. It is a minimum requirement, rather than an upper limit, and States should support conditions for increased access to secondary education for adolescents.
- Primary education enrolment is almost universal in Latin America and the Caribbean. Enrolment drops significantly from primary to secondary.
- International standards provide that the minimum age for the end of compulsory schooling shall not be lower than the minimum age for admission to employment, hence at least 15 years old – or 14 as a

temporary exception for countries whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed.

- Most countries in LAC make education compulsory until 14 to 16 years of age. A handful of countries have however set the age at 12 or 13. In some States, the law provides for minimum educational achievement rather than define an exact age. The level is either primary schooling like in Haiti or upper secondary like in Uruguay.

*For all children younger than the age of end of compulsory education attending school should be free of charge. This constitutes an important element for equality of opportunities.*

## MINIMUM AGE FOR THE END OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION – A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE FOR ADOLESCENTS' RIGHTS IN LAC

While primary education enrolment rates in Latin American and the Caribbean are high (91 per cent), lower secondary school enrolment drops significantly. Lower secondary school enrolment reaches only 74 per cent, with some countries showing rates below 50 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

Completion of secondary education is however important for a successful insertion into the labour market. It is considered that completion of primary education is no longer sufficient to escape poverty and secondary education is the minimum threshold for guaranteeing the future well-being of adolescents, and reducing poverty and inequalities.<sup>4</sup>

Setting an age at which adolescents must be in school is furthermore an important element of a national child protection system. School is an important environment for identifying children at risk, addressing vulnerabilities, detecting and reporting situations of violence, and limiting children's exposure to being drawn into hazardous and illegal activities and other forms of exploitation.

**1,5 million**  
**ADOLESCENTS**

deberían asistir  
SECONDARY SCHOOL

**ESTÁN FUERA DE  
LA ESCUELA**

**7,6 million**  
**ADOLESCENTS**

están inscritos  
SECONDARY SCHOOL

**DROPPING OUT**<sup>2</sup>



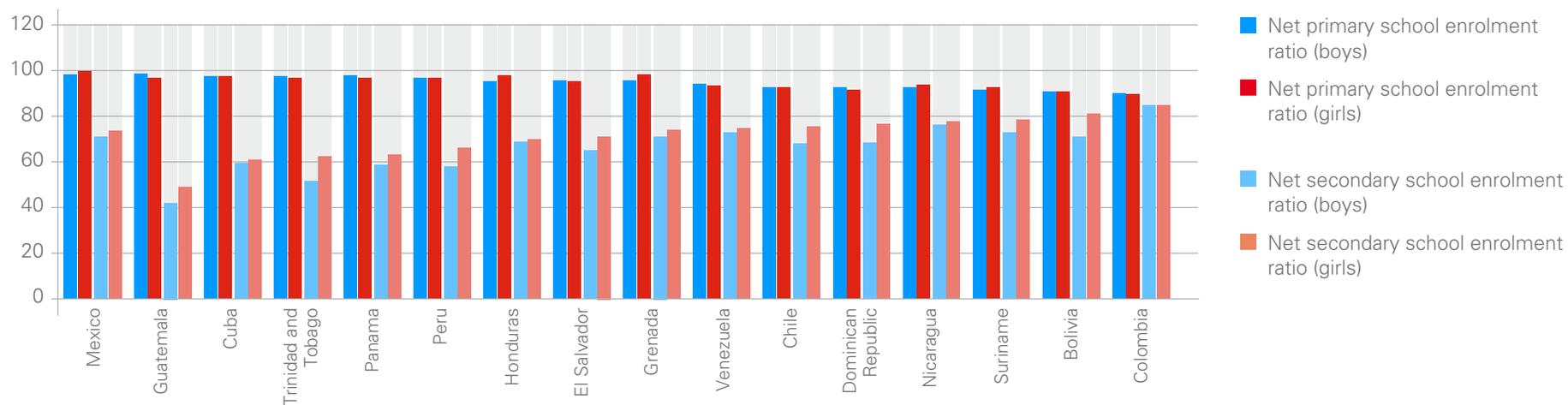
<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, Guía regional sobre adolescentes, 2014, quoting MICS data.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF and UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Iniciativa Completar la escuela: logros y desafíos al año 2011, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF, Guía regional sobre adolescentes, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF and ECLAC, Challenges: Adolescents and the right to education, No. 17, Nov. 2013.

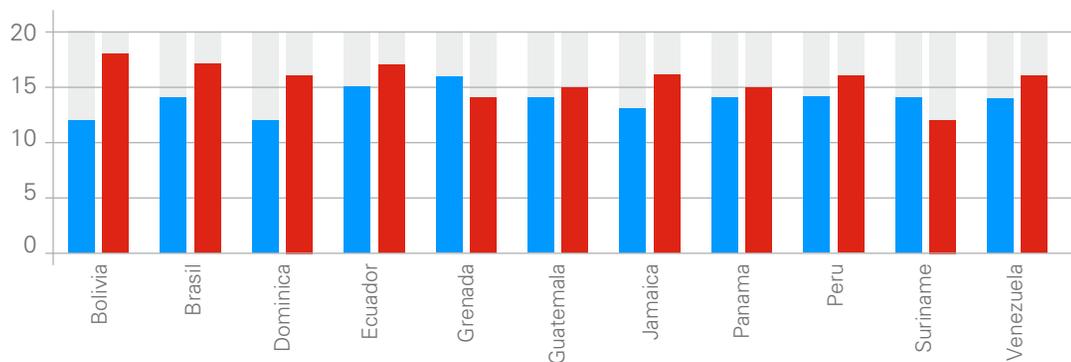
## NET PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ENROLMENT RATES (BOYS AND GIRLS)



Source: UNICEF datasets, State of the World's Children 2014.

## MINIMUM AGE OF EMPLOYMENT VS. MINIMUM AGE OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN A SELECTION OF COUNTRIES

■ Minimum age of employment  
■ Minimum age of compulsory education



Source: UNICEF.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that domestic legislation set a minimum age for the end of compulsory education at 15 years old or exceptionally and temporarily at 14, depending on the minimum age for admission to employment.
- Consider combining age requirements with educational achievement requirements, i.e. completion of lower secondary education as a minimum.
- Ensure that domestic legislation provides for free and mandatory secondary education.
- Consider including provisions linking access to education and social assistance for families in need.