Dominican Republic Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment Phase II: Final Report

Latin American and the Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN)

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ACRONYMS

CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CSE	Comprehensive sexuality education
CSO	Civil society organization
CSYA	Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment
DO	Development Objective
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
ILO	International Labour Organization
INFOTEP	Instituto Nacional de Formación Técnico-Profesional (National Institute of Professional Technical Training)
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those with other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
LACLEARN	Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
PYD	Positive youth development
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UNAP	Unidades de Atención Primaria (Units for Primary Attention)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USAID/DR	United States Agency for International Development/Dominican Republic

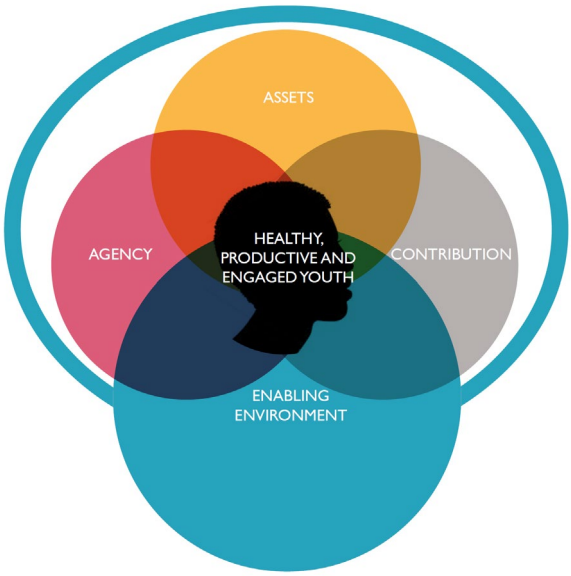
LIST OF DOMINICAN TERMINOLOGY

Term	Definition
Alcantarillados	Sewage systems
Bateys	Informal slums, predominantly occupied by Haitian migrants
Barrio	A community marked by high levels of poverty
Cayo	Key, as in a small island
Charlas	Community talks
Cédula	National Identity Card
Hombrecito	Diminutive version of "man" (i.e., "little man") used to refer to a boy
Loco	Crazy (used both as an adjective and a noun)
Motoconcho	A small motorcycle used for affordable, informal taxi service
Mujeriego	A womanizer
Nini	A person who is neither in school nor working
Pelo bueno, pelo malo	Good hair, bad hair; a phrase based on Eurocentric standards of beauty
Recreación Sana	Healthy or safe recreation
San	A rotating savings group. A group of people form the core group of participants. Each agrees to make regular contributions to the fund, which is given in whole to each contributor in rotation.
Talleres	Workshops
Vertedero	Landfill
Zona Franca	Free industrial zone

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inclusion is at the heart of the Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2020–2025 of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission to the Dominican Republic (USAID/DR). The CDCS aims "to promote a more secure and inclusively prosperous Dominican Republic (DR) that advances local and transboundary resilience."[1] Young people, aged 11 to 29, are a large and important group within the CDCS that is integrated into all USAID/DR programs in health, agriculture, democracy and governance, and conflict mitigation. Cutting across all programming is the use of a positive youth development (PYD) approach.[2]

Figure 1: USAID PYD Framework



To continue USAID/DR's work for and with youth, USAID/DR commissioned the Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN) contract to conduct a cross-sectoral youth assessment (CSYA) to assess the situation of young people in the DR. This CSYA aims to capture the experiences, aspirations, challenges, and assets of young people (aged 11 to 29), while also identifying effective programs, organizations, and partnerships that support young people. Building from an initial desk review conducted in 2020, the assessment aimed to explore and validate the themes and recommendations identified in Phase I, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, to help inform ongoing programming delivery and development with USAID/DR.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

This CSYA was structured around three overarching questions related to youth in the DR:

1. What is the youth landscape/situation in a given sector?

[1] More information at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/CDCS-DOMINICAN_REPUBLIC_External_12-2025.pdf, p. 7

[2] PYD is core to USAID's Youth in Development Policy (2022). According to the PYD framework, agency is defined as "youth perceiving and having the ability to employ their assets and aspirations to make or influence their own decisions about their lives and set their own goals, as well as to act upon those decisions in order to achieve desired outcomes."

2. What are the barriers youth face?

3. What are the opportunities for youth?

The study looked at all sectors where USAID works—education, economic growth, health, and governance. The CSYA used an intersectional lens[3] to examine these questions and identify which subsets of youth are more vulnerable or resilient based on certain characteristics, such as age, income level, gender, ethnicity, citizenship/migration status, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

METHODOLOGY

This CSYA is based on primary qualitative data collected through 243 semi-structured interviews, 11 focus groups discussions, 8 Youth Day activities, and one digital storytelling workshop, gathered through in-person and remote data collection from September through October 2022. Together, these activities engaged a total of 448 stakeholders, 205 of whom were youth, and was conducted in 11 regions of the country, including rural, urban, border, port, and tourist regions. In addition to youth, their families, and community organizations, the team spoke with local and national government officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and the public health sector.

Figure 2: Assessment Geographic Coverage[4]

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The following 10 overarching recommendations articulate how USAID staff can support the holistic needs of youth alongside other partners. Each overarching recommendation notes the development objective (DO) within USAID/DR's CDCS it most closely aligns to. The final section of the full report contains expanded and additional sector-specific recommendations.

1. INTENTIONALLY PARTNER WITH YOUTH-LED AND YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS. (CROSS-CUTTING)

CSOs, especially those led by youth, play an important role to uphold and support the rights of young people in the DR in all their diversity. In addition to large, national, youth-led

[3] An intersectional lens is based on the concept of intersectionality, which enables us to recognize the fact that membership in a particular group can make people vulnerable to various forms of oppression.

[4] The 11 regions USAID/DR selected are Boca Chica, DaJabon, Distrito Nacional, Higüey, La Romana, Monte Cristi, Puerto Plata, Samaná, San Francisco de Macorís, Santiago, and Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo Norte and Santo Domingo Oeste).

organizations, community-led and grassroots organizations have intimate knowledge of youth's needs and the contextual local dynamics that make a project successful, but they may not have access or systems to be able to partner directly with USAID.

Specific Recommendations: Use existing or future implementing mechanisms with co-created contracts or grants (direct or sub) to diverse youth-led organizations to leverage the expertise of these partners, while also including explicit capacity support and outcomes for longer-term sustainability. Support established CSOs to build symbiotic relationships with youth-led organizations. Continue to aid integration of youth engagement in programming and management, for USAID and partners' work.[5]

Image: Programa Alerta Joven graduate

2. CONTINUE TO DESIGN PROGRAMS THAT ARE YOUTH-CENTERED,HOLISTIC, AND ADDRESS THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS AND OTHER SUB-GROUPS, INCLUDING INTEGRATING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES. (CROSS-CUTTING)

Youth have differing needs throughout their lives, including social, health, and economic risks. For example, providing comprehensive sexuality education to adolescent girls who are more at risk of pregnancy or early marriage, remedial foundational learning courses for over-age and struggling students at risk of dropping out of school, or focusing on transitions from school-to-work or higher education or getting out-of-school students back into the education system. Respondents often described youth's involvement in community and national activities as "tokenistic" or inaccessible to marginalized youth. Participants cited that USAID's *Alerta Joven* activity was promising because it addressed multiple areas important to youth, including skills training, employment support, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) support.

Specific Recommendations: Expand active engagement of youth as partners from the design stage, include sub-group- and age-specific targeting interventions consistently throughout the implementation and learning of an activity. Practical steps for ongoing engagement include co-creation approaches, youth councils, youth advisory groups, or robust user feedback systems, intentionally including youth and

[5] See for example: Global LEAD Toolkit and Youth Programming Assessment Tool for organizational reflection.

youth groups beyond those known to USAID and close partners.[6] Include youth engagement expectations, with sufficient resourcing, in solicitations and contracts/agreements to strengthen implementation. Continue to implement holistic, demand-driven activities such as *Alerta Joven*. In measuring results, consider using qualitative tools that elevate youth's voices and capture transformative stories of change resulting from programming, such as most significant change.

Image: USAID university preparation course, October 2021, Santiago de los Caballeros

3. ADDRESS INTERSECTIONALITY IN PROGRAMMING BY TACKLING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO YOUTH INCLUSION AND PROVIDING SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS. (CROSS-CUTTING)

Many subgroups of vulnerable youth, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those with other diverse gender identities and sexual orientations (LGBTQI+) communities, migrant youth, youth with disabilities, youth of Haitian descent, or undocumented youth, are more at risk of being denied services and experiencing discrimination and rights violations. The requirement of a *cédula*, in particular, was described multiple times as creating a "chain" of barriers for youth who could not access education or health services, open a bank, or get housing or employment. Judgment 168-13[7] has led to increased discrimination and violence toward Dominicans of Haitian descent, and changes to the Penal Code non-discriminations removed protections for members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Specific Recommendations: Partner with civil society actors that focus on upholding and supporting the rights of vulnerable youth, including undocumented youth, girls and young women, LGBTQI+ communities, or youth with disabilities[8]. Together with domestic and development partners, advocate for policy and regulatory reform to address those that disproportionately affect vulnerable youth,

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[6] See these resources on youth advisory councils here.

[7] Constitutional Court judgment 168-13 states that children born in the Dominican Republic to foreign parents—and who did not have regular migration status—had never been entitled to Dominican nationality. It constitutes "a retroactive and arbitrary deprivation of nationality" that "disproportionately affects Dominicans of Haitian descent and is, therefore, discriminatory." (Amnesty International 2015, 6)

[8] Organizations that have been successful in advancing positive results include MUDHA, Reconocid.o, and COLESDOM.

including Judgment 168-13, *cédula* requirements, and Penal Code changes to remove protections for LGBTQI+ youth. Make sure programming with youth includes population-specific referral or support services to increase equity of access (e.g., health services that are safe and friendly for people who identify as LGBTQI+, mental health services for people who experienced gender-based violence). Provide support to training institutes for health, security, and other professionals to provide equitable, youth-friendly services.

Image: Programa Alerta Joven graduates

4. SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT AT THE NATIONAL AND SUBNATIONAL LEVELS TO STRENGTHEN POLICIES, IMPLEMENTATION, AND LEARNING AROUND REGULATIONS AFFECTING YOUTH. (DO1) There is an urgent need to strengthen legal or institutional frameworks and the implementation of public policies focused on young people's human rights, including their access to youth-friendly services and opportunities for economic and civic engagement.[9] Another policy challenge is the lack of monitoring and evaluation: Government actors identified few youth-focused policies that integrate ongoing learning.

Specific Recommendations: Supporting youth-led organizations and local governance interventions can assist with this relationship building, shift mindsets around youth engagement, and advance capacity-strengthening outcomes. Build on and support "bright spots" in the government, such as the Ministry of Youth's Technical Unit of Youth Studies[10] development of an *online data dashboard* for youth-focused indicators. Share USAID's good practices around youth engagement with government counterparts. For additional sector-specific recommendations, see the full report.

5. CREATE ENABLING HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTS BY WORKING WITH YOUTH, THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS. (DO3) Having access to a supportive household environment is important for youth of all ages. Barriers to youth development often exist within their immediate environments,

[9] Key actors research participants identified were the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Women, Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic (MINERD), and Ministry of Work.
[10] Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes (UESJ).

including limited access to educational support at home, domestic and community violence, unsafe or unkept streets and neighborhoods, and social expectations. Removing these barriers and creating more enabling household and community environments is a vital part of youth programming. Working with community organizations and civil society was also described as important to address social norms and harmful attitudes.

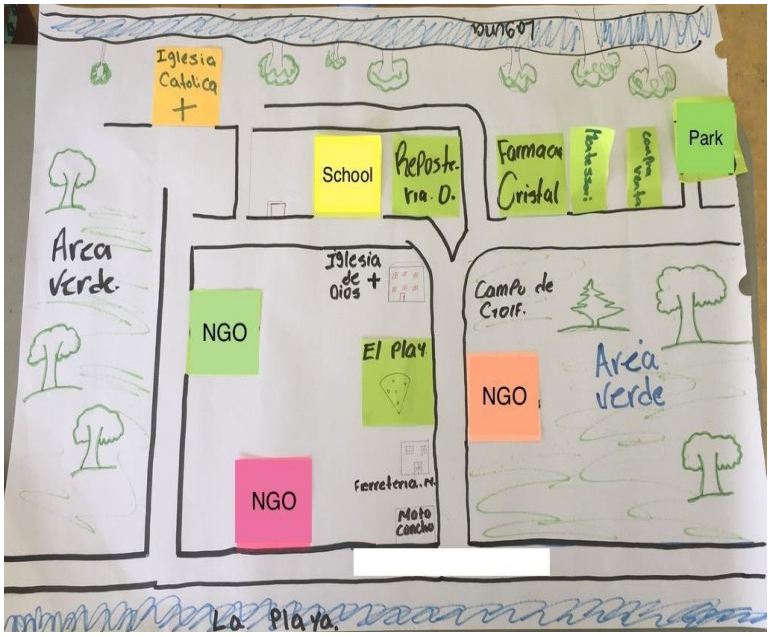


Image: Focus group community mapping

Specific Recommendations: Examples research participants identified include training parents and caregivers to support their children's education, supporting household dialogue between parents and children, creating opportunities for family and community recreational activities such as cooking classes or game nights, offering free and reliable childcare for young mothers, or engaging both young women and men—and especially spouses—in interventions that seek to address gender norms or gender-based violence. Combining gender dialogues with women's SAN networks were seen as important to reducing intimate partner violence. Investing resources into creating more safe and accessible homes, streets, and neighborhoods, including through clean-up or beautification projects, can also help instill a sense of collective pride among youth, their families, and the broader community.

