

GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY
YOUTH NETWORK
THE FUTURE IS YOUNG
aspen institute



Local Action, Regional Impact:

The Opportunity Youth Network in Latin America

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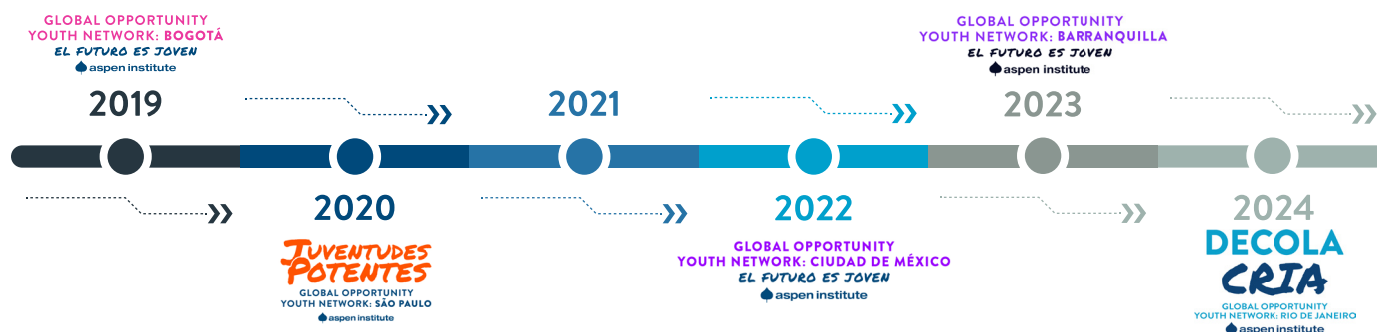


Introduction

The **Global Opportunity Youth Network¹ (GOYN), or Red de Jóvenes con Potencial**, is a multi-stakeholder partnership committed to catalyzing place-based systems shifts in communities — cities and rural districts — around the world through the creation of sustainable economic opportunities for “Opportunity Youth,” (OY) aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Created in 2018, **GOYN’s current network comprises 16 communities in India, Africa and Latin America**, with continued plans for replication of the model to other communities and regions.

The first GOYN community worldwide was founded in Bogotá, Colombia, in 2018, pioneering and inspiring other communities that followed in Kenya and India. In Latin America, the second community opened in 2020 in São Paulo, Brazil, followed by GOYN Mexico City in 2022, GOYN Barranquilla in 2023, and the most recent community launched in 2024, GOYN Rio de Janeiro.

In recent years, GOYN communities and youth in Latin America **have made significant progress in building you-**



th-centered ecosystems focused on education, employment, and entrepreneurship, creating an active and dynamic dialogue between various actors in the public, social, and private sectors in the main urban centers where we are present. These joint efforts, which have been designed, piloted, and implemented as solutions to a systemic problem that hinders young people’s access to decent opportunities and comprehensive well-being, have already yielded their first results in Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico.

This article is the result of a collective initiative between communities, young leaders from the Youth Advisory Groups (YAG), and the GOYN regional team in Latin

America, who see the need to bring a regional perspective to youth issues and to propose systemic solutions that have a greater impact and reach in Latin America. This piece aims to share the visions, barriers, opportunities, and stories of young people who, supported by GOYN, are now proposing concrete, collective, and collaborative actions in their communities to rethink and rebuild socio-cultural, political, economic, and mental structures from a perspective of empowerment with and for the youth of Latin America.

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE ARE YOUNG.

¹ >> The Global Opportunity Youth Network (GOYN) is a network that involves local public, private, and civil society partners, together with young people, to collaborate at the community level, creating pathways to decent employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. It is managed by the Aspen Institute in collaboration with the Global Development Incubator (GDI) and supported by various organizations in nine countries. Learn more at: <https://goyn.org/>

01

What is our context?



MEXICO

Mexico is one of the largest and most densely populated countries in Latin America, with more than 133 million inhabitants, according to population projections by the General Secretariat of the National Population Council (CONAPO, 2025). Although the country's economy is mainly export-oriented and considered robust—being the second largest in the region, behind Brazil only—with a GDP that exceeded \$1.85 trillion in 2024, the internal reality is marked by profound structural inequalities. Currently, the Mexican economy is undergoing what various experts call a "transition to inequality," as its economic growth has not translated into an effective reduction of social disparities. One of the main challenges is the high level of informal employment, which accounts for nearly 60% of the country's workforce and contributes only about 40% to public spending. Although economic inequality has declined slightly in recent years, it remains at alarming levels: the wealthiest households earn up to 14 times more than the poorest ones.

