



A trap for equality

Child labour in Latin America
and the Caribbean

Results of the regional study



Child Labour



Refers to children and adolescents that have not reached the minimum age established in the national legislation of each country to perform an economic activity.



May involve activities such as slavery, human trafficking, debt bondage, sexual commercial exploitation or pornography and other forms of forced labour.



Interferes with compulsory education, leading to dropping out of school prematurely or requiring children to combine school with heavy labour.



Is dangerous and harmful to the physical, psychological and social well-being of children and adolescents.

Child labour leaves a mark on the lives and trajectory of 10,5 million children and adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean. This is exacerbated for 6,3 million of them, performing hazardous work (ILO, 2017).

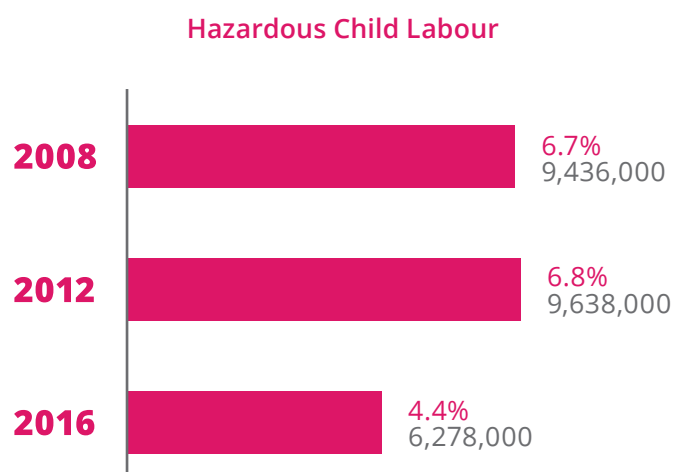
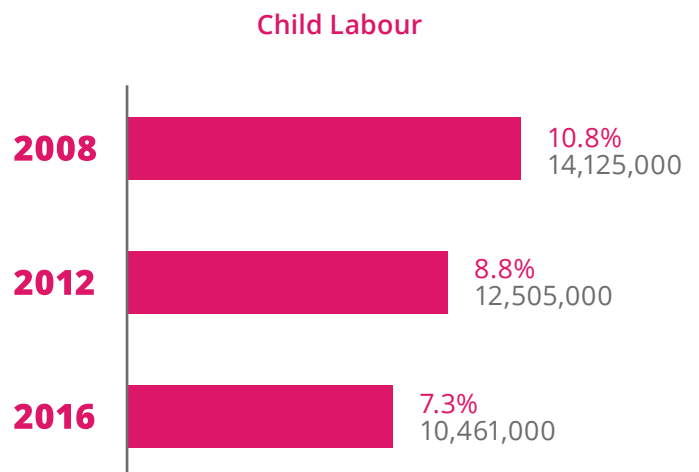
Inequality is a historic and cultural feature of Latin American and Caribbean societies which has been maintained and reproduced even in periods of economic growth and prosperity and is associated with the persistence of child labour.

Inequality transcends the mere distribution of income, even though it is one of its constitutive dimensions and encompasses rights, opportunities, means, capabilities and results (ECLAC, 2016).

The links between inequality and child labour are expressed in the risk levels to which children and adolescents are exposed when entering the labour market prematurely.