6. INTEGRATE SOCIAL NORM-SHIFTING ACTIVITIES, WHICH INCLUDE DIALOGUE WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS, COMMUNITIES, AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS, ACROSS ALL SECTORS. (CROSS-CUTTING)

Harmful social norms, both externally imposed and internalized, create a myriad of barriers for youth, especially marginalized youth. For example, stigma toward pregnant girls, Eurocentric standards of beauty, and expectations for boys to act in a certain way contribute to increased school dropout rates for young people. Employers' discriminatory attitudes limit youth's access to work or lead to youth experiencing gender-based violence, racism, and other forms of discrimination at work. Taboos around sexual and mental health cause some youth to not access these services. For example, comprehensive sexuality education is rarely taught in public schools and young people expressed fear that healthcare professionals would reject them.

Specific Recommendation: Shifting harmful norms should be included explicitly in results during activity design and throughout implementation, including being examined during assessments, monitoring, and evaluation.[11] For sector-specific examples, see findings in the body of the report.

7. STRENGTHEN THE DELIVERY OF BASIC EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) SERVICES, AND SUPPORT YOUTH'S SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION. (DO2) Indirect costs of schooling (e.g., fees for uniforms, textbooks, transportation, class activities, writing materials and school supplies) and location continue to pose a significant barrier to universal access to education. Many youth drop out of or suspend their schooling, schools are not properly equipped, and many teachers do not receive training and support. Key curricular topics such as SRH, financial literacy, or civic education are not effectively taught, if at all. Due to the gap between skills learned in school and employers' needs, youth are vulnerable in transitioning from education into the labor market.

Specific Recommendations: Work with the government to mitigate costs of school transportation, uniforms, or educational materials for the primary and secondary levels, especially for migrant youth. Continue to advocate for a holistic approach to curriculum development, including foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, homework or formal school support, and integration of life skills (e.g., critical thinking, socio-emotional skills) and work-related transferable skills. Design flexible formal and non-formal education programs for youth, particularly those engaged in paid or unpaid labor, and ensure there are paths for young people (including pregnant people or young parents) to return to and continue their education. Design community-level activities to address social norms that contribute to school dropout. Engage the private sector, public training institutions, and/or civil society to support young people in gaining practical work experience and developing work-related skills, including entrepreneurship.

8. ENCOURAGE THE MINISTRY OF LABOR TO ASSESS AND IMPROVE THE OVERALL WORK CONDITIONS OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN. (DO2) Youth's economic participation is often limited to lower paid and informal activities. Economic constraints also serve as a significant barrier to accessing employment opportunities for young people; and the lack of job opportunities, especially in rural areas, means youth have to migrate to be employed and are, thus, exposed to new risks. Gender discrimination and gender-based violence are common and perpetrated with impunity in formal workplaces.

Specific Recommendations: Conduct research on the extent to which the private sector, civil society, and government entities have instituted and enforced protective workplace policies. Work with the private sector, public training institutions, and/or civil society to develop entrepreneurship programs that encompass a wider range of career paths and target self-employed youth. This could include public–private partnerships between schools, TVET institutes, and employers. Develop programs to build youth's entrepreneurial skills through practical experience in business management, financial literacy classes, and professional¿/ engagement in agriculture by advocating for better pay and compensation, integrating digital technologies, or facilitating work exchanges that allow youth to explore modern and innovative approaches, such as smart agriculture.

[11] As one example of a practical tool for designing and implementing social norms shifting interventions, see CARE's Social Norms Design Checklist and suite of related tools, as well as capacity-development and programming resources on gender and social norms from USAID's PASSAGES project.

9. STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGH-QUALITY AND COMPREHENSIVE YOUTH-FRIENDLY HEALTH SERVICES. (DO1, DO2) Technical support should target gaps in policies and/or the implementation of policies, especially around the provision of SRH and mental health services, as well as equitable access to these services. A key public health policy challenge is the fact that abortion is still illegal and punishable by law, exposing childbearing people to additional risks. Young people who do or are perceived to belong to certain communities or identities (e.g., LGBTQI+, people with disabilities) are less able to access needed services, due to service providers' discrimination and discomfort in accessing services that affect health-seeking behaviors.

Specific Recommendations: Advocate for the Ministry of Health to establish clear health care standards so all persons must be provided with quality care and ethical treatment. Implement the mobile clinic model to better reach youth, specifically vulnerable youth in rural areas, with quality health services and care options. Assist training institutes and supportive supervision in graduating health personnel trained to provide ethical and youth-friendly services, including to people who identify as LGBTQI+, sex workers, and other historically stigmatized groups. Address norms and stigma around sexual and mental health services, including for access to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services.

Image: LGBT Vision for Action (USAID)

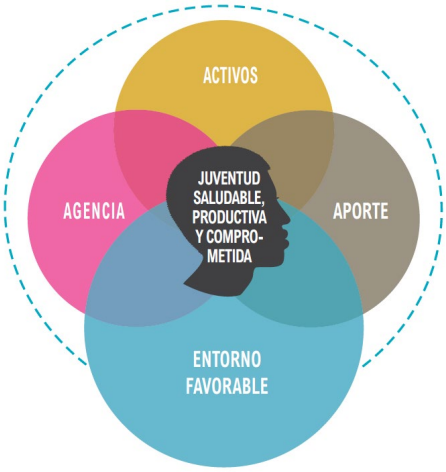
10. WORK TO IMPROVE TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN YOUTH AND THE GOVERNMENT, AND TRAIN LOCAL AND NATIONAL AUTHORITIES IN USING A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH. (DO1, DO3) Youth and other research participants identified a general distrust in political or judicial authorities and described the lack of accountability mechanisms as a key barrier to good governance that is central to DO3. The biased and/or discriminatory attitudes of authorities result in youth often having their rights abused or denied. Violence and disputes between neighbors, distrust in the police, and feeling unsafe in the streets and at home, were all challenges youth participants identified, especially certain youth. Youth of Haitian descent—and black or dark-skinned Dominicans—are at most risk of having police and migrant officials violate their rights, especially youth living in border towns.

Specific recommendations: Apply approaches such as multi-stakeholder dialogues with youth and other stakeholders, especially government and security institutions, to help build trust, positive relationships, transparency, and accountability. Support training police and government authorities in safeguarding, child protection, and gender-based violence response.

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

La inclusión está en el corazón de la Estrategia de Cooperación para el Desarrollo del País (CDCS) 2020-2025 de la Misión de la Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID) a la República Dominicana (USAID/DR). La CDCS tiene como objetivo "promover un país más seguro y próspero de manera inclusiva, avanzando a una resiliencia local y transfronteriza."[12] Los jóvenes de entre 11 y 29 años constituyen un grupo numeroso e importante dentro de la CDCS que está integrado en todos los programas de USAID/DR en materia de salud, agricultura, democracia y gobernanza, y mitigación de conflictos. A través de toda la programación se utiliza un enfoque de Desarrollo Positivo de la Juventud (PYD, por sus siglas en inglés).[13]

Figura 1: Marco del PYD de USAID



Para continuar el trabajo de USAID/DR para y con los jóvenes, USAID/DR encargó al contrato de Aprendizaje y Respuesta Rápida para América Latina y el Caribe (LACLEARN) la realización de una evaluación intersectorial de la juventud (CSYA, por sus siglas en inglés) para evaluar la situación de los jóvenes en la República Dominicana (RD). Esta CSYA tiene como objetivo capturar las experiencias, aspiraciones, desafíos y activos de los jóvenes (entre 11 y 29 años), así como identificar programas, organizaciones y asociaciones eficaces que apoyen a los jóvenes. A partir de una revisión documental inicial llevada a cabo en 2020, la evaluación tuvo como objetivo explorar y validar los temas y recomendaciones identificados en la Fase I, incluido el impacto de la pandemia de COVID-19, para ayudar a informar la ejecución y el desarrollo de la programación en curso con USAID/DR.

PREGUNTAS DE EVALUACIÓN

Esta CSYA se estructuró en torno a tres preguntas generales relacionadas con la juventud en la RD:

1. ¿Cuál es el panorama/situación de la juventud en un sector determinado?

[12] Mas información: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2022-05/CDCS-DOMINICAN_REPUBLIC_External_12-2025.pdf, p.7

[13] El PYD es el eje central de la Política de la Juventud en el Desarrollo de USAID (2022). Según el Marco PYD, la agencia se define como "jóvenes que perciben y tienen la capacidad de emplear sus activos y aspiraciones para tomar o influir en sus propias decisiones sobre sus vidas y establecer sus propias metas, así como para actuar sobre esas decisiones con el fin de lograr los resultados deseados".

2. ¿Cuáles son las barreras que enfrentan la juventud?

3. ¿Cuáles son las oportunidades para la juventud?

El estudio analizó todos los sectores en los que trabaja USAID: educación, crecimiento económico, salud y gobernanza. La CSYA utilizó una óptica interseccional[14] para examinar estas preguntas e identificar qué subconjuntos de jóvenes son más vulnerables o resilientes en función de determinadas características, como la edad, el nivel de ingresos, el género, el origen étnico, la situación de ciudadanía/migración, la discapacidad, la orientación sexual o la identidad de género.

METODOLOGÍA

Esta CSYA se basa en datos cualitativos primarios recopilados a través de 243 entrevistas semiestructuradas, 11 discusiones en grupos focales, 8 actividades del Día de la Juventud y un taller de narración digital, recopilados en persona y a distancia entre septiembre y octubre de 2022. En conjunto, estas actividades involucraron a un total de 448 partes interesadas, 205 de las cuales eran jóvenes, y se llevaron a cabo en 11 regiones del país, incluidas las rurales, urbanas, fronterizas, portuarias y turísticas. Además de los jóvenes, sus familias y las organizaciones comunitarias, el equipo habló con funcionarios locales y nacionales, organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC), organismos encargados de hacer cumplir la ley, instituciones educativas y el sector de salud pública.

Figura 2: Mapa de regiones de la evaluación[15]

RECOMENDACIONES PRIORITARIAS Y EVIDENCIA DE APOYO

Las siguientes 10 recomendaciones generales articulan el modo en que el personal de USAID puede apoyar las necesidades holísticas de los jóvenes junto con otros socios. En cada recomendación general se indica el objetivo de desarrollo (OD) de la CDCS de USAID/DR con el que está más estrechamente relacionada. La sección final del informe completo contiene recomendaciones ampliadas y adicionales específicas para cada sector.

[14] La óptica interseccional se basa en el concepto de interseccionalidad, que nos permite reconocer el hecho de que la pertenencia a un determinado grupo puede hacer a las personas vulnerables a diversas formas de opresión.
[15] Las 11 regiones seleccionadas por USAID/DR son Boca Chica, DaJabon, Distrito Nacional, Higüey, La Romana, Monte Cristi, Puerto Plata, Samaná, San Francisco de Macorís, Santiago, y Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo Norte y Santo Domingo Oeste).

1. ASOCIARSE INTENCIONALMENTE CON ORGANIZACIONES DIRIGIDAS POR JÓVENES Y AL SERVICIO DE LOS JÓVENES. (TRANSVERSAL)

Las OSC, especialmente las dirigidas por jóvenes, desempeñan un papel importante para defender y apoyar los derechos de los jóvenes en la RD en toda su diversidad. Además de las grandes organizaciones nacionales dirigidas por jóvenes, las organizaciones comunitarias y de base tienen un profundo conocimiento de las necesidades de los jóvenes y de las dinámicas locales contextuales que hacen que un proyecto tenga éxito, pero es posible que no tengan acceso o sistemas para poder asociarse directamente con USAID.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Utilizar los mecanismos de implementación existentes o futuros con contratos creados conjuntamente o subvenciones (directas o secundarias) a diversas organizaciones dirigidas por jóvenes para aprovechar la experiencia de estos socios, al tiempo que se incluye un apoyo explícito a la capacidad y los resultados para la sostenibilidad a largo plazo. Apoyar a las OSC establecidas para que establezcan relaciones simbióticas con organizaciones dirigidas por jóvenes. Continuar ayudando a integrar la participación de los jóvenes en la programación y la gestión, para el trabajo de USAID y sus socios.[16]

Imagen: Graduado de la Programa Alerta Joven

2. CONTINUAR DISEÑANDO PROGRAMAS QUE SE CENTREN EN LOS JÓVENES, QUE SEAN HOLÍSTICOS Y QUE ABORDEN LAS NECESIDADES ESPECÍFICAS DE LOS DIFERENTES GRUPOS DE EDAD Y OTROS SUBGRUPOS, INCLUYENDO LA INTEGRACIÓN DE LAS PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS JÓVENES A TRAVÉS DE ACTIVIDADES DE IMPLEMENTACIÓN Y APRENDIZAJE. (TRANSVERSAL)

Los jóvenes tienen distintas necesidades a lo largo de su vida, incluidos los riesgos sociales, de salud y económicos. Por ejemplo, ofrecer una educación sexual integral a las adolescentes que corren más riesgo de embarazo o matrimonio precoz, cursos de recuperación del aprendizaje básico para estudiantes mayores de edad y con dificultades que corren el riesgo de abandonar la escuela, o centrarse en las transiciones de la escuela al trabajo o a la educación superior o conseguir que los estudiantes no escolarizados vuelvan al sistema educativo. Los encuestados describieron frecuentemente la participación de los jóvenes en actividades comunitarias y

[16] Véase, por ejemplo: Global LEAD Toolkit y Youth Programming Assessment Tool para la reflexión organizacional.

nacionales como "simbólica" o inaccesible para los jóvenes marginados. Los participantes señalaron que la actividad *Alerta Joven* de USAID era prometedora porque abordaba múltiples áreas importantes para los jóvenes, como la formación profesional, el apoyo al empleo y el apoyo a la salud sexual y reproductiva (SSR).