This inequality is sharply reflected among Mexican youth. Of the 30.8 million young people between the ages of 15 and 29 living in the country, **15.6 million live in conditions of poverty, exclusion, and precariousness.** An estimated 4.9 million are disconnected from both the education system and the labor market, while 7.6 million work in informal and precarious conditions. In addition, 3.1 million students

face poverty and struggle to continue their studies (*Observatorio Acción Nacional Frente a la Pobreza, 2025*).

Territorial disparities further amplify this issue. In states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas², informal employment exceeds 85%, and the average level of schooling is below 10 years, in contrast to states such as Mexico City or Nuevo León, where informal employment is around 44% and 36%, respectively (UNDP, 2025). Adding to this complex reality are the intersectional structural barriers faced by diverse groups of youth in Mexico. At least 60% of LGBT+ people between the ages of 15 and 29 have experienced some form of discrimination due to their sexual orientation or identity.

Likewise, young and diverse women who take on caregiving responsibilities are even more vulnerable and limited in their access to educational, employment, and health opportunities.

Inequalities in Mexico disproportionately affect young people. Despite economic growth, comprehensive strategies for structural inclusion and social justice **remain insufficient to guarantee quality education, decent employment, access to comprehensive health services, and social protection systems for all young people living in Mexico.**

2 >> Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas are states in southern Mexico that have historically presented the greatest challenges in terms of socioeconomic development, characterized by a high proportion of indigenous population and an economy heavily dependent on rural and informal activities.



COLOMBIA

With over 53 million inhabitants, Colombia is one of the largest countries in South America and holds a strategic geographic position as a bridge between this region and Central America, with more than five land borders and nine maritime borders. Although the economy has shown signs of recovery — as evidenced by a GDP growth of 1.7% in 2024 and projected growth of 2.6% for this year, according to estimates from the Central Bank — significant challenges remain. Despite the national unemployment rate falling to 8.8% in April 2025 — the lowest in ten years — major issues persist, as three out of every four new jobs are either informal or self-employed. This means that while jobs are being created, many lack guarantees, stability, and access to social security.

International cooperation in Colombia has strengthened youth programs focused on peace, education, and climate change, benefiting more than 2.5 million young people over the last decade. However, with the defunding by the U.S. government through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Noticias Caracol, 2025), many education, employability, and youth programs have lost their economic sustainability. In the last year, diplomatic tensions with the United States have led to a change in the country's foreign policy and the need to seek new allies in the East and with the BRICS³. This policy has strengthened the country's presence as a regional authority, an example of this is the presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and its active participation in organizations such as

the Organization of American States (OAS), the Andean Community (CAN)⁴, and the Pacific Alliance.

In Colombia, the last few decades have been marked by strong youth leadership, from the *Séptima Papeleta* movement and the 1991 Constitution to the 2021 National Strike. However, the struggle for equality persists, especially in education and employment. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), **more than 50% of young people work in the informal sector**, and according to DANE⁵ (2025), **the national youth unemployment rate is approximately 16%**. In addition, challenges such as educational coverage rates, which, according to the Ministry of Education, start at approximately 80% for basic education and drop to 43% for higher education. On the other hand, according to DANE, 14.1% of Colombians live with unmet basic needs, a situation that is exacerbated in rural areas, where the figure is close to 30%, compared to 9% in urban areas.

Finally, the internal armed conflict continues impacting young people, especially in rural and peripheral areas. The COALICO report⁶ (2024) recorded 44,784 children and adolescents as victims of the armed conflict, with forced recruitment being the most common form of impact. This harsh violence is largely driven by a weak state presence in approximately 170 municipalities across the country, which are also the areas most affected by poverty, violence, and armed conflict. These areas were prioritized in the 2016 Peace Agreement and included under the PDET (Territorially Focused Development Programs) instrument, with

3 >> BRICS is an international political and economic group initially made up of countries with emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

