

NOTES YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



Preparing Youth for 21st Century Jobs: *'Entra 21' Across Latin America and the Caribbean*

The *entra 21* program demonstrates that youth from low income families in Latin America benefit from short-term job training, especially when combined with life skills, internships and job placement services. They develop technical and personal competencies, build social connections and, most importantly, enter the job market with decent entry-level jobs. What makes *entra 21* unique is its implementation in 18 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean through 32 executive agencies, most of which are NGOs. This diversity of contexts enables us to demonstrate whether projects with similar elements generate strong youth outcomes. The evidence to date indicates it does.



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Today's youth (15–24) constitute the largest cohort ever to enter the transition to adulthood. Nearly 90% live in developing countries and the challenges they face—low quality education, lack of marketable skills, high rates of unemployment, crime, early pregnancy, social exclusion, and the highest rates of new HIV/AIDS infections—are costly to themselves and to society at large. Client demand for policy advice on how to tap the enormous potential of youth is large and growing. This series aims to share research findings and lessons from the field to address these important cross-sectoral topics.

What is *entra 21*?

Entra 21 is a youth employment program operating in 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries that seeks to satisfy two different audiences: **youth** (ages 16–29) looking for work, and **employers** looking for qualified applicants for entry-level jobs. The Program is supported by the Multilateral Investment Fund, administered by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), as well as other donors such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, Lucent Technologies, Nokia, Microsoft and Merrill Lynch. While the Program's first concern is preparing youth for the world of work, it also recognizes that without engaging and satisfying the needs of employers, the program will not reach its targets. For this reason, *entra 21* sought from the outset to reach a 40% youth employment target by developing strong relationships with local businesses. The International Youth Foundation set this target based on results from other regional youth employment initiatives such as Uruguay's and Peru's PROJOVEN programs and the Chile Joven program.

Some common features of *entra 21* projects, which are shared with many of its predecessors include:

- short-term training that responds to labor market needs
- a comprehensive curriculum that includes technical training as well as life skills and job seeking skills development (Box 1)
- internships with local employers.

The average duration of this training package is seven to eight months, including the internship. This translates into a courseload of approximately 640 hours, with an average breakdown among the components as follows: technical training (46%); life skills (17%); job seeking skills (9%) and internship (28%).

In addition to focusing on information and communication technology (ICT) and life skills, *entra 21* innovated on the models of its predecessors by including the provision of **job placement services**. For youth whose parents have little to no experience working in the formal sector, the acquisition of job seeking skills and improved access to information is important and continues to be a challenge for many *entra 21* graduates. For example, over a quarter of all unemployed *entra 21* graduates cite the lack of contacts as the main reason they are not working.

To provide youth with information on job opportunities, executing agencies (also referred to as projects) created job placement offices or outsourced job placement to another organization. Under either arrangement, projects help youth make contact with local employers, arrange introductions and interviews, and provide data on vacancies. When asked 6 or more months after graduation whether the project helped them find a job, a majority of youth indicated the projects helped them learn how to look for a job as opposed to finding them a job. From the point of view of increasing youth employability,

Box 1. What are “Life Skills”?

(A Sample of *entra 21* Projects)

Project Location	Targeted skills	Approaches used
Venezuela	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team work • communication • conflict management • creative thinking • responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small group work during human development module • video discussions • individual coaching • community service
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team work • communication • creative thinking • responsibility • values/citizenship • self awareness • time management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in cultural events • family social events • interaction with business leaders as class speakers • feedback and modeling during internships
Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • team work • communication • conflict management • creative and critical thinking • responsibility • personal hygiene and grooming • ethical behavior at workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community service • participation in design of some activities • workshops • individualized sessions

Source: International Youth Foundation *entra 21* database.

this finding is positive as it suggests youth are learning to be self sufficient in finding jobs.

Who Benefits?

Between the years 2002 and 2006, nearly 12,000 youth benefited from *entra 21*¹ across a wide range of country contexts. Ninety-one percent live in or near urban areas and most are disadvantaged based on criteria such as household income and the quality of their neighborhoods. The *entra 21* project in Cartagena, Colombia, for example, targets those classified as poor according to a national poverty index (1). In Honduras, an external evaluation using national poverty statistics found that 59% of youth participants surveyed were very poor, 19% poor and the rest were lower middle class (2). The program in greater Sao Paulo targets youth living in municipalities with the highest levels of social vulnerability based on government poverty maps (3). The Peru project recruited youth from Lima's poor north side. The gender balance across 32 projects is 53% female and 47% male, and the average age upon matriculation is 20 years.

Entra 21 projects recruit youth who have enough education to handle training in ICT skills, but at the same time have

1 By the time the time the Program ends in 2007, an estimated 19,000 youth will have participated.



Box 2. *entra 21* At a Glance*

- 89% course completion (11% dropout)
- 51% job placement, of which
 - 57% with formal permanent contracts
 - 74% with one or more benefits
 - 85% working 35+ hours per week
 - 52% report using ICT skills often to very often
- 40% return to school (compared to 26% in school at baseline)
- 27% neither studying nor working (compared to 66% at baseline)
- Employers average ratings
 - graduates' life skills 4.3 out of 5
 - graduates' ICT skills 3.6 out of 5

*13 projects – 6 months after graduation

Source: International Youth Foundation *entra 21* database.

poor prospects for finding a decent job. Although the youth served by *entra 21* are relatively well educated by regional standards, (78% have completed high school), their secondary education does not guarantee them a job, let alone one with some prospect for advancement. This is particularly true for youth from poor communities with weak schools, where the curriculum does not provide them the life or technical skills they need to find work. For this reason, 50% of *entra 21* projects provide incoming youth with an average of 80 hours of remedial education to compensate for deficiencies in their literacy and math skills.