Recomendaciones Específicas: Ampliar la participación activa de los jóvenes como socios desde la fase de diseño, incluir intervenciones dirigidas a subgrupos y edades específicas de forma consistente a lo largo de la ejecución y el aprendizaje de una actividad. Entre los pasos prácticos para la participación continua se incluyen los enfoques de creación conjunta, los consejos de jóvenes, los grupos asesores de jóvenes o los sistemas sólidos de retroalimentación de los usuarios, incluyendo intencionadamente a los jóvenes y a los grupos de jóvenes más allá de los conocidos por USAID y los socios cercanos.[17] Incluir las expectativas de participación de los jóvenes, con recursos suficientes, en las licitaciones y contratos/acuerdos para fortalecer la implementación. Continuar implementando actividades holísticas, impulsadas por la demanda, como *Alerta Joven*. Al medir los resultados, considerar el uso de herramientas cualitativas que eleven las voces de los jóvenes y capturen historias transformadoras de cambio resultantes de la programación, como el cambio más significativo.

Imagen: Cursos de preparación para la universidad de USAID, Octubre 2021, Santiago de los Caballeros

3. ABORDAR LA INTERSECCIONALIDAD EN LA PROGRAMACIÓN HACIENDO FRENTE A LOS OBSTÁCULOS SISTÉMICOS A LA INCLUSIÓN DE LOS JÓVENES Y PRESTANDO SERVICIOS DE APOYO A LOS MÁS VULNERABLES, ESPECIALMENTE LOS MIGRANTES INDOCUMENTADOS. (TRANSVERSAL)

Muchos subgrupos de jóvenes vulnerables, incluyendo las comunidades de lesbianas, gays, bisexuales, transexuales, queer e intersexuales, y aquellos con otras identidades de género y orientaciones sexuales diversas (LGBTQI+), los jóvenes migrantes, los jóvenes con discapacidades, los jóvenes de ascendencia haitiana o los jóvenes indocumentados, corren más riesgo de que se les nieguen los servicios y de sufrir discriminación y violaciones de sus derechos. El

[17] Vea estos recursos sobre consejos consultivos juveniles aquí.

requisito de la cédula, en particular, fue descrito en múltiples ocasiones como la creación de una "cadena" de barreras para los jóvenes que no podían acceder a la educación o a los servicios de salud, abrir un banco, o conseguir vivienda o empleo. La sentencia 168-13[18] ha provocado un aumento de la discriminación y la violencia contra los dominicanos de ascendencia haitiana, y los cambios introducidos en el Código Penal en materia de no discriminación eliminaron las protecciones para los miembros de la comunidad LGBTQI+.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Asociarse con agentes de la sociedad civil que se centren en defender y apoyar los derechos de los jóvenes vulnerables, incluidos los jóvenes indocumentados, las niñas y las mujeres jóvenes, las comunidades LGBTQI+ o los jóvenes con discapacidades[19]. Junto con los socios nacionales y de desarrollo, abogar por reformas políticas y normativas para abordar aquellas que afectan de manera desproporcionada a los jóvenes vulnerables, como la sentencia 168-13, los requisitos de la cédula y los cambios en el Código Penal para eliminar la protección de los jóvenes LGBTQI+. Asegurarse que la programación con jóvenes incluya servicios de referencia o apoyo específicos de la población para aumentar la equidad en el acceso (p. ej., servicios de salud que sean seguros y amigables para personas que se identifican como LGBTQI+, servicios de salud mental para personas que sufrieron violencia de género). Brindar apoyo a los institutos de formación para que los profesionales de la salud, la seguridad y otros presten servicios equitativos y amigables para los jóvenes.

Imagen: Graduadas de la Programa Alerta Joven

4. APOYAR AL GOBIERNO A NIVEL NACIONAL Y SUBNACIONAL PARA FORTALECER LAS POLÍTICAS, LA APLICACIÓN Y EL APRENDIZAJE EN TORNO A LAS NORMATIVAS QUE AFECTAN A LOS JÓVENES. (OD1)

Existe una necesidad urgente de fortalecer los marcos jurídicos o institucionales y la aplicación de políticas públicas centradas en los derechos humanos de los jóvenes, incluido su acceso a servicios adaptados a los jóvenes y a oportunidades de participación

[18] La sentencia 168-13 del Tribunal Constitucional establece que los niños nacidos en la República Dominicana de padres extranjeros -y que no tenían un estatus migratorio regular- nunca han tenido derecho a la nacionalidad dominicana. Constituye "una privación retroactiva y arbitraria de la nacionalidad" que "afecta desproporcionadamente a los dominicanos de ascendencia haitiana y es, por tanto, discriminatoria." (Amnistía Internacional 2015, 6)

[19] Las organizaciones que han tenido éxito en el avance de resultados positivos incluyen MUDHA, Reconocid.o y COLESDOM.

económica y cívica.[20] Otro reto político es la falta de seguimiento y evaluación: los agentes gubernamentales identificaron pocas políticas centradas en los jóvenes que integren el aprendizaje continuo.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Apoyar a las organizaciones dirigidas por jóvenes y las intervenciones de gobernanza local puede ayudar a establecer estas relaciones, cambiar la mentalidad en torno a la participación de los jóvenes y avanzar en los resultados del fortalecimiento de capacidades. Aprovechar y apoyar los "puntos brillantes" del gobierno, como el desarrollo por parte de la Unidad Técnica de Estudios sobre la Juventud del Ministerio de la Juventud[21] de un *tablero de datos en línea* para indicadores centrados en los jóvenes. Compartir las buenas prácticas de USAID en torno a la participación de los jóvenes con las contrapartes gubernamentales. Para más recomendaciones específicas por sector, véase el informe completo.

5. CREAR ENTORNOS DOMÉSTICOS Y COMUNITARIOS PROPICIOS TRABAJANDO CON LOS JÓVENES, SUS FAMILIAS, LOS LÍDERES COMUNITARIOS Y RELIGIOSOS Y LAS ORGANIZACIONES COMUNITARIAS. (OD3)

Tener acceso a un entorno familiar de apoyo es importante para los jóvenes de todas las edades. Las barreras para el desarrollo de los jóvenes a menudo se encuentran en su entorno inmediato, como el acceso limitado al apoyo educativo en el hogar, la violencia doméstica y comunitaria, las calles y barrios inseguros o descuidados y las expectativas sociales. Eliminar estas barreras y crear entornos más propicios en los hogares y las comunidades es una parte vital de la programación juvenil. El trabajo con las organizaciones comunitarias y la sociedad civil también se describió como importante para abordar las normas sociales y las actitudes perjudiciales.

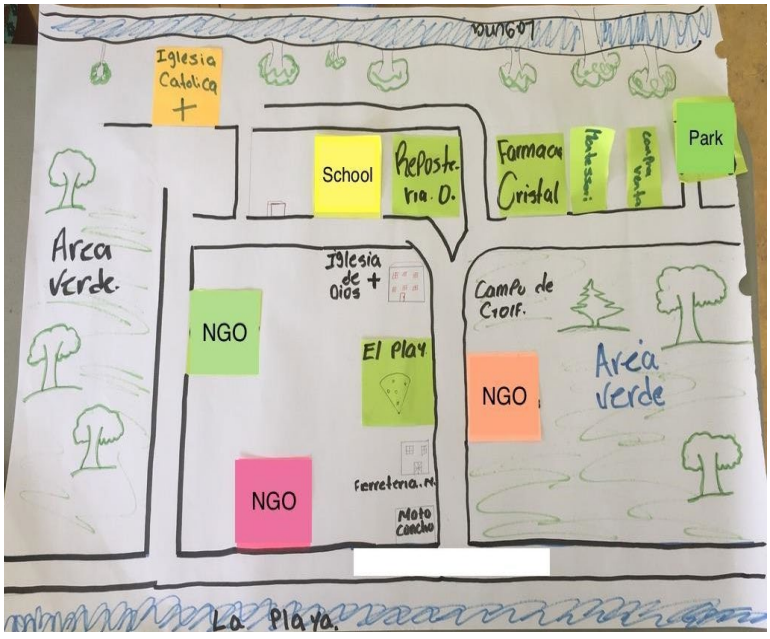


Imagen: Mapa de la comunidad elaborado durante uno de los grupos focales

[20] Los actores clave identificados por los participantes en la investigación fueron el Ministerio de la Juventud, el Ministerio de la Mujer, el Ministerio de Educación de la República Dominicana (MINERD) y el Ministerio de Trabajo.
[21] Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes (UESJ).

Recomendaciones Específicas: Entre los ejemplos identificados por los participantes en la investigación se incluyen la formación de padres y cuidadores para apoyar la educación de sus hijos, el apoyo al diálogo en el hogar entre padres e hijos, la creación de oportunidades para actividades recreativas familiares y comunitarias como clases de cocina o noches de juegos, la oferta de guarderías gratuitas y fiables para madres jóvenes, o la participación tanto de mujeres como de hombres jóvenes—y especialmente de los cónyuges—en intervenciones que tratan de abordar las normas de género o la violencia de género. Combinar los diálogos de género con las redes SAN de mujeres se consideró importante para reducir la violencia de pareja. Invertir recursos en la creación de viviendas, calles y barrios más seguros y accesibles, incluso mediante proyectos de limpieza o embellecimiento, también puede ayudar a infundir un sentimiento de orgullo colectivo entre los jóvenes, sus familias y la comunidad en general.

6. INTEGRAR EN TODOS LOS SECTORES LAS ACTIVIDADES DE CAMBIO DE LAS NORMAS SOCIALES, QUE INCLUYEN EL DIÁLOGO EN LOS HOGARES, LAS COMUNIDADES Y LOS LÍDERES RELIGIOSOS. (TRANSVERSAL)

Las normas sociales perjudiciales, tanto las impuestas externamente como las interiorizadas, crean un sinfín de barreras para los jóvenes, especialmente los marginados. Por ejemplo, el estigma hacia las niñas embarazadas, los estándares de belleza eurocéntricos y las expectativas de que los niños actúen de una determinada manera contribuyen a aumentar las tasas de abandono escolar entre los jóvenes. Las actitudes discriminatorias de los empresarios limitan el acceso de los jóvenes al trabajo o hacen que sufran violencia de género, racismo y otras formas de discriminación laboral. Los tabúes en torno a la salud sexual y mental hacen que algunos jóvenes no accedan a estos servicios. Por ejemplo, la educación sexual integral rara vez se imparte en las escuelas públicas y los jóvenes expresaron su temor a que los profesionales de la salud los rechacen.

Recomendaciones Específicas: El cambio de las normas perjudiciales debe incluirse explícitamente en los resultados durante el diseño de la actividad y a lo largo de su implementación, incluido su examen durante las valoraciones, el seguimiento y la evaluación.[22] Para ejemplos específicos por sector, consulte los hallazgos en cuerpo del informe.

7. FORTALECER LA PRESTACIÓN DE SERVICIOS DE EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA Y DE EDUCACIÓN Y FORMACIÓN TÉCNICA Y PROFESIONAL (EFTP), Y APOYAR LA TRANSICIÓN DE LA ESCUELA AL TRABAJO DE LOS JÓVENES. (OD2)

Los costos indirectos de la escolarización (p. ej., gastos de uniformes, libros de texto, transporte, actividades de clase, material de escritura y material escolar) y la ubicación continúan siendo una barrera importante para el acceso universal a la educación. Muchos jóvenes abandonan o suspenden sus estudios, las escuelas no están debidamente equipadas y muchos docentes no reciben formación ni apoyo. Los temas curriculares clave, como la SSR, la educación financiera o la educación cívica, no se imparten con eficacia, si es que se imparten. Debido a la brecha entre las habilidades aprendidas en la escuela y las necesidades de los empleadores, los jóvenes son vulnerables en la transición de la educación al mercado laboral.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Trabajar con el gobierno para mitigar los costos de transporte escolar, uniformes o materiales educativos para los niveles primario y secundario, especialmente para los jóvenes migrantes. Seguir abogando por un enfoque holístico del desarrollo curricular, que incluya

[22] Como ejemplo de herramienta práctica para diseñar y ejecutar intervenciones de cambio de normas sociales, véase la Lista de verificación de diseño de normas sociales de CARE y el conjunto de herramientas relacionadas, así como los recursos de desarrollo de capacidades y programación sobre género y normas sociales del Proyecto PASSAGES de USAID.

competencias básicas en lectoescritura y aritmética, tareas o apoyo escolar formal, e integración de habilidades para la vida (p. ej., pensamiento crítico, habilidades socioemocionales) y habilidades transferibles relacionadas con el trabajo. Diseñar programas flexibles de educación formal y no formal para los jóvenes, en particular para aquellos que realizan trabajos remunerados o no remunerados, y garantizar que existan vías para que los jóvenes (incluidas las embarazadas o los padres jóvenes) retomen y continúen su educación. Diseñar actividades a nivel comunitario para abordar las normas sociales que contribuyen al abandono escolar. Involucrar al sector privado, las instituciones públicas de formación y/o la sociedad civil para ayudar a los jóvenes a adquirir experiencia laboral práctica y desarrollar habilidades relacionadas con el trabajo, incluido el espíritu empresarial.