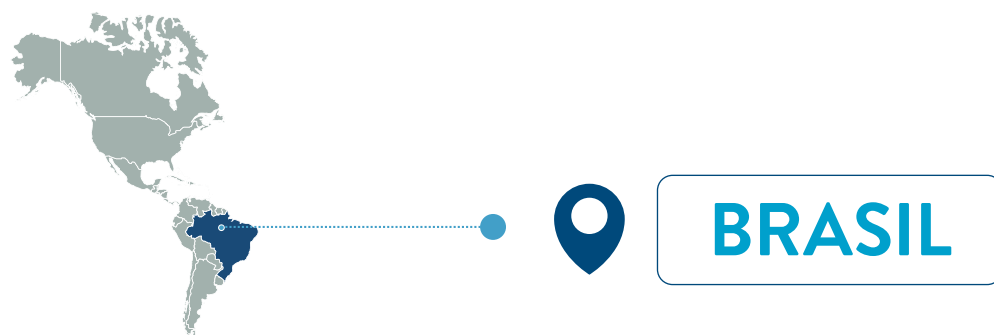
4 >> The Andean Community, formerly known as the Andean Pact, is an international economic organization created with the aim of achieving the comprehensive and autonomous development of the Andean peoples. It is composed of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

5 >> DANE: National Administrative Department of Statistics.

6 >> COALICO: Coalition against the involvement of children and young people in armed conflict in Colombia was created in 1999 and is a space for the convergence and coordination of civil society organizations that seek to transform the situations generated by the Colombian armed conflict, specifically those related to the use, recruitment, and involvement of children in armed groups.

the promise of deploying a strategy that would transform these operational strongholds of criminal groups into municipalities of peace. However, at present, many of these areas remain a strategic enclave for these illegal structures,

and violence against the civilian population persists, leaving Colombian youth particularly vulnerable.



Brazil is the largest country in Latin America in terms of territory and stands out for its natural and ethnic diversity, with unique ecosystems and environmental wealth. According to the 2022 Demographic Census (IBGE), the country has 203,062,512 inhabitants, of whom 45.3% are mestizo (around 91.9 million), 43.5% white (88.4 million), 10.2% black (20.7 million), and 0.8% indigenous (1.65 million).

Nonetheless, its history is marked by profound inequalities since colonization, including the genocide of indigenous peoples and the enslavement of more than 4.9 million Africans between 1500 and 1888 (BBC, 2018). After the signing of the Golden Law, "whitening" policies further marginalized black, indigenous, and mixed-race populations. This historical exclusion gave rise to the favelas, which became symbols of resistance and survival, and where even **today**

young people from the peripheries face barriers such as limited access to education, health services, decent work, and urban mobility (Unicef, 2024).

In 2025, despite advances such as GDP growth, increased life expectancy, and Brazil's removal from the world hunger map (Federal Government, 2025), **structural inequalities persist: in the favelas of Rio, life expectancy is only 59 years, and in São Paulo, young people spend up to two and a half hours a day on transportation.** In addition to material precariousness, Brazilian youth are **subject to police violence and historical discrimination, especially black and indigenous youth.** In the face of this reality, the younger generation resists and fights against racism, machismo, homophobia, and fascism, establishing itself as a transformative and liberating social force.

WHY SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT THE BRAIN DRAIN IN LATIN AMERICA?

Although they are different countries, the historical, economic, social, and environmental contexts of Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil are intertwined and resonate with the reality of many Latin American countries. It is a colonial history of social and environmental exploitation, the legacy of which persists in the systematic discrimination and marginalization of Black and Indigenous communities, women, mothers, and LGBTIQ+ people—issues further exacerbated through an intersectional lens. None of these countries can

be reduced to an economic reading based on GDP growth, as in all three contexts, economic inequality persists and deepens due to internal violence, external economic dependence, corruption, unstable governments, and inconsistent policies at the national, state, and municipal levels.

Education systems, in terms of both quality and coverage, remain insufficient to address the reality of a predominantly informal, precarious, and unprotected labor market faced

by Latin American youth, a situation that is even worse in rural settings. Added to this are the internal armed conflict, police violence, and drug trafficking networks operating through transnational corridors that stretch from the south of the continent to the border with the United States. This network constitutes a context of normalized violence in which young people grow up and try to build their lives.