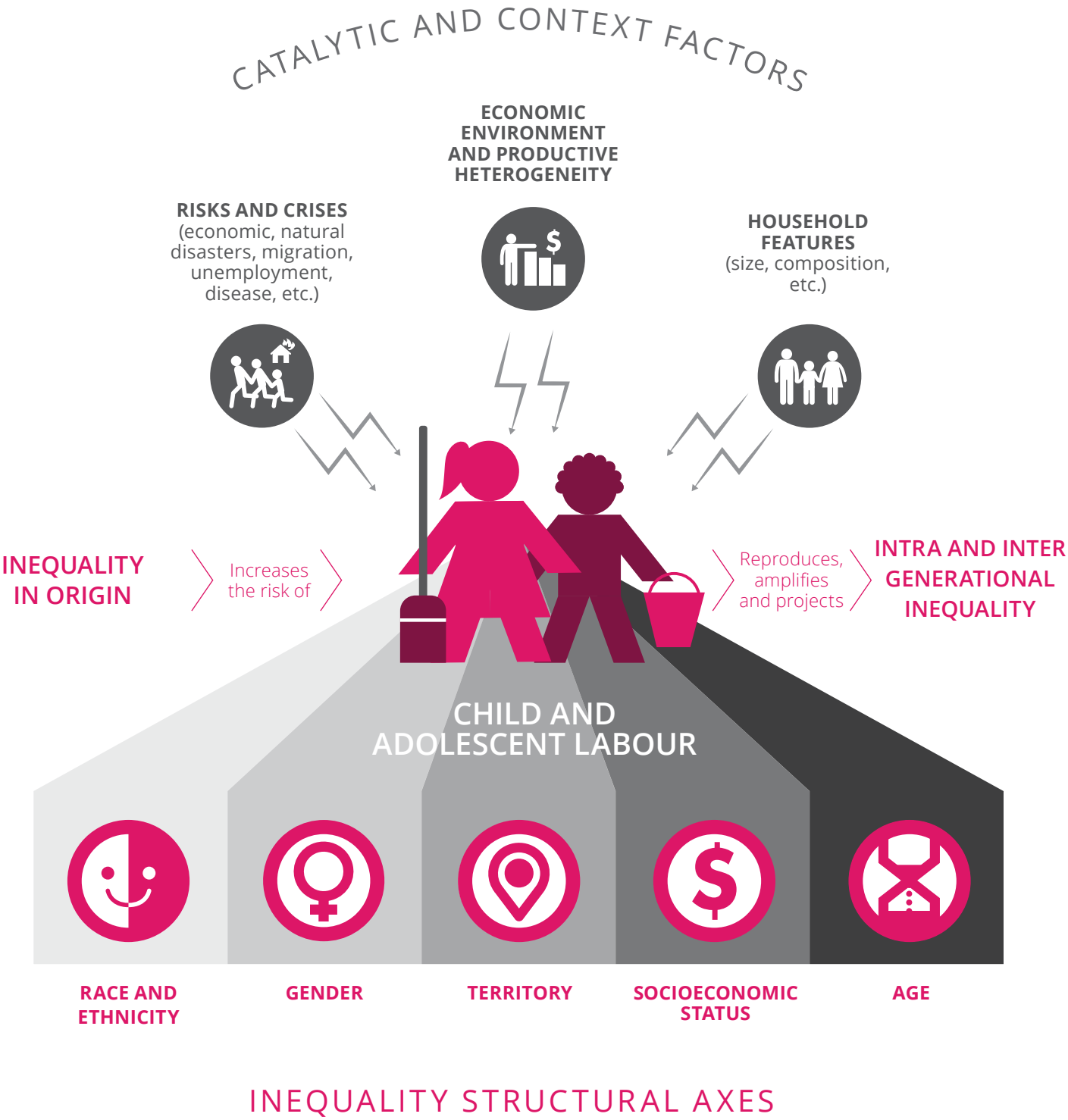
Child labour reproduces inequality in the region: it broadens the gap between those who can benefit, fully or not, from opportunities associated to access to education services, use of free time and other social assets. Child labour effects are reflected in the present and throughout the life of those who perform it, as well as inter-generationally, contributing to the perpetuation of the structural inequality in the region.

**Latin America and the Caribbean:
Child labour and hazardous child labour,
5 to 17 years, 2008, 2012 and 2016**



Cycle of inequality and child labour

Children of Latin America and the Caribbean are affected differently by child labour, according to their gender, territory, social class, age, race and ethnicity, structural axes of inequality (ECLAC, 2016).