8. ALENTAR AL MINISTERIO DE TRABAJO A EVALUAR Y MEJORAR LAS CONDICIONES GENERALES DE TRABAJO DE LOS SECTORES FORMALES E INFORMALES EN LOS QUE PARTICIPAN LOS JÓVENES. (OD2)

La participación económica de los jóvenes suele limitarse a actividades poco remuneradas e informales. Las restricciones económicas también sirven como barrera importante para que los jóvenes accedan a oportunidades de empleo; y la falta de oportunidades laborales, especialmente en las zonas rurales, hace que los jóvenes tengan que emigrar para conseguir empleo y, por tanto, estén expuestos a nuevos riesgos. La discriminación y la violencia de género son habituales y se perpetran con impunidad en los lugares de trabajo formales.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Investigar en qué medida el sector privado, la sociedad civil y las entidades gubernamentales han instituido y aplicado políticas de protección en el lugar de trabajo. Trabajar con el sector privado, las instituciones públicas de formación y/o la sociedad civil para desarrollar programas de emprendimiento que abarquen una gama más amplia de trayectorias profesionales y se dirijan a los jóvenes autónomos. Esto podría incluir asociaciones público-privadas entre escuelas, institutos de EFTP y empleadores. Desarrollar programas para desarrollar las habilidades empresariales de los jóvenes a través de la experiencia práctica en gestión empresarial, clases de alfabetización financiera y participación profesional en la agricultura abogando por mejores salarios y compensaciones, integrando tecnologías digitales o facilitando intercambios de trabajo que permitan a los jóvenes explorar enfoques modernos e innovadores, como la agricultura inteligente.

9. FORTALECER LA IMPLEMENTACIÓN DE SERVICIOS DE SALUD INTEGRALES Y DE ALTA CALIDAD AMIGABLES A LOS JÓVENES. (OD1, OD2)

El apoyo técnico debe centrarse en las brechas existentes en las políticas y/o en la implementación de las mismas, especialmente en torno a la prestación de servicios de SSR y salud mental, así como en el acceso equitativo a estos servicios. Un reto clave de las políticas de salud pública es el hecho de que el aborto sigue siendo ilegal y punible por ley, lo que expone a las personas en edad fértil a riesgos adicionales. Los jóvenes que pertenecen o son percibidos como pertenecientes a determinadas comunidades o identidades (p. ej., LGBTQI+, personas con discapacidad) tienen menos posibilidades de acceder a los servicios necesarios por la discriminación de los proveedores de servicios e incomodidad a la hora de acceder a servicios que afectan a los comportamientos de búsqueda de atención médica.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Abogar para que el Ministerio de Salud establezca normas claras de atención médica para que todas las personas reciban una atención de calidad y un tratamiento ético. Implementar el modelo de clínica móvil para llegar mejor a los jóvenes, en concreto a los jóvenes vulnerables de las zonas rurales, con servicios de salud y opciones de atención de calidad. Ayudar a los institutos de formación y supervisión de apoyo a graduar personal de salud capacitado para prestar servicios éticos y adaptados a los jóvenes, incluidas las personas que se identifican como LGBTQI+, los trabajadores del sexo y otros grupos históricamente estigmatizados. Abordar las normas y el estigma en

torno a los servicios de salud sexual y mental, incluido el acceso a los servicios de prevención y tratamiento del VIH/SIDA.

Imagen: LGBT Visión para Acción de USAID.

10. TRABAJAR PARA MEJORAR LA CONFIANZA Y LA RESPONSABILIDAD ENTRE LOS JÓVENES Y EL GOBIERNO, Y CAPACITAR A LAS AUTORIDADES LOCALES Y NACIONALES EN EL USO DE UN ENFOQUE BASADO EN LOS DERECHOS. (OD1, OD3)

Los jóvenes y otros participantes en la investigación identificaron una desconfianza generalizada en las autoridades políticas o judiciales y describieron la falta de mecanismos de rendición de cuentas como un obstáculo clave para la buena gobernanza que es fundamental para el OD3. Las actitudes sesgadas y/o discriminatorias de las autoridades hacen que a menudo se abuse de los derechos de los jóvenes o se les nieguen. La violencia y las disputas entre vecinos, la desconfianza en la policía y la sensación de inseguridad en la calle y en el hogar son algunos de los problemas señalados por los jóvenes, especialmente por algunos de ellos. Los jóvenes de ascendencia haitiana—y los dominicanos negros o de piel oscura—corren mayor riesgo de que la policía y los funcionarios de migración violen sus derechos, especialmente los jóvenes que viven en ciudades fronterizas.

Recomendaciones Específicas: Aplicar enfoques como los diálogos entre múltiples partes interesadas con los jóvenes y otros actores, especialmente el gobierno y las instituciones de seguridad, para ayudar a crear confianza, relaciones positivas, transparencia y rendición de cuentas. Apoyar la formación de la policía y las autoridades gubernamentales en materia de salvaguardia, protección infantil y respuesta a la violencia de género.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development/Dominican Republic (USAID/DR) commissioned the Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN) to conduct a cross-sectoral youth assessment (CSYA) using a positive youth development[23] (PYD) lens to assess the situation of young people (between the ages of 11 and 29) in the Dominican Republic and provide programmatic recommendations for its technical offices. The assessment also supplies development practitioners working in the Dominican Republic with an analysis of the barriers and opportunities for young people living in the Dominican Republic across a variety of key sectors.

The CSYA is informed by USAID's Youth in Development Policy, which was developed in 2012 and updated in 2022, to improve young people's agency, rights, influence, and opportunities to meaningfully contribute to the development of their communities. The USAID/DR 2020–2025 Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) prioritizes youth, gender, and other forms of social inclusion as cross-cutting issues. Youth are integrated into all USAID/DR programming in the health, agriculture, democracy, governance, and conflict mitigation sectors. USAID/DR will use findings and recommendations from this CSYA to better address PYD in sectoral programs, including identifying opportunities for designing youth programs to support young people in achieving their full potential.

To support USAID/DR in reaching their goal to increase the meaningful participation of young people within their communities, schools, peer groups, and families to lead to positive outcomes, this CSYA delineates barriers and challenges, as well as effective programs, organizations, and partnerships that help young people reach their life goals and full potential.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This report is the result of a two-phase assessment to better understand young people's aspirations, access to services and protection, and visions for the future and their role in it. The first phase was a desk review conducted in 2020, through another implementing mechanism. The resulting report provided key background information to frame the next phase of the CSYA, including interview data and findings by sector.[24] Priority areas for USAID's engagement, identified in the Phase I desk review, included (1) governance: promoting democratic practices, rule of law, citizen responsiveness, and credible enforcement, and effectively steward the country's resources, (2) service system capacity: efficiently providing quality and accessible services through inclusive and interconnected systems, (3) local resilience: improving the capacity of local actors and promoting social behavior change and conflict mitigation for resilient and sustainable development, and (4) other topics, such as demographics, policies, education, employment, civic engagement, violence and crime, health, and families and communities.

Following the desk review, the purpose of Phase II was to conduct an in-depth CSYA involving focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews with youth, families, and community organizations to explore and validate the themes and recommendations identified in Phase I, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth. At the same time, interviews were conducted with individuals from local and national governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), law enforcement agencies, educational

[23] The PYD framework offers four domains through which the vision of healthy, productive, and engaged youth can be achieved. These domains include assets, agency, enabling environment, and contribution (see *Figure 1*).
[24] Desk Review Report. 2020. Link.

institutions, and the public health sector to gain a deeper understanding of barriers and opportunities for youth, as well as recommendations for youth engagement and empowerment.

The intention of the CSYA is to serve not only as a resource for internal use at USAID, but also for government entities and CSOs that seek updated data on youth and their circumstances, including perspectives directly from young people. For USAID, the CSYA provides evidence to inform the introduction or integration of youth into all its programming. For CSOs and governments, the CSYA will provide robust research findings that can be used to substantiate proposals or reports. For youth advocates, the CSYA will serve as a means of holding their local governments accountable to youth.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

To better understand the context and needs of young people in the Dominican Republic, the CSYA was structured around three overarching questions:

1. What is the youth landscape/situation in the given sector?
2. What are the barriers youth face?
3. What are the opportunities for youth?

An intersectional lens was used to respond to these questions and to identify, in particular, which subgroups of youth are more vulnerable based on certain characteristics, such as age, income level, gender, ethnicity, citizenship/migration status, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

PYD APPROACH

USAID's PYD approach informs the CSYA and has driven the analytical framework both in terms of the kinds of questions asked of youth and the search for promising and innovative approaches to address priorities youth identified during the assessment. The PYD approach was used as a lens to assess the situation among young people in the Dominican Republic.

PYD is both a philosophy and an evidence-based approach to youth development that "engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems."[25] The PYD framework offers four domains through which the vision of healthy, productive, and engaged youth can be achieved (see Table 1).

Table 1: PYD framework domains and program features

DOMAIN	PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY ACTIVITIES
Assets Agency	Skill Building	Develop soft and life skills through skill-building activities within individual, family, peer, and community settings.
Contribution	Youth engagement and contribution	Allow youth engagement to take different shapes. This can include youth expression, youth involvement in community service, and creating opportunities for youth decision-making at various levels of

[25] USAID. Youth Power. Link.

DOMAIN	PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY ACTIVITIES
		government. This can include programs that provide structure for youth contribution or that support youth leadership.
Enabling Environment	Healthy relationships and bonding	Identify and link youth to positive adult role models, mentors, coaches, teachers, health care providers, and community leaders. Ideally, youth have at least one caring, consistent adult in their lives. Healthy peer relationships are particularly important.
	Belonging and membership	Foster activities where youth feel included regardless of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, or other factors. Identify activities that provide a positive sense of belonging (schools, sports, community service, faith-based groups, etc.)
	Positive norms, expectations, and perceptions	Have clear and consistent norms and expectations about health, relationships, and forms of engagement that provide youth with an increasing amount of responsibility and independence and allow them to grow and take on new roles.
	Safe space	Create safe spaces tailored to the needs of youth, including both physical infrastructure and emotional safety. Space can be defined in a variety of ways, including virtual. Many communities lack any space for youth to convene. Thus, communities must be committed to providing youth with safe spaces to practice, engage, and learn creatively and collaboratively. An emotionally safe space is critical to learning.
	Access to age-appropriate and youth-friendly services; integration among services	Make information available to youth and families, connecting and integrating health and social services so there is a continuum of care and support at community level.

METHODOLOGY

To build on the Phase I desk review, the team used primarily qualitative methods to understand the experiences and priorities of young people, with an emphasis on amplifying young people's voices. The research team conducted primary data collection using in-person and remote methods from September through October 2022, reaching a total of 448 stakeholders (58 percent female and 42 percent male; 205 of whom were youth, 63 percent female and 37 percent male). To capture a range of stories and experiences, the team collected data in 11 regions of the country, including rural areas, urban areas, border regions, port regions, and touristic regions.

DATA COLLECTION, SAMPLING, AND ANALYSIS

Table 2: Data Collection Methods

METHODS	DESCRIPTION AND SAMPLING
Semi-Structured Interviews	Virtual and in-person interviews with USAID staff, local implementing partners, government officials, development partners, national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), key civil society stakeholders, and USAID program participants. Completed interviews with 243 people.
FGD	Held 11 FGDs with community stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, homework clubs, parents, local leaders, religious leaders, youth experts, health workers, and youth-led organizations.
Participatory Youth Activities	Organized in-person workshops in eight regions on Youth Day, consisting of a full-day of participatory activities for 20–25 youth each. Activities included community mapping, FGDs, diamond ranking exercises, worry exercise, and my community activity. See *Annex 2* for details on these activities.
Digital Storytelling Workshop	A 3-day workshop was held in Santo Domingo with nine participants to further explore the barriers young people experience.

USAID/DR identified 11 regions for this CSYA based on where USAID had previously organized programming and where future USAID programming might take place. Within each region, the assessment team chose communities based on physical accessibility (at least fair road conditions and security/safety considerations), concentration of youth, and diversity of socioeconomic characteristics among the total sample population (e.g., rural/urban, education level; see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Assessment Geographic Coverage[26]

The research team identified respondents for this CSYA using a variety of methods, including online searches, personal networks, and youth referrals. The selection criteria for organizations to participate in the study was that their organization must have had actively worked with youth in the past 5 years. Youth were selected to participate in the study based on age: they had to be between 11- and 29-years-

[26] The 11 regions USAID/DR selected are Boca Chica, DaJabon, Distrito Nacional, Higüey, La Romana, Monte Cristi, Puerto Plata, Samaná, San Francisco de Macorís, Santiago, and Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo Norte and Santo Domingo Oeste).

old. To understand how youth overlaps with other forms of identity, the team actively ensured that included youth had a diversity of characteristics or identities, such as: teenage or young mothers; different education levels; out-of-school; homeless; identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex people, and those with other diverse gender identities and sexual orientations (LGBTQI+); undocumented; orphaned; with a learning or physical disability; living with HIV/AIDs; with diverse economic backgrounds; and of diverse ethnicities/religions.

During fieldwork, the team conducted weekly virtual debrief sessions to discuss key issues, findings, and opportunities stakeholders identified. The team used these weekly debrief sessions to frame our understanding of the findings in different regions. They also provided an opportunity for the team to analyze differences between regions. Building on the weekly debriefs, the team typed all notes and held a 3-day full team in-person data analysis session to apply qualitative coding. The team used open coding to ground findings in the data, organizing around sectors and emergent themes.

LIMITATIONS

Because this assessment used qualitative methods, this report emphasizes lived experiences and relationships of data collection respondents; it does not claim to be representative of youth in the Dominican Republic. For example, we provide rough estimates and quantify certain terminology based on primary data collection, although each section begins with a snapshot summary of existing secondary data that speak to scope and countrywide estimates.

The geographic sampling did not include regions in the southwest of the country due to the limited time and dearth of youth-serving organizations that work there. The team only accessed one organization targeting the agriculture sector, although numerous organizations interviewed use a multisectoral approach and could speak to the experiences of young people in agriculture. Lastly, due to time constraints related to their schedules, we interviewed a limited number of parents for this CSYA.