Faced with these structural conditions, **human mobility** emerges as an immediate and historical response. Latin America is characterized by high internal and external migration, especially to the United States, which is the main receiving country according to the International Organization for Migration⁷ (IOM) and the Economic Commission for Latin America⁸ (ECLAC). Although there is insufficient empirical and disaggregated evidence to determine why young people migrate, we know that the population between the ages of 15 and 29 represents approximately 15% of international migration (IOM, 2022; UNDESA, 2019). In Latin America, it is estimated that there are over 7 million young migrants. This does not take into account that 40% of Latin American migrants in the United States are between the ages of 15 and 34 (ECLAC 2025), a trend similar to that in Spain, where 40% are between the ages of 15 and 29 (ECLAC, 2025).

Migratory flows are not limited to south-to-north movement, as historically there have been various migratory corridors, mainly to Argentina and Chile (ECLAC, 2006). However, Venezuelan migration over the last decade has transformed the landscape, with the arrival of more than 6 million migrants in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador (R4V, 2023). This, of course, has posed an additional challenge for the socioeconomic inclusion of young people in these countries.

The high rates of youth mobility are alarming for the region and, according to studies by the UN, ILO, and UNICEF, the main reasons for these migrations are the search for job opportunities, education, and a better quality of life. Hence, the concept of "brain drain," as many young people are prepared and willing to work but do not find sufficient incentives to remain in their home countries. Even though migration abroad carries the risk of not being able to work in formal jobs related to their professional training or aligned with their aspirations, generating a stable source of income remains the priority for them and their households.

7 >> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established in 1951 and is part of the United Nations system. It is the leading intergovernmental organization in the field of migration. It has 175 Member States, 8 Observer States, and offices in 171 countries.

8 >> The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) was established in 1948 and is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations that seeks to contribute to the economic development of the region.



02

The perspective of young people: what holds us back and what drives us forward

Ten members of the Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) from GOYN São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá, Barranquilla, and Mexico City, along with members of the GOYN regional team in Latin America, gathered to discuss the main barriers and opportunities shared by young people in La-

tin America. The meeting used reports and data from all countries to fuel the discussion, but participants also talked and listened to each other's feelings based on their own life experiences and those of their communities.

WHAT HOLDS US BACK

01

Intersectional Stigmatization

Social characteristics such as gender, race, sexual orientation, disability status, economic poverty, geographic location, or motherhood constitute factors of discrimination that affect youth in Latin America in an intersectional and disproportionate manner. Access to educational and income-generating opportunities is conditioned by a **multiplicity of social determinants that reproduce structural inequalities**.

For instance, young mothers with unpaid care responsibilities face serious time and resource constraints, in addition to cultural barriers and limiting beliefs derived from patriarchal prejudices. These obstacles hinder their access to and retention in technical or higher education, as well as their integration into a labor market that still does not accommodate their specific needs. Added to this is the historical and persistent discrimination against Afro-descendant and indigenous populations, who are the foundation of our cultures, identities, knowledge, and traditions. Likewise, LGBTIQ+ youth not only face economic precariousness and social

prejudice, but are also frequent victims of violence, harassment, or exclusion in educational and work spaces and even in their own family environments.

On the other hand, geographical location in Latin American cities operates as a hidden criterion in selection processes. This is partly due to the fact that opportunities for training and decent work tend to be concentrated in geographical areas far from marginalized neighborhoods and closer to urban centers. Distance and commuting times become pretexts that conceal territorial discrimination, limiting their chances of accessing formal employment. Finally, when seeking their first job, these various exclusion factors are intensified by the requirement for certified work experience—a paradoxical condition for those who are just trying to enter the formal labor market.

How can young people gain formal experience if we are not given the initial opportunities to do so?

02 Violence, Security, and Transportation

When we talk about young people who are most disconnected from education and employment in Latin American cities, this usually coincides with their location in peripheral areas in what we call *slums, comunas, favelas, irregular settlements, or marginalized and overcrowded colonias*. In general, within urban density—and especially in these conurbated areas—the levels of violence and insecurity are disproportionately high. The presence of urban criminal gangs, microtrafficking organizations, *militias*, and even paramilitary groups that fight daily for territorial control creates a high-risk environment for young people. Not only due to constant exposure to violent confrontations and crime but also, and more importantly, because of the **immediate economic opportunities that these illegal groups offer amid conditions of precarity and exclusion**. Productive inclusion in the formal labor market is unable to compete with this tangible alternative for income generation.