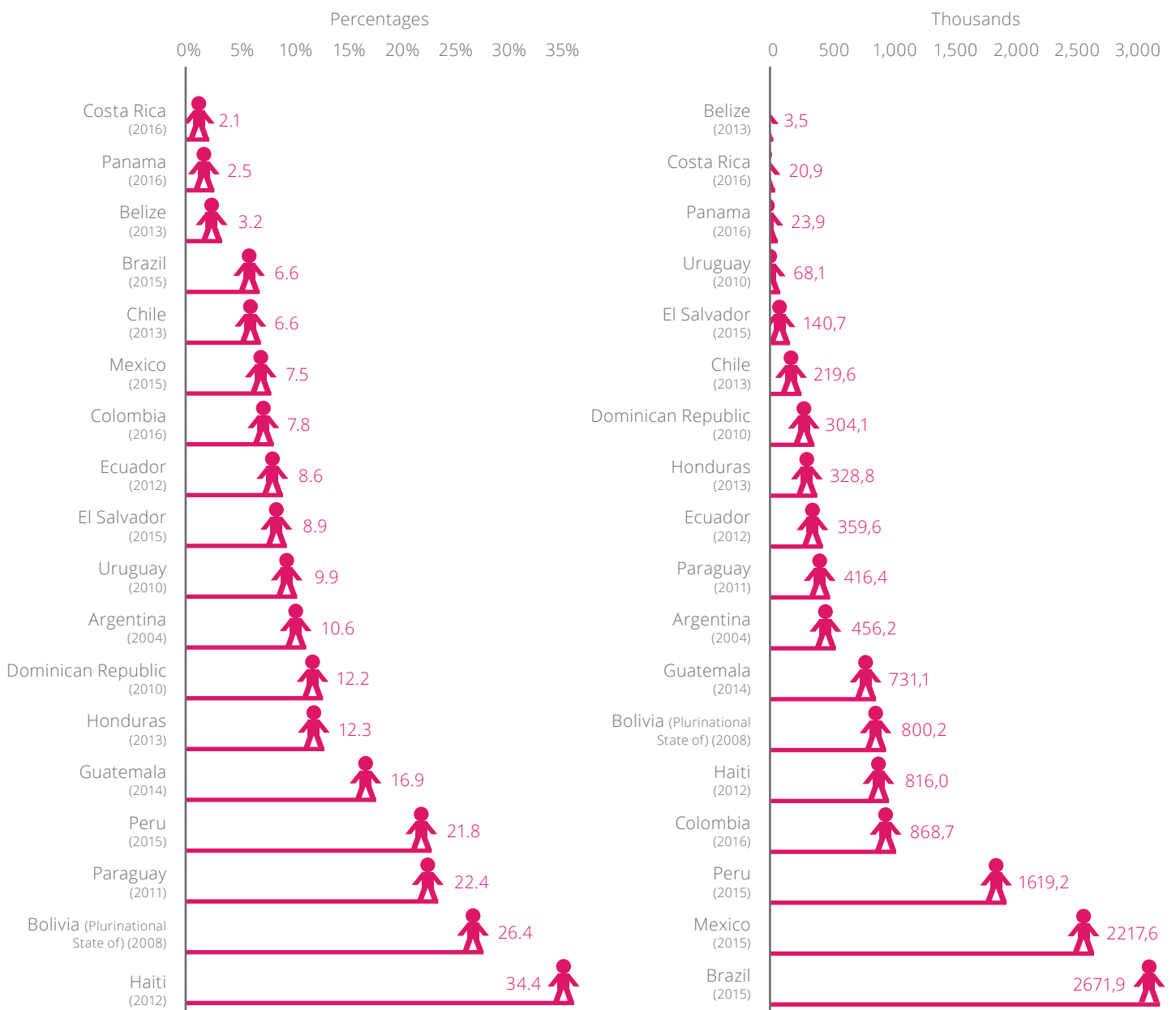
Child labour as an expression of the inequality matrix in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions that produces more information and knowledge on child labour. At least 23 countries¹ carry out regular surveys that allow the visibility and positioning of the issue in the public agenda. The estimates, although not comparable between countries due to the definitions used, provide valuable information on the features and common traits of child labour in the region, allowing the analysis of inequality structural axes.

A. A persistent reality...

Evidence shows that child and adolescent labour continues to be considerable in the region, despite its heterogeneity between countries and the expectations related to its reduction through improving living conditions of their citizens.