THE SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DR

The Dominican Republic has a youthful demographic, but members of this generation face various structural, social, and individual barriers to effectively attaining and realizing the roles society expects of them. Obstacles such as lack of quality education, normalization of teenage pregnancy, high rates of child marriage/informal unions, lack of job opportunities, youth violence, and limited family support all serve as risk factors that hinder the well-being of young people in the Dominican Republic. Below are key takeaways to illustrate the situation of young people in the Dominican Republic. Further details can be found in *Annex 5*.

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- Approximately 6.8 million people (62 percent) are under the age of 35;[27] 3 million of them (27 percent) are 10 to 24 years old within the Dominican Republic's total population of 11 million.[28]
- The Government of the Dominican Republic introduced a General Youth Law (Law No. 49-2000) in August 2000, to establish a legal policy and institutional framework that guides the state's actions pertaining to youth.

[27] World Bank Data. 2020. Link

[28] United Nations Population Fund. 2022. Country Program Data. Link

- One in four women in the Dominican Republic between the ages of 20 and 49 has had a child before turning 18, and almost half of them had a child before 20.[29]
- 36 percent[30] of girls in the Dominican Republic are married by the age of 18 and 12 percent of those girls are married by the age of 15.[31]
- 57 percent of girls in the Dominican Republic complete secondary school.
- Two out of three youths in the Dominican Republic aged 15 to 24 live in poverty.

For more information about the broader institutional and legal framework related to youth in the Dominican Republic, see the Phase 1 report (not publicly available).

SECTOR-LEVEL FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section offers a detailed discussion of the findings from the primary data collection, building on the Phase 1 desk review, using the lived experiences and perceptions youth, youth-serving organizations, businesses hiring youth, and other youth-focused stakeholders expressed.

Findings are presented by sectors of interest and priority for young people. We begin with an analysis of the barriers and challenges in education, followed by economic empowerment, health, and governance and civic engagement. While we take a sectoral approach in our presentation of findings, it is important to note these sectors are interconnected, and a cross-sectoral lens is essential in considering youth-focused programming that supports positive outcomes through youth engagement and empowerment.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING: PREPARING YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- As of 2020, 10 percent of primary-age children, 16 percent of lower secondary-age adolescents, and 32 percent of upper secondary-age youth were not in school.[32]
- As of 2019, only 16 percent of children achieved minimum proficiency in reading at the end of primary school and only 2 percent achieved minimum proficiency in mathematics.[33]
- As of 2016, only one-quarter (26 percent) of youth (ages 18–24) had achieved tertiary-level education.[34]
- Percentages of out-of-school youth are similar for boys and girls (7 percent and 6 percent, respectively).[35] Boys drop out of school because of higher class failure rates[36] or to work,[37] whereas girls may drop out to support household work[38] or if they become pregnant.[39]

[29] UNICEF. Link
[30] Girls Not Brides. (2020). Link
[31] Girls Not Brides. (2020). Link
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] SITEAL. 2019. *Perfil: República Dominicana*. Sistema de Información de Tendencias Educativas en América Latina. Link. This is the latest available data set.
[35] World Bank. 2019. *Dominican Republic: Learning Poverty Brief*. World Bank. Link.
[36] OECD. 2018. Link
[37] Ibid.
[38] UNICEF. 2022. Link
[39] UNICEF and MINERD. 2017. *Niños y niñas afuera de la escuela en la República Dominicana: Resumen del Informe*. Fondo de las Naciones Unidas para la Infancia (UNICEF), oficina de país de la República Dominicana y Ministerio de Educación. Link.

In the last two decades, the Dominican Republic has significantly expanded access to universal education. Indirect costs and access in remote communities of schooling, however, continue to pose significant barriers to universal education. The Government of the Dominican Republic declared free primary education to reduce financial barriers for boys and girls to access primary education. While school fees have been abolished, the indirect costs involved in schooling—such as school fees for uniforms, textbooks, transportation, class activities, writing materials and school supplies (pens, rulers, notebooks, photocopies, etc.)—mean that financially disadvantaged families must conduct an informal cost-benefit analysis to decide which child's education to fund. This often leads to greater investment in girls' education than boys' because boys are expected to go to work and contribute financially.[40] Further, the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated financial barriers for some youth (single mothers, migrants, rural dwellers) and led to students not re-enrolling for in-person classes upon schools reopening.

For both boys and girls, school dropouts are greater in rural areas due to higher poverty rates, increased distance to schools, and lower education levels of the head of household.[41] According to FGDs with parents and young people in Samana, there was only one primary school and one secondary school to serve the entire community. Given the distance to the primary and secondary schools in their community, students or parents would be expected to spend approximately 400 DOP (around 7 USD)[42] for a roundtrip on a *motoconcho*, which is not feasible for the average household.

Likewise, in Puerto Plata, a young woman stated there was only one school building in their community. During the day, the school's classrooms were used for primary school, and during the night for adult and secondary school classes. Because classes offered at night are diverse, the age range among students was significant. According to the young woman, she observed older students engaging in risky behavior that left younger students (especially girls) feeling vulnerable and unsafe to attend school at night.

Social norms and negative perceptions of schooling returns contribute to boys' disengagement with school. Gender norms make studying a more socially acceptable behavior for girls, while boys are more likely to experience peer pressure to engage in risky behavior that is seen as "cool."[43] In addition, because boys and young men are seen as household breadwinners, they may be pressured to participate in income-generating activities from a young age. Further, many young men perceive limited returns to investing in education. For example, a young man from Northern Santo Domingo said: "Why would I go get more schooling? You went and got your degree and where did that lead you? You are still unemployed. You and I are in the same place, at least I didn't waste years in school."[44] Other informants, including youth, their family members, and community leaders, shared a similar sentiment, often describing how, when they tried to encourage young men in their community to go back to school, they responded with disinterest and doubt in the economic and social returns to investing time into schooling. Given their perception that school does not result in higher income, a better quality of life, or enhanced health outcomes for those who stay in school, many young men choose to drop out of school and seek employment. As a result, young women are more likely than their male peers to enroll in higher levels of education.

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[40] Stakeholder Interview, Samana. September 2022.
[41] Perez, N. 2020. Link
[42] This is equivalent to their daily salary.
[43] Stakeholder Interview. Puerto Plata. October 2022.
[44] Young man. Age 24. Single mother family. Works in the informal economy.

The stigma around pregnant girls in school and night schooling influences their ability to attend classes consistently or to reenroll after giving birth. Pregnant girls drop out of school for several reasons, including difficulty with concentrating at school; stigma against pregnant girls; or a need to earn an income through employment, for which pregnant girls may engage in transactional sex with older men in exchange for money or gifts.[45] Young mothers typically do not reenroll, but permanently drop out. In 2001, the Government of the Dominican Republic implemented a night school model to support students who could not attend school during the day.[46] While this was a huge advancement for teenage mothers to complete their education, night schools were surrounded by the stigma that they were for "troubled" students. According to a respondent in Samana, "After I gave birth to my child, I tried to enroll in the night school so that I could complete my schooling. When I went to enroll, the school administrators discouraged me. They said it was not safe for me to be there."[47] The stigma and non-acceptance of pregnant girls and the lack of alternative models for young mothers to finish their education have contributed to a high dropout rate for girls.

The quality of education broadly, and the limited support provided to teachers in particular, have contributed to many young people graduating without basic skills and inhibited young peoples' school-to-work transition. Since 2018, the Ministry of Education has worked to implement a comprehensive plan of education reforms, which includes an extended school day, school feeding programs, improvements in teacher training, digital education, and (since 2016) implementation of a competency-based curriculum that focuses on critical life skills, such as communication, critical thinking, and problem solving.[48] Quality issues across the education system, however, lead many young people to graduate without basic skills. System issues that contribute to this are: (1) insufficient teacher and administrator training, educational resources, and support; (2) ineffective pedagogies; and (3) a curriculum that does not develop socio-emotional, creativity, or critical thinking skills.[49] In addition to these systemic challenges, stakeholders described how COVID-19 had resulted in increased learning loss and lack of teachers' motivation. Given that students' basic competencies are not being achieved, the expectation for inclusive education, gender-responsive pedagogy, and life skills education is nonexistent. According to an interviewee, "We failed at doing gender-integrated education programs. Comprehensive sexuality education is not integrated, educational programs on drugs and alcohol are not included, programs targeting violence prevention are not included, scholarships targeting men are nonexistent."[50]

According to the private sector in the Dominican Republic, specifically the tourism, commerce, and service industries, insufficient schooling affects young peoples' job prospects. There is a demand for foundational competencies (such as reading, writing, numeracy, and logical thinking) and soft or transferable skills (such as social-emotional competencies, creative and critical thought, problem solving, positive self-concept, civics and citizenship, and digital literacy).[51] In interviews with the private sector, many stated, "When we hire a young person straight from school, we have to retrain all of them, because the school system is not training them in the skills that will be useful to our company. This is why we prefer hiring people with more experience, to avoid the extra time and investment it requires

[45] Stakeholder Interview, Samana. October 2022.
[46] OEI. 2019. Link
[47] Young woman. Age 14. Lives with a single mother who was also a teen mom. Has one older and two younger siblings.
[48] UNODC. 2020. Link
[49] For more context, see D'Angelo. 2020. Link
[50] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo. September 2022.
[51] FHI 360. Link

to retrain."[52]

The gap in the skills taught at school and those required to join the workforce and lack of career counseling or job preparation in schools serve as a barrier to young people's transition to the labor market. Youth and key informants said that young people rarely got the chance in school to explore the different professions or career paths they could pursue, and because of this, they rarely knew what they wanted to study or do when it was time to transition into labor markets. Youth receive limited opportunities for internships or apprenticeships throughout primary and secondary school. Also, although the new, extended school day curriculum proposes the use of *talleres* to nurture young people's skills and interests in diverse areas such as music, arts, and technical vocations, schools are rarely equipped with the human or material resources to effectively implement such courses.[53]

Discriminatory practices related to Eurocentric standards of beauty have contributed to low attendance rates, specifically among boys. According to respondents, teachers and school administrators implement stringent expectations for standards of beauty and send students who do not follow these standards home. The perceptions that education personnel often bring with them to school—for example, *pelo bueno, pelo malo* (good hair, bad hair)—are rooted in colonial imposition and the dictatorship of Trujillo, who wanted to *blanquear* (or whitewash) the Dominican race.[54] Young boys in La Romana stated that they were sent home numerous times a month if their hair was not shaven short. One respondent stated: "If I didn't have the money that week to get my hair shaved or if I had a small design on my head, I would automatically be sent home [...] of course, I would not go back that day."[55] As a result of these Eurocentric standards of beauty that, in some cases, are embedded in racist norms, young boys can miss school, which affects their learning outcomes.

The last several years have seen increased national investment in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), but only certain youth have access to these opportunities. The launch of the National Institute of Technical-Professional Training (INFOTEP) has provided 800,000 recognized training certificates to support young people with the technical skills required to enter the trades workforce. While almost all informants identified INFOTEP as a successful route to support young people to enter the workforce, the same informants stated that this opportunity did not come without its challenges. According to young people interviewed, privileged students with internet access and homes near the INFOTEP centers quickly fill up class spots in TVET programs. Likewise, to register for INFOTEP courses, youth must present a *cédula*, making courses inaccessible to undocumented youth. Many young people also stated that all "INFOTEP centers do not offer the same programs, and if you are requiring more specialty programs, you have to travel as the majority of the centers only offer basic programs."[56] Young women in San Francisco de Macoris mentioned that they could not make use of INFOTEP because the program they wanted was in a center, situated an hour away from their home, and due to the rise of gender-based harassment and violence, they could not travel the long distance to attend classes. Many young people reported that they often did not study the degree they wanted because the degree was not available at the local post-secondary institution (e.g., in the arts, theater, business management). Likewise, almost all young people interviewed noted that outside of INFOTEP, there were limited TVET centers, especially in rural areas. The lack of TVET programs prevents young

[52] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo. October 2022.
[53] D'Angelo. 2020. Link
[54] Ibid.
[55] Young man. Age 18. Dominican of Haitian descent. Lives with grandmother.
[56] Young woman. Age: 21. La Romana. Lives with both parents. INFOTEP Certificate. Working in informal economy.

people from getting the technical skills that prepare them for the formal workforce and limit their options and the types of careers they can pursue.

Few youth in the Dominican Republic attend higher education or complete a university degree. If students, especially those from low-income households, complete primary and secondary schooling, they have challenges to access higher education. Respondents—both youth and other stakeholders—described how public schools provided little support to young people to consider higher education options, both in terms of what to study, where to study, or how to apply for a university. Additional challenges for those who do pursue a university degree are high costs of transportation or schooling materials; a limited number of universities in some communities, which reduces potential career paths; and limited parental support provided at this level, when students are expected to be independent. While the Ministry of Youth provides scholarships for young people, certain research participants described that these scholarships were mostly based on academic merit and some of the most vulnerable youth—from poorer households and parents or families who are less educated—were rarely able to academically outperform their peers. Further, the closures of university libraries and community internet centers that the caused by COVID-19, as well as the decision for some universities to maintain remote modalities, have pushed some low-income youth further out of the system.