Peripheral locations also entail **significant disconnection from infrastructure and public services—including cultural, educational, recreational, and sports facilities**—in contexts where access to public transportation is limited. Even those young people who manage to access educational and professional development opportunities—such as the leaders of GOYN—face serious mobility challenges, with commute times exceeding two hours each way. Furthermore, the limited availability of social and cultural activities in their immediate surroundings hinders the productive use of their free time, increasing their vulnerability to recruitment by organized crime networks.

03 Structural Economic Inequality

Limited financial resources, as expected, reinforce cycles of poverty that constitute a **fundamental barrier for young people to access and remain in quality education programs and formal employment**. Added to this is low digital literacy and limited access to technological infrastructure, as **technology remains an economic privilege**. In the current context, this translates into exclusion from virtual study, learning, and employment opportunities, which tend to be more flexible and competitive for youth with diverse intersectional identities.

Economic inequality structures continue to represent a significant obstacle that requires tailored solutions for youth opportunity. On one hand, precarious, undignified, and insecure labor market conditions hinder processes of economic advancement. On the other hand, entrepreneurship and informal work—often the most immediate option for generating income—are frequently impacted by the presence of illegal groups that impose extortion or unlawful fees.

Thus, it is urgent to propose multisectoral, collaborative, and structural solutions that systematically address the multiple and complex barriers preventing young people from fulfilling their full potential.

WHAT DRIVES US FORWARD

01 Studying and Working Under New Paradigms

Young people in Latin America have the desire and determination to study and work, but they want to do so within **transformative educational models oriented toward life and the development of dignified jobs that allow them to reach their full potential**. Traditional approaches to education focused exclusively on obtaining a professional degree

with the promise—increasingly unfulfilled—of formal employment no longer respond to the realities of a dynamic and constantly changing labor market.

In this context, young people *demand* relevant, flexible, and accessible training programs that prioritize the develop-

ment of **universal skills applicable both in the workplace and in everyday life**. It is also essential to include the strengthening of social-emotional skills that prepare us to make autonomous decisions, face adverse circumstances, and chart our own professional and personal paths.

Similarly, youth want to work and recognize their enormous potential to actively contribute to the economic, social, cultural, and environmental development of their countries. Therefore, young people **call for a paradigm shift**: a labor model that guarantees decent conditions, prioritizes collective well-being, respects human rights, and promotes sustainability beyond salary as the sole indicator of progress. *We aspire to build **more just and inclusive economic dynamics** that drive the transition towards **sustainable production models**, with environmental commitment and community roots, thereby shaping a future where young people not only participate but lead change.*

02

Come Together, Take Ownership of, and Make Decisions about our Territory

Young people in Latin America **want to know, inhabit, and take ownership of our territories**; *we want to actively participate in decisions regarding the development of our communities, exercising our right to the city, to political participation, and to collective agency. We demand to be part of the creation of timely and effective public policies that respond to our realities and aspirations.*

It is essential for the youth of Latin America to have **spaces that promote social cohesion**, both within their communities and with people from diverse backgrounds. In these spaces —such as dialogue circles— agency is built, solidarity among groups with different perspectives and experiences is strengthened, contributing to the reduction of violence. Collective processes led by young people contribute to the construction of a solid social fabric that **enables us to imagine and build alternative futures, mitigating the feelings of loneliness and despair that affect so many young people.**

Youth not only seek inclusion; they are demanding recognition as a social group with its own identity, characterized by a diversity of experiences, knowledge, and forms of resis-

tance that enrich social capital and contribute to the transformation of their territories.

03

Well-being and Mental Health

Young people aspire to build a life project in which their personal and professional vocations are aligned and mutually reinforced. **We reclaim our right to live our youth to the fullest and to dream about our future**, overcoming the phenomenon of “premature adulthood” that forces us to assume disproportionate responsibilities from an early age and without the necessary support.

It is also essential to address the use of psychoactive substances from an educational, public health, and harm reduction perspective. Prohibitionist and stigmatizing approaches have proven ineffective and, instead of providing emotional support and accompaniment, they deepen the risks faced by youth, including the impact on mental health. In contexts marked by multiple forms of exclusion, it is urgent to promote comprehensive approaches that recognize the complexity of consumption, respect the rights of users, and contribute to their emotional and social well-being.

Therefore, achieving the integral well-being of Latin American youth requires guaranteeing **effective access to mental health services**, emotional education, sports and cultural activities, artistic expressions, **and collective and stimulating spaces for the development of the self in freedom.**



03

How has GOYN addressed these challenges in Latin America?