Latin America and the Caribbean (18 countries): Child and adolescent labour, different years



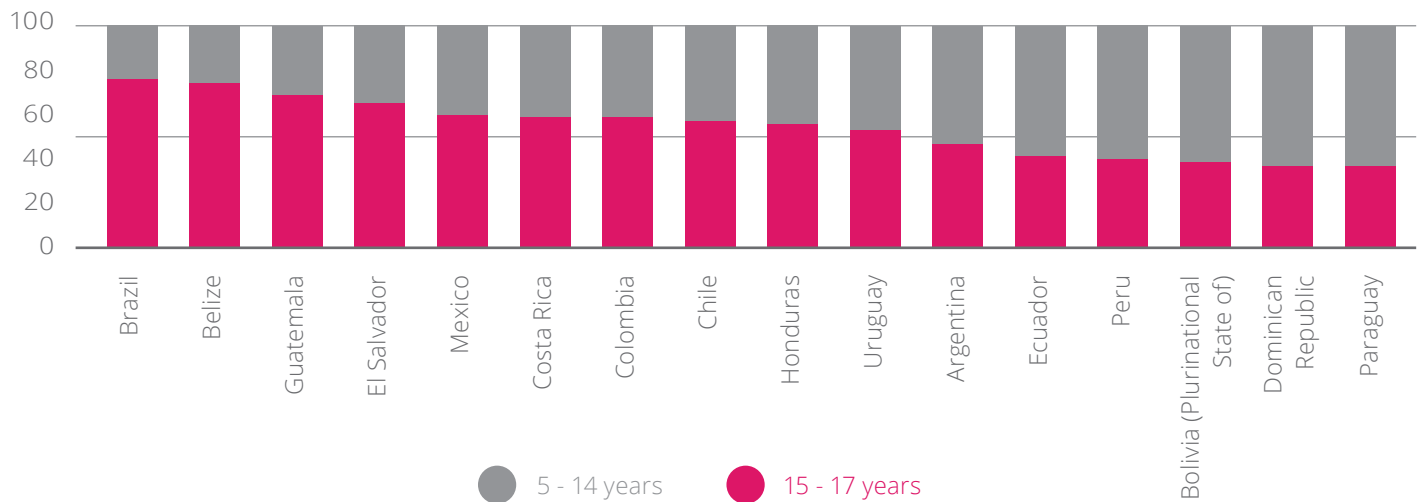
Source: ECLAC, based on special tabulations of child labour surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

¹ Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Uruguay.

B. Age

In most countries child labour is performed by adolescents, and they mostly carry out hazardous activities. This causes damages, often irreparable for their safety, health and psychological well-being (ILO, 2013).