Taboos on discussions of sexuality prevent comprehensive sexuality education in classroom pedagogy. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) empowers young people to make informed decisions about their sexuality, well-being, and health and to advocate for their rights in these areas. However, parents interviewed in the CSYA believed that CSE increased young people's sexual activity, sexual risk-taking, and rates of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Likewise, interviews with teachers found that the majority did not teach CSE out of fear parents or school administrators would reprimand them.[57] As a result of the lack of CSE, many young people in the Dominican Republic do not have safe spaces where they can learn, discuss, and reflect on their bodily autonomy. According to young people in the CSYA, when asked where they got information related to sex education, many cited friends, anecdotal stories, music videos, and social media, resulting in significant misinformation.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: YOUTH FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- Nationally, more than 1 in 10 youth (ages 15–35) are unemployed. The unemployed youth population is mostly females (60 percent).[58]
- Among employed youth, 53 percent work in the formal sector, 44 percent in the informal sector, and 4 percent in domestic services.[59]
- Young people aged 15–29 source 55 percent of jobs in the informal sector.[60]
- In 2019, 25 percent of youth (31 percent of young women, and 19 percent of young men) in the Dominican Republic were neither enrolled in school nor employed.[61]

[57] Stakeholder interview. Santo Domingo and San Francisco de Macoris. September and October 2022.
[58] Ministry of Youth Dashboard: https://juventud.gob.do/dashboard/
[59] Ibid.
[60] FHI 360. Link
[61] World Bank. (2019). Link

A gap between skills learned in school and skills and experience employers require limits young people's economic participation to informal activities that come with no social protections or lower-paid opportunities. Significant gaps exist within the Dominican Republic's employment structure, resulting in youth having limited opportunities within the underdeveloped formal economy and being forced to work in the informal economy. One of the reasons for this that all young people in this CSYA identified is that entry-level jobs in the formal sector require at least 3 to 5 years of experience. Young people finishing school do not have these years of practical experience, which often forces them to work in the informal economy to make a living and gain experience. However, according to informants in Samana:

> *The informal economy has no benefits. We earn less than minimum wage, we have no health insurance, and we are expected to work unreasonable hours. We also have no power to say no to these standards. The moment we say no, there are hundreds of other people waiting for our position and willing to accept the exploitation.*[62]

Given that informal workers have no social protection, their ability to negotiate or leverage their power is minimal, compelling them to remain in positions that perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Sectors where young people are more likely to work, such as tourism, can come with additional risks. According to interviews with both young people and employers, young people often apply for tourism positions because these jobs only require skills such as basic reading and numeracy, as well as intrapersonal rather than technical skills. Youth employed in the tourism sector are particularly vulnerable because they are poorly compensated, required to work long hours without overtime pay, and expected to meet the business needs by taking leave without pay on no notice. One informant from Higuey stated:

> *I worked in the hotel industry for 5 years. When there were not that many clients at the resort, my manager would tell me as of tomorrow to take 1 week, 2 weeks off, 3 weeks off. Imagine having less than 24-hours-notice that you will not get paid for 3 weeks.*[63]

Although there is strong growth in key employment sectors, such as tourism, this has not translated into formal, well-paying jobs or broader compensation benefits for young people.

Economic constraints, such as access to internet or transportation, are significant barriers to accessing employment opportunities for young people. Young people in this CSYA repeatedly stated that to be equipped to apply for jobs, one needed money for data and/or cell phone minutes, as well as for transportation to get to interviews and eventually, to the job itself. Not all young people have these resources. Some young people said that in 1 week, they could often only afford to buy data for 3 days, therefore, sometimes missing emails or messages from potential employers because of their economic inability to be connected at all times. One young man in San Francisco de Macoris described that he had missed many job opportunities because of the distance to public transport from his *barrio* and his inability to pay for transport to get to job sites. The cost of transportation for those who do not live in the city center and low remuneration serve as an economic constraint for young people and validate their perspective to not seek employment.

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[62] Young man. Age 21. Living with a single mother and three younger siblings. Working in the tourism sector.
[63] Young man. Age 24. Living in Higuey, in a lodging shared with three other youth.

Hiring practices and gendered risks affect vulnerable groups when accessing employment opportunities and during employment, with insufficient legal protections. Single mothers are often restricted in the employment they can get because of their childrearing duties. In some cases, young women leave their children with grandmothers for long periods of time while they work, while others choose to take informal jobs early in the morning or late at night when someone is home to take care of their children.[64] Persons with disabilities stated that employers legally had to be inclusive. However, in their experience, employers' inclusivity of disabilities was only seen as having an accessibility ramp to enter the workplace. Young people from the Zona Franca reported that in this area, employees had to be able to hear alarms in case of an emergency, thus excluding young people with impaired hearing. Another barrier all young people in this CSYA identified was the importance of having social capital to secure a job. The majority of the participants in this assessment noted that applying with a CV alone would not result in employment. To be able to secure a job, one needs to know someone in the sector or the company to vouch for them and to get their CV noticed. Consequently, vulnerable groups' limited connections or networks result in limited opportunities, which perpetuates the privileges associated with being middle and upper class. Further, according to many informants in this CSYA, employers (specifically in the tourism sector) require blood tests to be completed as a condition for employment. Employers use these blood tests to deny jobs to pregnant women or young people living with HIV/AIDS. An informant stated that:

> *I've seen cases where the employer denies a job applicant because they tested positive for HIV. But they don't let the applicant know that's why they were denied. So, the applicant in some cases, continues to not know they have HIV and in other cases, continues to apply for jobs not knowing that they are denying them based on something they don't have control over.*[65]

Gender discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV) are common and perpetrated with impunity in formal workplaces in the Dominican Republic, especially affecting young women. Despite national legal protections, young women still face workforce discrimination in the hiring process or after being hired[66] and around promotions.[67] There are limited mechanisms in place to enable workers to report gender discrimination or GBV in the workplace, particularly without retribution, which creates hostile working environments for young women.[68] In general, the rights and protections within the Labor Law have limited application and role in supporting young people's employment, due to the high level of informal employment and lack of written contracts.

The requirement of a *cédula* for a work contract affects young people, especially undocumented and transgender youth. Haitians of Dominican descent, refugees/migrants, and youth who do not have a *cédula* because their parents did not file correct paperwork with the civil registry system stated that the lack of documents significantly affected their ability to get a job, enroll in entrepreneur programs, or register for certificate courses that would enhance their technical skills. Likewise, transgender youth reported that due to burdensome bureaucratic processes, changing your sex on the *cédula* was nearly impossible. As a result, transgender youth experience discrimination in their attempts to get employed, because their gender identity does not align with their *cédula*.[69]

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[64] Stakeholder interview, Samana. October 2022.
[65] Stakeholder interview, Higuey. October 2022.
[66] Stakeholder interview, Higuey, San Francisco de Macoris, Santo Domingo. September and October 2022.
[67] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo. October 2022.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

Lack of job opportunities, especially in rural areas, means young people have to migrate to be employed and are exposed to new risks. Data from the CSYA show that in rural areas, livelihoods opportunities are primarily in farming and agriculture, and young people are not interested in this work. According to a key stakeholder working in the agriculture sector, "To get young people interested in agriculture, you need to involve technology. Young people are interested in using drones to support agriculture production. But to get their interest in other aspects of agriculture is extremely difficult."[70] Research participants stated that young people tended to make up the majority of rural to urban migration. In all 11 regions where interviews were conducted, most young people said that to get a job, they would either be required to travel to Santo Domingo or Santiago to look for a position in the service or industry sectors or migrate to tourist regions, such as Bavaro or Puerto Plata. However, according to interviews with CSOs, young people move to urban centers in hopes of finding jobs but are often forced to work in the informal economy (young men) or become sex workers (young women) due to their limited qualifications.

Entrepreneurship and self-employment are survival mechanisms for young people in the Dominican Republic. The trend to be self-employed and start your own business significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdown measures resulted in the layoff of hundreds of thousands of employees from all sectors, especially tourism. Young people in this CSYA stated they preferred starting their own business over wage labor, because in the latter, they were likely to work under poor conditions and for very low remuneration. One informant stated that they had started their own business "because [I was] tired of being treated like a dog. [I] wanted to be [my] own boss and have [my] efforts determine how much [I] financially earn."[71] While the trend among young people has been to move toward entrepreneurship and self-employment, they have faced many challenges in these pursuits and often failed to reach their full potential. Many young people keep their businesses informal and avoid registering them due to a lack of incentive to formalize.[72] The lack of business management skills, mentorship, financial education, and access to credit has often rendered young people unable to maintain their businesses, forcing them to shut down within 12 months of operation.

Limited access to credit and professional networks significantly hinders young people's entrepreneurship potential, despite national strategies to promote entrepreneurship. Young people face specific barriers to starting economic enterprises, such as limited access to credit, because loan applications are often time consuming and require specific know-how and skills to fill out necessary paperwork.[73] As a result, young people often resort to local microfinance institutions or informal credit unions to gain the seed capital for their businesses. However, these institutions frequently provide capital at significantly high interest rates and short lending terms, creating unfavorable conditions to grow a business. Savings groups (see *Box 1* in *Annex 6* for an example) are a more accessible option for young people, according to research participants.

Entrepreneurship programs targeted at young people tend to perpetuate the cycle of poverty by keeping young people in low-paying jobs/sectors. According to different CSOs, both government and CSOs have established entrepreneurship programs to help young people acquire the skills they needed to set up their own businesses. While these programs are useful in training young people in entrepreneurship, they can reinforce the cycle of poverty by training young people to work in

[70] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo. September 2022.
[71] Young man. Age 28. Higuey. Living with the mother of his child. Has two children.
[72] Stakeholder interview, requested the city to be anonymized. October 2022.
[73] Stakeholder interview, Higuey and La Romana. October 2022.

businesses like salons and barbershops, instead of supporting them to gain skills needed for higher paying jobs. On the other hand, youth-led networks (see *Box 2* in *Annex 6* for an example) were described as a promising practice to support youth's economic engagement.

HEALTH: ACCESS TO QUALITY AND COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- In 2018, suicide was the third leading cause of death for adolescents (ages 14–18) in the Dominican Republic. COVID-19 has increased the prevalence of mental health issues among young people.[74]
- The adolescent birth rate is among the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean. From 2015 to 2020, there were more than 94 live births per 1,000 adolescent girls (ages 15–19) and nearly 2 births per 1,000 young girls (ages 10–14).[75,76] In 2022, the birth rate rose to 96 births per 1,000 women (ages 15–19).[77]
- Nearly three-quarters (70 percent) of adolescent pregnancies and nearly half (48 percent) of *all* pregnancies are unplanned.[78]
- More than two-thirds (68 percent) of students do not receive any form of education on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in school.[79]

While policies are in place, implementation is inconsistent and young people may not understand their rights. Some positive aspects of the law that key informants mentioned included universal access to contraceptives and medical statutes that demand health services be provided to minors, even when unaccompanied by an adult. Another challenge is whether young people know their rights, under the law, and ways to access the range of health services.[80] For many young people in the Dominican Republic, a main source of information is the internet, which often contains false or misleading information. Similarly, health *charlas* (talks) in schools tend to only provide basic information and "are not taken seriously" by many youth.[81]

Broader health system constraints also affect youth. Clinics and hospitals in many communities are not equipped with adequate resources or infrastructure to provide quality health services to all young people. Youth often told stories of negative experiences while visiting community clinics, from long wait periods to a lack of resources, equipment, and services. Some hospitals and clinics, including *Unidades de Atención Primaria* (UNAPs), lack certain contraceptives youth prefer—for example, many young women prefer birth control methods that are discreet, such as implants and injections because they are subtle, easy to use, and last several years/months, but these methods cannot be found in all clinics. A doctor specializing in youth with disabilities also described how health facilities were rarely accessible for young people with physical disabilities. Many young people with disabilities do not have access to necessary assistive technologies, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, or other reasonable accommodations that would allow them to live independently. Youth living in rural or remote communities and *bateyes* may need to travel long distances to urban centers to access the services, creating additional challenges, such as the cost of transportation or travel safety issues, especially for

[74] UNICEF 2021; see also *Ministerio de Salud Pública* 2019.
[75] United Nations 2022.
[76] Pan American Health Organization. 2020. Link
[77] Ibid.
[78] United Nations 2022.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Stakeholder, community health clinic, Santiago.
[81] Stakeholder, psychologist, Santiago.

women and girls. Financial barriers also exist. As one key informant noted, "If you don't have private [health] insurance, you're very much restricted, because the public system has little coverage."

Youth access public health services through various means, including in their schools and wider communities. Certain subgroups of youth, such as those who are poor or from rural and remote communities including *bateyes*, youth of Haitian descent, undocumented youth, youth with disabilities, or youth from the LGBTQI+ community, are particularly at risk of not accessing quality health services. Many research participants described how youth generally sought health services from local clinics or hospitals, as well as school-based support with nurses or school psychologists. In addition to the private sector, public health services are offered through the UNAPs, small clinics that, according to informants, should technically exist in all communities with at least 500 inhabitants. However, the assessment team could not locate UNAPs in all communities visited.

A doctor specialized in supporting patients with disabilities stated, "We don't have public policies that are designed for persons with disabilities [in the Dominican Republic]." Further, as noted previously, personnel often lack training in diversity, equity, and inclusion, and may have their own biases and stigma that cause discrimination. One research participant with disabilities from La Romana described how she was denied SRH services because the doctor said people with disabilities could not have sex. Various stakeholders mentioned the perception that people with disabilities are "sick" or "cursed" as a barrier to their access to quality health services. In border towns and *bateyes*, nearly all youth and other stakeholders retold stories of women and girls who were denied services in hospitals or who did not seek help in fear of deportation, resulting in young mothers giving birth in the streets. All key informants working with LGBTQI+ youth described how clinicians often discriminated against and refused to provide services to these young people, especially men who have sex with men.[82] Because of this, many men who live with HIV do not seek help, which puts their lives further at risk. Numerous key informants also described the discrimination young men who have sex with men faced as an urgent matter that contributed to increased rates of suicide for this subgroup of young people. Additional vulnerable groups of youth that only a few interviewees mentioned include young people who are less educated, as well as young mothers who, due to child rearing responsibilities, may not have the time or opportunity to seek the health services they need.