The Youth Opportunity Network (GOYN) mobilizes young people and community allies to co-create collaborative and place-based solutions that drive systemic transformations aimed at equity and increasing the income, assets, and agency of young people. In Latin America, each community conducts research in partnership with young leaders and organizations within the education and employability ecosystem, with the goal of identifying and defining pathways oriented toward systemic change in their territories. While the action pathways respond to the particularities of each context, all communities share fundamental pillars: intersectoral collaboration, the building of local movements, strengthening learning networks, active listening to youth

voices and leadership, a focus on equity and structural justice, as well as diversifying funding sources and leveraging technological platforms for data analysis and accelerating educational and labor trajectories.

Below, members of the Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs) from the communities in Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico share five stories of youth leaders from the GOYN network. From different perspectives, these narratives illustrate how GOYN promotes its work in Latin America through a multisectoral, coordinated approach with the active participation of young people.

FROM THE VOICE OF YOUNG PEOPLE: WHAT DO WE DO AND HOW DO WE DO IT?



Bogotá

Wilber Ladino, a 20-year-old, learned early on to take care of his siblings and do household chores, from preparing lunch to helping out with whatever needed to be done. Through games and sports, he discovered that, even though he had no formal work experience, he already had the strength of discipline and responsibility within him.

His life changed when he joined the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) of GOYN Bogotá. Thanks to this opportunity, he traveled by plane for the first time to Barranquilla, an experience that opened his mind and showed him that the world was much bigger than he had imagined. Through GOYN, Wilber gained access to forums where he could share his

ideas with other young people and key actors in the city, which strengthened his confidence as a leader. In addition, the support of the training center allowed him to engage in educational processes that are now opening the door for him to finish university. **The GOYN's fellowship and social leadership development strategy** was also key, as it con-

nected him with learning and project-building opportunities that made him feel like an active member of a network that believes in the dreams of young people.

Today, while studying programming and participating in

GOYN Bogotá, Wilber walks with confidence and determination. He has learned to dream big and to believe that young people not only have a future, but also the power to build it. His story reflects what it means to transform hope into action and open paths for more young people to shine.



Barranquilla

Alexandra Villafaña, 23, and María De Los Ángeles De León, 22, are opportunity youth from the southwestern town of Barranquilla who remember the first moment they learned about GOYN and how they knew from the start that it was a different kind of initiative.

They didn't know what the "**Conexiones**"⁹ project was about. They had more doubts than confidence, but they were pleasantly surprised to see a space led by young people like themselves who were responsible for including them in the dynamics, listening to them, understanding their context, and connecting with their reality. That's what convinced them that they were in a safe space where they could open up and express themselves. Both agree that they often thought that an opportunity was only about getting a job or an education. But after connecting with GOYN and the Youth Advisory Group (GAJ), they saw the opportunity to become part of the initiative. Shortly after, they achieved it

—both were selected as members of GOYN Barranquilla's YAG in 2025.

NNow, through their work with the GAJ, they've come to understand the process behind each "**Conexión**", where young people are the creators and leaders of these spaces—from design to evaluation. *Conexiones* has become their true leadership school, allowing them **to build confidence, develop leadership skills, nurture a spirit of service, spark creativity, get to know their city better, and build relationships with other youth and organizations, among many other skills for life and work.**

"Finally, we thank GOYN for opening the doors and allowing us to be part of a group of young people who aim to inspire others and provide the foundation they need to access all the opportunities that exist—for them and for us."



Ciudad de México

In Mexico, to address the challenge of precarious youth employment, GOYN CDMX's strategy has focused on building strong bridges with the **private sector**, ensuring that solutions respond to real market demands. A clear example of this approach is the story of **Atena Rodríguez**, who, in collaboration with **Accenture**, **led the creation of the Kompas Digital**¹⁰ — a free educational platform that provides a

9 >> *Conexiones* is a territorial strategy promoted by GOYN Barranquilla in partnership with community associations to connect young people, through network-strengthening dynamics, with education, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities in the city.

10 >> KOMPAS Digital is an initiative of GOYN CDMX. Access the platform at: <https://digital.kompasgoyn.mx/>

training pathway in digital skills for the three high-demand job profiles: web development, data analysis, and content creation.