**Latin America and the Caribbean (16 countries):
Incidence of child and adolescent labour by age group**

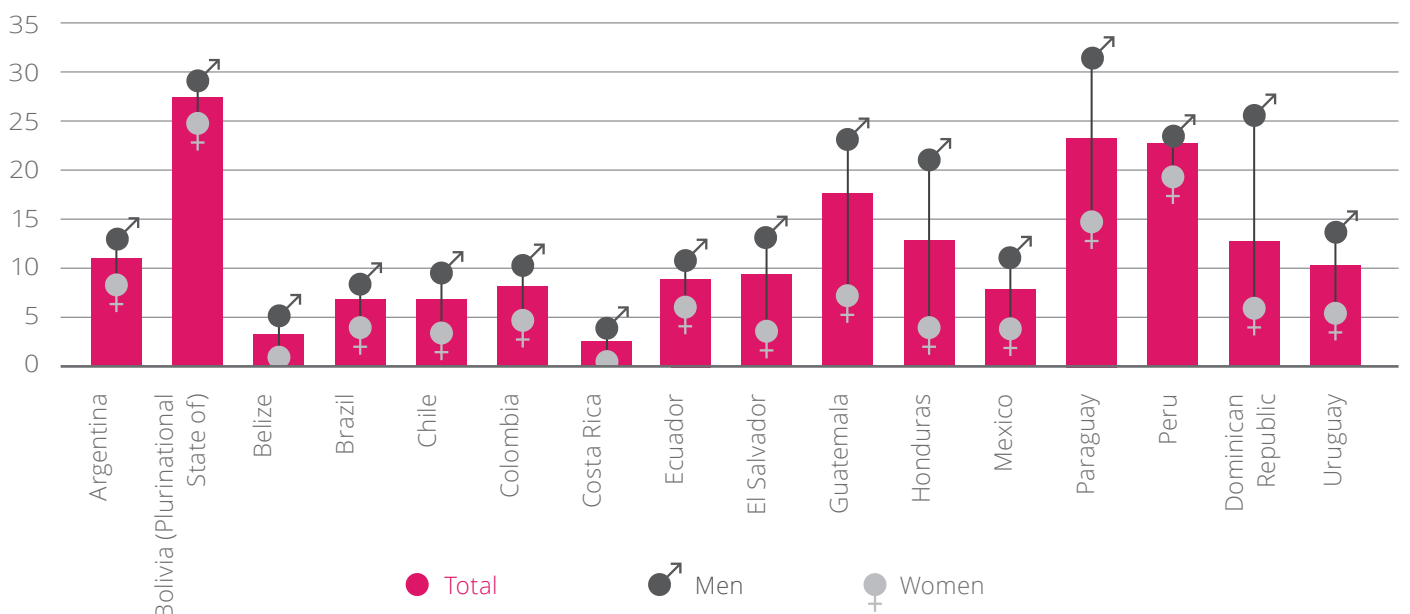


Source: ECLAC, based on special tabulations of child labour surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

C. Gender

The early segmentation of the roles assigned to men and women on productive and reproductive labour, shows significant gender inequalities. Boys are more likely to enter paid employment prematurely and perform child labour (ILO, 2006; 2015). The percentage of girls that perform household chores as their main occupation, which may be child domestic labour or family labour without pay, is significantly higher than the percentage of boys.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (16 countries):
Incidence of child labour and adolescent work by gender**

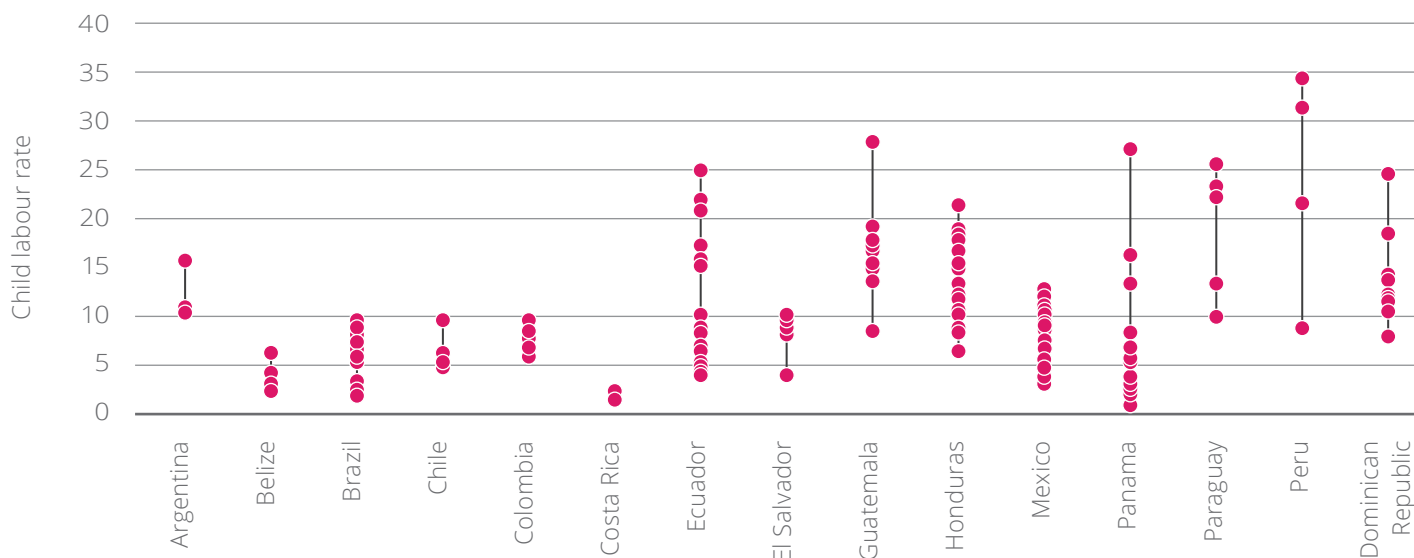


Source: ECLAC, based on special tabulations of child labour surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