A key health policy challenge is that abortion is illegal and punishable by law. This is written in the Constitution, which creates particular risks for women and girls who become pregnant and who, "from the perspective of the State, are obliged to have the child."[83] The Dominican Republic has some of the highest rates for adolescent and girl pregnancy in the Latin America and the Caribbean region.[84] Some research participants described attempts of illegal or clandestine abortions, putting both the mother and child at risk. Adoption is rarely a viable option due to administrative burdens like paperwork, so after giving birth, most young mothers either decide to keep the child or leave it with an older or more capable family member. This, ultimately, contributes to the high number of "dysfunctional families," a term all participants used to describe families with non-traditional structures—for example, where a parent is absent or a grandparent or another relative is raising a child.

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[82] Importantly, the category of "men who have sex with men" may include young people who identify as LGBTQI+, as well as youth who do not identify as such (e.g., sex workers, or men who experiment with other men).
[83] Stakeholder, health clinic, Santiago.
[84] United Nations. 2022. Link.

Seeking SRH services, especially for young unmarried youth, is taboo due to cultural and religious norms. There is discrimination and distrust of many SRH providers. Almost all health stakeholders described how SRH providers may reject youth, demanding that their parents accompany them to procure contraceptives or other family planning resources and services. A key informant from a community health clinic described how health personnel were "[…] the first to judge adolescents by their type of clothing, their age, and because they go alone. It is a cultural [and] religious issue, which the State is not applying, or training staff to leave their religion, their myths, their beliefs at the door when they attend to an adolescent." Likewise, a USAID implementing partner said, "[Health] personnel must be trained. In this country, human resources are really lacking. They need to learn how to separate their role and their professional duty from their personal perceptions."

Nearly all research participants described a lack of trust in health care professionals, particularly for youth. In smaller communities, health practitioners, or even the personnel at the local pharmacy, may know the parents and family members of young people seeking services or contraceptives, which often leads to breaches in patient/client confidentiality. During a Youth Day in Samana, many young people described how they visited clinics outside their community, because the farther one traveled the less likely it was that someone working there knew them.

Mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) are still stigmatized, which deters young people from seeking help. In public schools, students who misbehave are often sent to the school psychologist, instilling in youth from a very young age the idea that seeking help is bad. Being sent to the school psychologist is negatively perceived in the community and is often targeted at students who are deemed "problematic." This creates a "snowball effect," where young people perceive seeking mental health support in a negative light.[85] In addition, social norms have created an unfavorable language when discussing mental health. For example, calling people "crazy" (*loco*). Due to gender norms around masculinity, men may be particularly stigmatized when seeking mental health, because expressing one's feelings is perceived as a sign of weakness.

Personnel working at health clinics and hospitals often lack the skills and knowledge needed to provide quality and youth-friendly health services. Nearly all stakeholders remarked that health personnel were not trained specifically on working with adolescents and youth. Health workers also often lack "cultural competence" and "disability competence" to effectively work with young people in all their diversity.[86] In addition, there is a limited number of personnel with Creole language skills to attend to Haitian immigrants, and almost no personnel who can act as sign language interpreters for youth who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. In the area of SRH, not all UNAPs have qualified personnel who are available at all hours of the day and sometimes, they only offer services at times that interfere with young people's school schedules. In the area of mental health, some key informants also described a lack of specialists in certain types of services, such as affirmative therapy, art therapy, or music therapy, which could be effective approaches when working with young people, because they teach youth "to understand that therapy is not just paper and pencil."

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected young people's access to quality health care in various ways, both negatively and positively. Due to the public health crisis and increased demand on health service providers, SRH services have been curtailed in local clinics across many communities. As one health care worker noted, "Even though in the news, the State would say that the *Unidades*

[85] Stakeholder, psychologist, Santiago.
[86] Stakeholder, medical doctor, Santo Domingo.

[UNAP] were working, it's a lie—the *Unidades* were closed, and girls could not access contraceptives," which led to an increase in unintended pregnancies. In addition, the pandemic created more distance between health care providers and their young patients, both literally and figuratively. Some key informants described how, either due to travel restrictions, social distancing, or simply the fear of catching COVID-19, fewer young people sought out health care services. Likewise, as one doctor said, "Health personnel have distanced themselves from their patients during consultations and during physical [in-person] treatment."

On the other hand, the positive impact of the pandemic was the emergence of new telehealth and virtual or remote modalities of service provision. Indeed, due to the increased prevalence of mental health needs among young people, there has been an increase in "international attention toward mental health," ultimately combating stigma, dismantling taboos, and offering youth a platform of peers they can "identify" with[87] (see *Box 3* in *Annex 6* for an example).

GOVERNANCE: PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- According to youth, the main civic issues in the country are crime (75 percent), unemployment (47 percent), high costs of living (28 percent), corruption (22 percent), and poverty (19 percent).[88]
- Youth believe the main causes of crime are unemployment (77 percent), poverty (31 percent), lack of opportunities to study (15 percent), and drug consumption (11 percent).[89]
- In 2016, Grade 8 students in the Dominican Republic scored the lowest among 24 participating countries on civic and citizenship education exams (381 points compared to an average of 517 points), and the national average did not significantly change since the last test in 2009.[90]

Respondents described youth's engagement and participation in civic and political life as minimal, and several related this to the Government of the Dominican Republic's perceived lack of concern. Almost all people interviewed described the limited opportunities for youth to be active members of their communities, engage in civic activities, or participate in decision-making processes. For example, the director of a community NGO, when asked to describe youth's participation in civic life, replied, "For some reason, youth don't have political education, because they [the government] want youth to be ignorant … because that's how the hierarchy continues." They went on to explain how young people in their community rarely participated in community service, simply because they were not "conscious" or aware of it and its importance. "They also rarely vote," they said, "and if they do, they vote for the person that gives them 200 or 300 pesos" or for the color of the political party, but not because they really understand the "values, plans, and strategies of politicians." Youth from the same communities in the area echoed this sentiment, citing the corruption of politicians and councilors who "buy young people's vote." Likewise, when asked what works *well* to protect the rights of young people, a young person from a women's rights NGO in Santo Domingo said:

[87] Stakeholder, psychologist, Santiago.
[88] Ministerio de Juventud, Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes, drawing on 2017 data from ENHOGAR, Módulo de Seguridad Ciudadana, Oficina Nacional de Estadística. Link.
[89] Ibid.
[90] IDEICE, 2021, drawing on the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) results from 2016.

I don't think anything is working well. We [youth] are very behind in political domains. Here, there is an issue of "adult centrism," which never ends, [and] where youth are not given participation, nor have rights … for the State, it's convenient that people remain isolated, without knowing anything, that these [political] themes are not addressed, so that people don't know how to defend themselves.

During Youth Day, a young man also spoke of his participation in a *Junta de Vecinos* (Neighborhood Council). He described his role and participation as limited because, as a young person, he had to respect his elders, which meant he could not voice his concerns if it went against what the elders believed.[91] His peers also reiterated their doubts about the effectiveness of such structures. The age-based hierarchy within Dominican society limits meaningful youth engagement in civic and social life.

The opportunities for youth to participate that do exist were described as tokenistic and inaccessible to those most marginalized or vulnerable. A youth activist from La Romana, for example, described youth participation as a "publicity stunt" to help certain political agendas and a respondent from an educational NGO in Santo Domingo said political parties used youth to rise to power. Young people may be included in a panel discussion or roundtable event, but their participation is tokenized, their voices are rarely heard, and their needs are not addressed. Similarly, a key informant from an international NGO mentioned that many actors included youth in events just to have them in photos, without really engaging or listening to them in decision-making processes. Likewise, a respondent from an educational NGO noted that the leadership positions that did exist for youth were often reserved for middle- or upper-class youth.

Many subgroups of vulnerable youth, including LGBTQI+ communities, migrant youth, those of Haitian descent, or undocumented youth, are more at risk of rights violations. Insufficient security officers' training and accountability around bias and discrimination contribute to potential rights violations (see *Box 4* in *Annex 6* for an example). In the context of the LGBTQI+ community, a respondent and activist in Santiago said, "One thing is that you are accepted, and another thing is that you have the same rights as everyone else." The informant, who identified as LGTBQI+, cited the discrimination and mistreatment of LGBTQI+ youth as a main cause of internal migration to places "where I feel that I am freer [sic], where I feel that I am taken into consideration, where I feel that my rights are valued."

For migrant youth and youth of Haitian descent, the 2013 passing of Judgment 168-13 was consistently described as a breach of human rights despite its legality.[92] Respondents reported a recent spark in mass deportations of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, particularly due to the current sociopolitical climate in Haiti. During a Youth Day event in Montecristi, a community near the border with Haiti, a Dominican girl of Haitian descent said she was afraid to attend youth activities at the local city council due to risks of deportation.[93] All youth and stakeholders working with Haitian youth retold stories of police officers, migration authorities, or military officials in border towns who verbally or physically

[91] Young man. Age 23. Oldest sibling. Lives with both parents in a *barrio*.

[92] Constitutional Court judgment 168-13 states that children born in the Dominican Republic to foreign parents—and who did not have regular migration status—had never been entitled to Dominican nationality. It constitutes "a retroactive and arbitrary deprivation of nationality" that "disproportionately affects Dominicans of Haitian descent and is, therefore, discriminatory." (Amnesty International 2015, 6)

[93] Youth, female, 18 years, Dominican of Haitian descent.

abused these youth, at times not even giving them the chance to show their documentation or explain themselves.

A key informant from a religious community organization in Higuey explicitly said, "If you're of a foreign nationality, your rights are abused, and you are discriminated against." Young people are subject to risks based on their perceived or actual nationality and race, including unfair deportations, but also theft, robbery, violence, and expulsion from one's own home. Poor training of military officials and, to a lesser extent migration authorities, and their regular rotations contribute to these discriminatory attitudes.[94]

Many young people have a general distrust of government, including police and politicians. Almost all youth spoke negatively of politicians and officers of the law, and diverse stakeholders echoed this. A respondent from a human rights organization in Santiago, for example, described the relationship between police and the broader community as "toxic," and the public perception of them as one based on "fear." Research participants retold stories of corruption and injustice, with some stories including deaths of young people from different communities. As one stakeholder explained, youth "are physically assaulted when they try to reclaim their rights." During a Youth Day in Santiago, FGDs centered on violence and crime in various communities. In an activity, one focus group of young people ranked "safety, protection, and the law" as one of the last three and not of great relevance for improving their community. When asked to explain why they did not rank the role of police and law officials as more important, a young girl noted, "because it doesn't matter… they [police] aren't going to do anything."[95]

At the macro level, there is an urgent need to strengthen legal or institutional frameworks and the implementation of public policies focused on young people's human rights. Almost all respondents described the "nonexistence" of policies that protect vulnerable youth, particularly subgroups of youth, such as Haitian migrants, undocumented youth of Haitian descent, LGBTQI+ communities, or youth with disabilities. Others identified the need to strengthen the implementation of policies that do exist, so that they would not remain "simply on paper and paint."[96]

At the grassroots level, civil society plays a critical role in upholding the rights of young people, although the reach of CSOs is often limited (see *Box 5* in *Annex 6* for an example). In general, organizations frequently emphasized the importance of a rights-based approach, a focus on social mobilization and youth participation, and an intersectional lens to support youth in all their diversity. New and innovative forms of youth participation have been explored, particularly through the internet, social media, and online civic engagement. At the same time, however, many CSOs and nonprofits also often remarked on how limited financial resources constrained their impact and that there was a need for more funding to increase the social and economic inclusion of youth beneficiaries. Therefore, donors also play a role in

> *[…] Helping foster values [in youth], so they know their rights and duties as human beings, to give opportunities for personal development … [and] to support organizations that can continue bringing these sorts of activities to youth, to make them feel valued in life.*[97]

A key informant from a civic education NGO described an "opportunity" for youth as "providing tools to community leaders and grassroot organizations on how to demand their rights, how to organize

[94] Key informant, international development agency, Dajabón.
[95] Youth, female, 17 years, Santiago.
[96] Stakeholder, international NGO, Santo Domingo.
[97] Stakeholder, religious leader, Samana.

themselves, educate themselves about certain topics, and learn about the issues that affect them." Another challenge at the level of civil society is that most CSOs are located in major cities, such as Santiago and Santo Domingo, which means that many vulnerable groups of youth in other communities do not have access to active individuals or organizations that can advocate on their behalf. Indeed, many stakeholders mentioned how efforts, both at the level of CSOs and government, were "centralized" rather than evenly distributed across geographic provinces or cities within the Dominican Republic.

Communication and collaboration across youth and diverse stakeholders are essential to building positive relationships, transparency, and accountability, especially in light of existing civic disengagement and public distrust. Many informants cited the importance of creating structured spaces for collaborative discussion and "reflection" focused on human rights issues.[98] This could happen through dialogues, *charlas,* or roundtables. As one stakeholder stated, "There are a lot of youth that don't stop fighting for their rights, but still, the system does not help them."[99]

CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section summarizes cross-cutting themes that emerged around social norms, violence and crime, place and environment, and identity and intersectionality.