The combination of life skills training and internships is a key component of the *entra 21*. This provides poor youth, who often have no experience interacting with clients and co-workers, dressing for the workplace, or communicating in a formal work environment, with the necessary skills and first job experience to build their employability for future jobs. Seventy-seven percent of youth view internships as valuable learning experiences where they can hone the technical and life skills taught in class, as well as have a supportive structure in which they can learn how to be comfortable in a formal work setting and interact professionally with people from different social classes (Box 3).

What Are the Results?

More than half of *entra 21* graduates were employed 6 months after graduation, most in the formal sector (92%) with either formal permanent contracts or benefits (Box 2). Nine percent (9%) of graduates opted to start their own micro-enterprises. The **quality of employment** is particularly important because

in Latin America, most poor youth rarely have access to formal sector employment. In Brazil, for example, the overall formal sector employment rate for poor Brazilian youth is around 25%. By comparison, 56% of *entra 21* graduates in Campinas, Brazil, found employment of which 82% were formal jobs with permanent contracts.

Overall, most *entra 21* graduates who are employed are hired for full-time, entry-level positions and work in Web-management or research-related positions, customer services, or administration (Box 3). Contracting practices vary among the countries where the projects were implemented; overall 57% of beneficiaries had formal, permanent contracts. However, in places like Peru where informal contracting arrangements are more common, only 4% of youth had permanent contracts. Three-fourths of the youth receive one or more employment benefits, the most frequent being paid annual leave. Evaluation data suggest that a majority of youth are earning minimum or higher wage.

Over 80% of those who were not working at 6 months or more after graduating were still actively looking for work and nearly 60% had decided to go back to school to further their education. In fact, **re-enrollment in school** was an unforeseen positive outcome seen across all projects. Specifically, 26% were in school at baseline and when surveyed 6 or more months after graduating, 40% were in school. The percentage of youth who **were neither studying nor working** dropped from 66% at

Box 3. Miguel Ángel García, 22, Mexico

It is very difficult for young people like Miguel Ángel García to get a job in Tehuacan, a poor town south of Mexico City where the rate of youth unemployment has risen to more than 40%. Having dropped out of school and unprepared to get a job, Miguel admitted being deeply discouraged. "I felt I was incapable of doing anything," he says. Today, he is standing behind the counter of a computer and electronics store in downtown Tehuacan, in charge of sales and speaking confidently to a customer. Miguel's life changed when he enrolled in entra 21. The internship at the electronics shop that he gained through the program turned into a full time job.

"The program taught me both the technical side and the personal side," he explains, and now he is applying what he learned. "When customers come in, I can tell them about the computers and DVD players and other electronic systems we sell here," he says, "but I also learned [in entra 21] how to interact with people, and am more sure of myself." Now that he has a job—which pays him a minimum wage plus commission—Miguel is saving money to go back to school. While he likes his current position, he wants to open an internet café in a year or two.

Source: Christy Macy, International Youth Foundation.



baseline to 27% at the time of the follow up study, suggesting that *entra 21* helped participants achieve greater human capital—education and training in particular.

Of those working in salaried employment, 52% report using their ICT skills *very often to often*; the remainder use their ICT skills less frequently. In Sao Paulo, for example, the youth who studied hardware maintenance and repairs had a harder time finding a job and ended up taking sales or other jobs where they do not use the ICT skills they learned.

How do Youth and Employers Assess the Effectiveness?

At the end of training, 59% of youth report having higher expectations of what type of employment they can aspire to as well as what they can achieve. These positive feelings persist over time. When surveyed 6 or more months after graduating, youth attribute the following changes to their participation in *entra 21* a) more capacity and motivation to learn; b) greater ability to set and meet goals; and c) stronger self confidence. Even youth who were looking for work felt they had changed in a positive way.

The majority of youth also report liking their jobs and the most frequently cited reason is because the work is interesting, followed by opportunities for promotion, salary and benefits (Box 3). Since 93% of those working have no dependents, it is not surprising that having an interesting job where they can learn and advance, is more important than salary or job security.

Employers rated the youths' life skills more highly than their ICT skills. Employers' average ratings of graduates' motivation,

ability to learn, to work in groups and take initiative was 4.3 out of a total possible score of 5. By contrast, they rated *entra* graduates' IT skills slightly lower (average score 3.6). Employers consider *entra 21* graduates as having equal or greater potential for growth when compared to other workers in similar positions, which is another indicator for *entra 21* that the second audience—employers—are being well served by this program.

Conclusion

For the International Youth Foundation, *entra 21*'s approach is consistent with its core beliefs about youth development. By providing youth a safe place, caring and competent adults, quality instruction, high standards and integrated services, young people increase their personal and social assets and become more employable.

So far the data confirm that important results can be achieved across a wide range of country contexts. However, many questions remain. What can we learn about graduates' work-related pathways? After 6 to 12 months, what are *entra* graduates' job retention rates? Do their levels of skill and responsibility increase or do they find their skills cannot keep up with new competency requirements? By introducing control groups into future evaluations, we also hope to learn whether *entra 21* graduates do significantly better than similar youth who have not participated in such programs. Finally, IYF will explore means by which to increase the scale of youth employability services—while maintaining quality—through greater involvement of the private sector and enhanced linkages with related government services in the employment and training sectors.

References and Recommended Reading

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