For Atena, the experience redefines the role of young people: "Coordinating the KOMPAS Digital platform has been a **process of collective learning and construction**. This effort brought together companies, civil society organizations, and young people in a co-design exercise. It was a two-way process:

*we got companies to stop seeing us as mere potential talent and **recognize us as strategic partners**, capable of co-creating the tools they themselves need. This experience has allowed me to transform the traditional narrative that frames young people as beneficiaries or success stories, and instead recognize us as active co-creators of solutions. This cross-sector collaboration not only strengthens the platform, but also reaffirms the role of young people as key players in building solutions".*



São Paulo

Matheus Gastão, 25, has built a career at GOYN São Paulo that reflects the convergence between his passion for systematizing information and the network's mission to empower young people with the potential to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving world of work.

Over the past three years, he has focused on **knowledge production and management**—organizing and analyzing data that sheds light on both the challenges and potential of young Brazilians, especially those from underserved communities.

This **collection and systematization of information has strengthened relationships with the private sector** by providing key insights that help adapt business practices and better align labor market supply and demand. By translating data into actionable evidence, Matheus' work enables

companies to recognize and value young talent in a more strategic and inclusive way.

In this way, Matheus' contributions serve as a bridge between data analysis and engagement with the productive sector, aligning with GOYN São Paulo's mission: to transform information into opportunity and to invest in youth not merely as beneficiaries, but as protagonists of innovation and social transformation—prepared to thrive in emerging green, digital, creative, and care economies.



Rio de Janeiro

Erick and Heloisa: paths that cross in youth political advocacy. Youth Political Advocacy at GOYN Rio – Decola Cria emerges from the weaving together of individual paths into a collective project.

Among these stories, the journeys of **Erick Soares and Heloisa Oliveira** show how different lives can converge around a shared mission: transforming territories into spaces of power, care, and future.

For Erick, the pain of losing his father to drug trafficking became a creative and community-driven force. Out of grief, he founded **ArterAção**¹¹, a space of refuge, resistance, and support, where young people, children, and adolescents exchange knowledge and build networks of solidarity.

For Heloisa, her concern about the climate crisis and the exclusion of youth from public decision-making fueled her drive to found **Sustenta Cria**¹², where she now serves as a spokesperson and advocate for the rights of children and adolescents.

Both recognize their communities as sources of social innovation: Erick by valuing ancestral knowledge and empowering youth in the favelas; Heloisa by building bridges between environmental education, climate justice, and community mobilization. Each, in their own way, reaffirms that transformation begins when youth recognize themselves as protagonists.

This is where GOYN Rio – Decola Cria acts as a catalyst. The program has equipped Erick with tools to expand the impact of ArterAção and engage in political advocacy—culminating in his recent election as a Youth Councilor for the city of Rio de Janeiro. For Heloisa, GOYN has amplified her voice in collective spaces, connected her cause to broader agendas, and extended her influence through networks like *"Manas, young women leaders for climate justice."*

More than just supporting projects, GOYN connects stories. By bringing Erick and Heloisa into the same network, it creates the possibility for the fight against drug trafficking and the fight for climate justice to meet—revealing that caring for youth and caring for the planet are two sides of the same transformation.

Thus, **Decola Cria** is not just a program, but a territory of collective continuity, where stories of pain are transformed into seeds of hope—and where Erick, Heloisa, and many other young people demonstrate that our lived experiences are a starting point, a pathway, and a new beginning.

OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN THE REGION

+270 Emerging Youth Leaders,
trained by GOYN

who have been or are part of **GOYN's Youth Advisory Groups (YAG)**, guiding the actions of the GOYN network while training to enhance their leadership skills.

+83.000 Improved
Young People

who have **acquired soft, technical, and/or socio-emotional skills**, received training, and/or gained work and life experience, thereby reporting a substantial improvement in their lives.

+146.000 Young People Connected
to Opportunities

who have participated in GOYN's connection activities and its collaborative network and, as a result, have **connected to opportunities of education, personal development, or work.**

+21.000 Transformed
Young People

who are undergoing a significant transformation in their lives, either by **reconnecting with formal education or accessing income-generating opportunities** that promote their autonomy and sustainability.