D. Territory

When analyzing inequality within the countries of the region, it is fundamental to consider the territory. The differences between urban and rural areas are also expressed in the features of child labour.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (15 countries):
Incidence of child labour and adolescent work by area of residence**



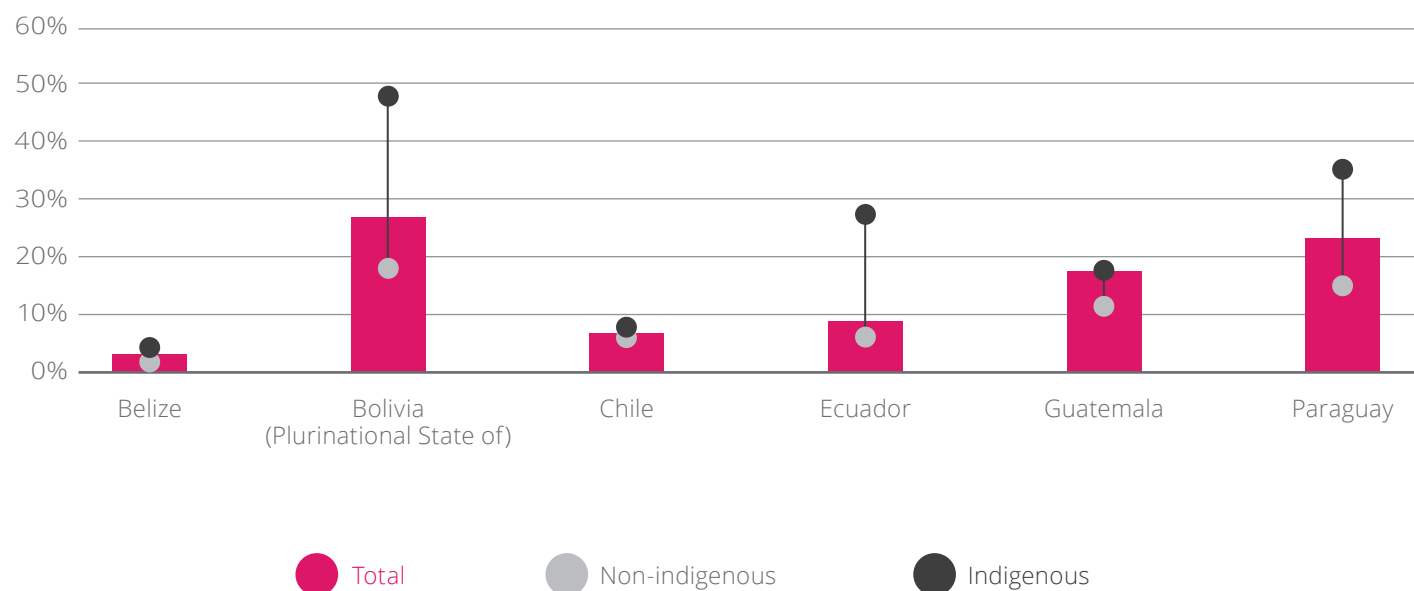
Note: Each dot shows a representative territory (region/province/state/department) in the surveys.

Source: ECLAC, based on special tabulations of child labour surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

E. Ethnicity

The incidence of child labour shows a marked racial and ethnical gap, which is consistent with the patterns of inequality in the region (ECLAC, 2016b). Indigenous or Afro-descendant children and adolescents, are likely to be incorporated to a greater extent in child labour than those who do not belong to these groups.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (6 countries):
Incidence of child and adolescent labour by ethnicity**

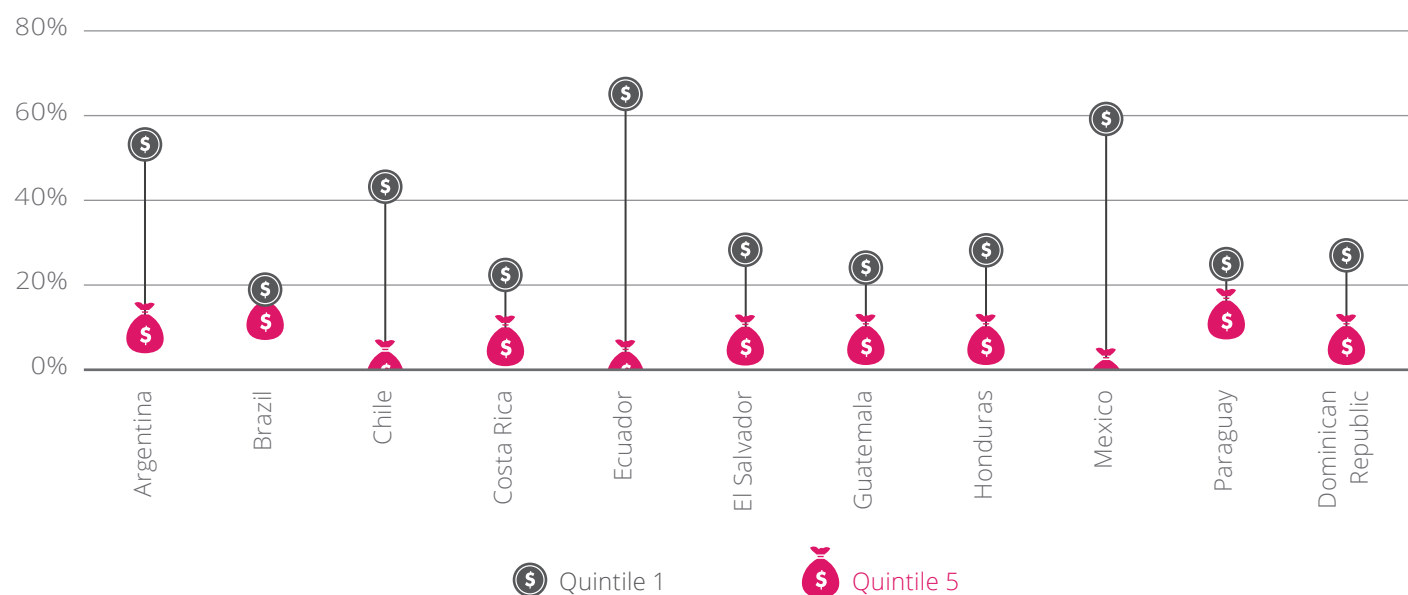


Source: ECLAC, based on special tabulations of child labour surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

F. Social class

In all the countries of the region, child labour is concentrated in the lowest income quintiles. However, a significant percentage is registered in the highest quintiles, which shows that poverty is not the only determining factor for the early insertion of children and adolescents at work.

**Latin America and the Caribbean (11 countries):
Incidence of child and adolescent labour by household income quintiles**

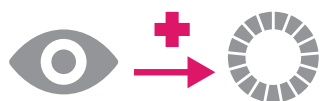


Source: ECLAC, based on special tabulations of child labour surveys in Latin America and the Caribbean countries.

Recommendations



Recognizing the links between the axes of inequality and child labour is fundamental to lessen its impact on children and adolescents and to lower the barriers for its prevention and eradication.



Visualizing and considering the linkages between gender, territory, social class, age, race and ethnicity inequalities, will allow to make simultaneous progress towards several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Formulating public policies that integrate the regional dimension and reach beyond national averages on child labour, will allow a comprehensive, coordinated and synergic management of the child labour eradication policies in several locations of a country.



Expanding the access to inclusive and quality education and health, as well as to decent work and the consolidation of universal systems of social protection and care, is crucial to reduce child labour and inequality.



Regional Initiative
Latin America and the Caribbean
Free of Child Labour



International
Labour
Organization

For more information visit:

ILO

www.ilo.org/ipec/programme/lang--en/index.htm

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Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean free of child labour

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