11 >> The ArterAção collective defines itself as "youth that empowers, develops, and mobilizes." Learn more about our work at: <https://www.instagram.com/coletivoarteracao/#>

12 >> Sustenta Cria is an environmental education project for children and young people. Learn more at: <https://www.instagram.com/sustentacria/>

+470 Collaborative Partner Organizations

from the public, private, and civil society sectors that are part of GOYN's collaborative network, where actors and projects are articulated and joint initiatives in the youth education and employability ecosystem are promoted

+60 Studies, Publications, and Learning Documents

led and produced by GOYN communities in Latin America in collaboration with our network of partners to strengthen knowledge management about youth in the ecosystem.

+30 Social Innovation Projects led by

supported by **GOYN's Youth Innovation Fund (YIF)** in the 2024-2025 cycle, which have impacted more than **3,400** young people in Latin America

+90 Young Entrepreneurs

+ US 7.700.000 in funds mobilized across the region

through GOYN in Latin America and in partnership with our collaborative network.



04

Looking ahead: How can we move forward together as a Latin American region?

The challenges of supporting opportunity youth in the region are complex, and no single organization, company, or government can solve them alone. To build a sustainable social and economic present and future, we must invest today in youth development in a collaborative, systemic, and continuous way.

This is our call to action for all sectors:



For NGOs:

Integrate young people as co-participants in change, not merely as beneficiaries. Include their voices in the governance, design, and evaluation of programs. To scale the impact and influence of your programs and actions, form coalitions with other organizations and stakeholders; join various collaborative networks within cities.



For the government:

Prioritize the needs of young people in public policies aimed at them. Use data and territorial evidence — including the voices of young people in the fullness of their diversity — to design inclusive policies. Allocate and invest specific resources in youth capacity building and leadership development, recognizing and funding genuine spaces for youth participation beyond symbolic gestures.



For the private sector:

Youth inclusion is not philanthropy; it is a smart and strategic investment. Integrating opportunity youth benefits not only society but also enriches innovation, organizational culture, and competitiveness within your company. Through multisectoral partnerships, support initiatives in training, mentorship, and purposeful employment, and actively participate in territorial platforms for youth to generate shared value.



For young people:

Your leadership, voice, struggle, and demands for dignity, community, and well-being are essential. Exercise purposeful leadership to connect with other young people, demand full respect of *our* rights, and continue mobilizing to demand genuine and strategic participation at all decision-making levels. The present and future of Latin America must be built with the voice and perspective of its youth.

Looking to the future requires action in the present. By acting collaboratively and in a coordinated manner, we can transform the structures of inequality and exclusion that hold back young people. Building opportunities and a dignified future requires systemic change. We believe in this and work every day to make it happen.

Therefore, we call on all sectors and stakeholders to drive this change through GOYN: the network where collaboration is the path to transformation.

JOIN US!

05

Want to know more about what we do?

Learn about our stories, reports and research, events, allies, actions, and impact.

Bogotá

- **Website:** <https://goynbogota.com/>
- **Instagram:** @goynbogota_
- **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/goynbogota/>
- **GOYN Bogotá 2025 Report:** <https://goynbogota.com/informe-2025/>

Barranquilla

- **Website:** <https://goynbarranquilla.com/>
- **Instagram:** @goynbarranquilla
- **Facebook:** Goyn Barranquilla
- **Podcast Young People Inspiring Young People:** on Youtube & Spotify
- **LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/goynbarranquilla/>
- **2025 Report - Overview of Youth in Barranquilla:** <https://goynbarranquilla.com/informes/>

Ciudad de México

- **Website:** <https://goynmexico.org/>
- **Instagram:** @goynmx
- **Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@goynmexico>
- **I'll sing it to you – decent work has never sounded so good:** this song is an invitation to citizens, government officials, and employers to listen and take action to guarantee the rights of 16.4 million young people who go out every day to earn a living in Mexico.
- **Apunta Report | Identifying the best career and training paths for young people:** <https://goynmexico.org/2024/08/21/reporte-apunta-identificando-las-mejores-trayectorias-laborales-y-de-formacion-para-jovenes-oportunidad/>
- **Learn about all our initiatives and platforms:** <https://linktr.ee/goynmexico>

São Paulo

- **Website:** <https://juventudespotentes.org.br/>
- **Instagram:** @juventudespotentes
- **Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@juventudespotentes>

Rio de Janeiro

- **Website:** <https://decolacria.org.br/>
- **Instagram:** @decolacria
- **Study - Ecosystem Mapping**
- **A Rio of Young People: What do young people want for the city?**

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