SOCIAL NORMS

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- More than two-thirds (65 percent) of male youth in the Dominican Republic believe that it is better for men to be breadwinners and women to take care of children.[100] More than one in three girls (36 percent) are married by the age of 18.[101]
- Approximately 80 percent of all adolescents (ages 15–19) and 60 percent of young adults (ages 20–25) believe it is incorrect for a pregnant girl or woman to interrupt an unplanned pregnancy.[102]
- More than two-thirds of male youth (66 percent) and over half of female youth (51 percent) believe verbal violence is acceptable.
- More than 8 in 10 (84 percent) of adolescent males (ages 15–19) in the Dominican Republic admit that their friends think they can catcall women.[103]

Social norms expect women to have children at a young age. Girls in the Dominican Republic grow up with the perception that pregnancy and motherhood are a means to personal fulfillment. As a result of these social norms, and among other factors, the Dominican Republic has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 96 births per 1,000 for adolescents aged 15–19 and 2 births per 1,000 for girls aged 10–14.[104] One informant from San Francisco de Macoris stated, "When I was 17, I went to the doctor to see why I was not pregnant. All of my friends were pregnant, so I thought something was wrong with me, because in my community, it was not normal to

[98] Stakeholder, international NGO, Dajabón.
[99] Stakeholder, social justice NGO, Santo Domingo
[100] Oxfam International. 2018. *Rompiendo Moldes: Transformar imaginarios y normas sociales para eliminar la violencia contra las mujeres,* p.102. Oxfam International. Link.
[101] UNFPA. 2020. Link.
[102] Oxfam International. 2018. *Rompiendo Moldes: Transformar imaginarios y normas sociales para eliminar la violencia contra las mujeres,* p.102. Oxfam International. Link.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Pan American Health Organization. (2020). Link

not be pregnant at my age."[105] An informant from Samana said that, because she was childless, the responsibilities put on her to take care of her younger siblings made it easy for her to decide to have her own children. She stated, "I was already responsible for taking care of brothers and sisters, so I thought I might as well have my own so that I am just taking care of my child."[106] Various key informants echoed this sentiment, reporting how girls and young women are often expected to take care of their younger siblings and other domestic responsibilities in their early childhood.

Marriage is a form of emancipation for vulnerable girls in rural areas. Data from informants indicate that vulnerable girls (i.e., girls from rural or remote areas, girls who have dropped out of school, undocumented girls, girls living in poverty, and girls from single-parent households) perceive marriage as a method of independence.[107] For example, young women from a focus group in Samana stated: "Girls at our school have gotten married to show their families they are independent. They are scared to get a tattoo, but not scared to get married and move out. It's the only way they feel empowered, by leaving their house and moving into their husband's house."[108] While the Dominican Republic has implemented Law 02-21 that prohibits child marriage, data from the CSYA indicate that child marriage continues. Informants said there was a trend for young girls to informally marry adult men and live a married life without being formally registered, because adult men can support their emancipation from their families. While young women initially feel empowered by leaving their family homes, the economic dependence on their husbands and the power imbalance to make household decisions reinforce inequalities and lead to further risks of GBV for many young women and girls.

Harmful social norms are embedded in hiring practices that prevent young people from accessing equitable employment opportunities. Many of the respondents in the CSYA stated that employers in the Dominican Republic often discriminated against job applicants based on their physical appearance or searched their resumes for opportunities to discriminate (based on age, potential for pregnancy, or place of residence). The social norm of having your picture on your CV or the employer requesting your identity card during the application process can perpetuate discrimination based on the applicant's physical appearance.[109] One of the most reported barriers for young people in this CSYA was expectations of a specific standard of beauty (e.g., straight hair, light skin, thin body). Young women, speaking about their own personal experiences, stated that a condition to being employed is that they regularly have their hair undergo chemical treatments to make it straight.[110] Another informant stated that Afro-descendent young women "have a lot less opportunities, because their hair has a huge impact on the opportunities they can get. It's a very colorist culture. Your hair has to be seen as 'clean' and straight for you to even be considered a professional."[111] These hair treatments are processes that are not only expensive and dangerous, but also reinforce racism at all levels. The second highest reported barrier to equitable employment opportunity is the place of residence on your CV and identity card. Respondents stated that certain communities or cities (e.g., Santo Domingo Norte, Santo Domingo Oeste) were stigmatized for being inundated with poverty, migrants, or sex workers. Young people from these cities are often discriminated against and prevented from accessing employment.

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[105] Young women. Age 19. Lives with grandmother and cousins. Secondary school degree.
[106] Young women. Age 15. Lives with her child in her mother's home. Single mother.
[107] Stakeholder interview, Samana and San Francisco de Macoris. September and October 2022.
[108] Young women. Age 14–17. Single-mother families. Primary education.
[109] Ibid.
[110] FGD, Santo Domingo and San Francisco de Macoris. Mixed group. September and October 2022.
[111] Young woman. Age 21. Afro-descendant. Works in the informal economy.

Social norms expecting young men to be economic providers for their families have led to them dropping out of school at a young age. As noted under the Education and Training section *above*, to show their masculinity or fulfill familial expectations, young boys often drop out of school as early as Grade 7 or 8 to support their family economically. One informant stated, "Parents often do not push back against their children dropping out, because they need the financial support."[112] This is especially the case for boys living in female-headed households, because they are seen as the "hombrecito" (little man) of the house from a very young age.[113] Parents stated that daughters were more likely to ask parents for financial support to get a post-secondary degree, whereas sons were more likely to feel shame to go to their parents to ask for money; therefore, they often chose to get a job so that they could independently bring in financial resources. These gendered norms and the expectations to show "masculine" characteristics have resulted in young men having to work in informal jobs that do not require a secondary school degree, potentially exploit their labor, or engage in illegal activity to make money.

VIOLENCE AND CRIME

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- The most common types of community-based GBV that female youth reported include sexual harassment (84 percent), cyber violence (30 percent), and verbal abuse (24 percent).[114]
- The most common types of intrafamilial violence that female youth reported include physical violence, such as being hit by someone's hand or an object (62 percent); verbal abuse (53 percent); neglect (30 percent); threats of physical violence or being kicked out of the house (27 percent); being punched, kicked, or beaten (21 percent); or being pushed, shook, tied up, or having hair pulled (20 percent).[115]
- In 92 percent of all cases of GBV, female youth do not seek help or report incidents of violence to an authority or institution.[116]
- One (1) in 10 (10 percent) of minors are exploited in the commercial sex industry.[117]

Primary data indicate that GBV is common and perpetrated with impunity. The government's lack of enforcement of GBV laws and policies contributes to continued acceptance and prevalence of GBV and ongoing violence against young women.[118] Several stakeholders said a lack of enforcement enabled a culture of impunity, where perpetrators felt empowered to continue committing acts of GBV, knowing they would likely not be prosecuted or face legal or social consequences.[119] Examples of implementation gaps of Article 22 in the Constitution include a lack of special court houses designated for GBV cases and minors; lack of specific training for judges and lawyers to try GBV cases; and the requirement of medical certificates to prosecute GBV cases. The culture of impunity further discourages survivors from reporting GBV cases out of fear of reprisal or social stigma.[120] According to informant interviews with CSOs, a lack of enforcement of GBV laws, a history of local law enforcement accepting bribes from perpetrators in exchange for immunity, a lack of access to medical facilities, and

[112] Parent (Male). Samana.
[113] Key informant, educational NGO. Santiago.
[114] Encuesta Experimental sobre la Situación de las Mujeres. (2018). Link
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] International Justice Mission. (2019). Link.
[118] Stakeholder interviews, Santo Domingo, La Romana, and San Francisco de Macoris. September and October 2022.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.

slow judicial processes contribute to low reporting of incidents of GBV.[121] Regional stakeholders consulted for this assessment said that at the community level, law enforcement officers and the judiciary trivialized cases of GBV or sometimes harassed survivors who reported it, contributing to survivors' reluctance to come forward and seek justice.[122]

Stakeholders report low confidence in the justice system to prosecute cases that have normalized violence at the community level. With limited access to and control over resources, young people often cannot afford to prosecute their perpetrators in court or fear retaliation that threatens their livelihood or reputation.[123] Young people are less represented in decision-making positions at all levels, with little voice and influence in the design and implementation of mechanisms for effective justice and accountability.[124] Young people reported they had gone to governmental and police institutions to report cases of violence, but according to informants, these "claims never lead anywhere."[125] An informant from San Francisco de Macoris stated, "If you do not have money, don't bother going to the police. The police only work on how much money you can propose to them."[126] These stories reinforce distrust in the efficacy and transparency of government and police.

Limited implementation of safeguarding and protection mechanisms has led to normalization of violence at all levels of the society. An informant stated that because the police and governmental institutions did not take claims seriously, "Young people choose to take matters in their own hands and resolve their conflicts via violence."[127] In the absence of reliable enforcement agencies, young people turn to gangs as a form of social protection. Informants from La Romana said: "You have to either be in a gang or be friends with someone in a gang to be protected in your community. Since the police are not around, it's the gang that will protect you."[128] Likewise, out-of-school young men stated that young people tended to join gangs to insulate themselves from the insecurity and violence present in their communities. Community mapping activities conducted with young people across the assessment regions demonstrated that almost all respondents felt the most secure and safe place in their community was their home, specifically their bedroom. High rates of crime and violence in the community resulted in limited safe spaces for young people to come together.

Lack of access to economic opportunities has led young people, especially young men, to engage in delinquent activities for their livelihood. Informants stated that the pressure to financially contribute to the household, without the means to do so legitimately, has led young people to look at fast methods to make money that can lead to engaging in illegal activities. Many resort to crime, violence, sex trafficking, or drugs as a way out of difficult financial situations. A lack of formal income-generating activities, coupled with the tendency to drop out of school to look for economic opportunities, has resulted in more young people out of school and jobless. The economic shocks related to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent impacts on the tourism and service industries have

[121] Ibid.
[122] Stakeholder interviews, Santo Domingo, La Romana, and San Francisco de Macoris. September and October 2022.
[123] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo and Higuey. September and October 2022.
[124] Stakeholder interviews, Santo Domingo, La Romana, and San Francisco de Macoris. September and October 2022.
[125] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo. September 2022.
[126] Young woman. Age 19. Lives in *barrio* with both parents. Currently in school.
[127] Young man. Age 20. Santo Domingo Oeste. Primary education degree. Works in the informal economy.
[128] Young man. Age 18. San Francisco de Macorís. Secondary education degree. Works in the informal economy.

exacerbated this. According to informants, this idleness in general is seen as a critical factor in the involvement of young people in crime, violence, gangs, and other forms of risky behavior.

Lack of tools to support conflict resolution forces young people to use violence as a method to resolve conflict. Young people in Dajabon and Montecristi often spoke how community violence stemmed from disputes or conflicts between neighbors (e.g., over loud music).[129] The lack of communication skills among adults, young people, and children has led to violence at the community, family, and relationship levels. According to informants in this CSYA, "Violence happens between everyone, adults disrespecting young people, family members [living] in a small space, houses being very close [to one another], all because they cannot communicate."[130] While youth and other key stakeholders often cited tense and frequently conflicting community relationships, only in one instance did a young person in a Montecristi Youth Day speak positively of, "the good coexistence that exists amongst 20 percent of the communities."[131]

PLACE AND PHYSICAL OR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- Nearly one in three youth work in service industries (29 percent), including hotels, bars, and restaurants (8 percent), and another 5 percent work in agriculture or farming.[132]
- The Dominican Republic is ranked as the 50th most vulnerable country to climate change, based on data from 2000–2019.[133]
- According to youth, the main civic issues in their communities are crime (46 percent), unemployment (31 percent), lack of water (26 percent) or electricity (26 percent), and the poor conditions of streets and sidewalks (15 percent).[134]

[129] Stakeholder interview. September 2022.
[130] Key informant interview, social justice NGO, Santiago. September 2022.
[131] Stakeholder interview, Montecristi. September 2022.
[132] Ministerio de Juventud, Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes, drawing on data from the first quarter of 2022. Link.
[133] Eckstein, D., V. Künzel, and L. Schäfer. 2021. *Global Climate Risk Index 2021: Who Suffers Most from Extreme Weather Events? Weather-Related Loss Events in 2019 and 2000-2019* [Briefing Paper]. Germanwatch e.V. Link.
[134] Ministerio de Juventud, Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes, drawing on 2017 data from ENHOGAR, Módulo de Seguridad Ciudadana, Oficina Nacional de Estadística. Link.

Image: Focus group community mapping

Natural environment is important for employment and access to resources, which makes climate change a particular risk to young people's livelihoods. Because many young people work in the informal sector, including jobs in agriculture and fishing, they rely heavily on the natural environment as a source of income. The beach and ocean, especially in coastal cities, were also described as a vital resource and source of employment for young people, who work as water sport instructors or vendors to local tourists. In general, most young people valued and described positively the natural environment and green areas; this was particularly apparent during youth community mapping activities (for an example, see Photo 2). Even in urban areas, many young people mentioned they worked selling seeds and nuts at popular transit stops; while some youth living in *bateyes* noted their involvement in cutting sugar cane.

Despite youth's heavy reliance on nature, some informants noted how climate change, especially extreme weather conditions, had negatively affected the natural environment and subsequently, job opportunities for many young people. One key informant involved in a community council in the Samana peninsula, for example, said, "Now with this storm [Hurricane Fiona], many people don't even have anything to eat … Here, the major source of informal employment is *el cayo,* and the storm destroyed everything." In her statement, *el cayo,* refers to one of the many keys, or small islands, off the coast of the Dominican Republic, which attracts many tourists and provides informal work for young people in fishery, as well as formal work for youth who take on jobs in tourism and the service industry. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the tourism industry has negatively affected youth's opportunities to engage in formal or informal income-generating activities.

Many youth and other stakeholders mentioned poor and inaccessible infrastructure in communities. Because young people are more likely to migrate for employment, they are more likely to be subject to poor urban conditions. During a Youth Day event, when participating in the "My Community, My Country" activity, young people described diverse infrastructural issues as "negative." For example, the complete absence of paved streets in some communities, streets that were not well lit and were unsafe to roam at night, streets that were damaged or in poor conditions, or streets where high levels of traffic created precarious or uncomfortable situations for young people when traveling to school or work. In an urban community outside of Santiago, inadequate filtration

systems create flooding in many young people's houses, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. A stakeholder from a local human rights organization in a community outside of Santiago described the sewage systems (*alcantarillados)* as "nonexistent" and noted how flooding may remain for up to a month due to these "conditions created by the State."

Other participants cited the high costs of transportation, especially in rural places, where there are only motors and moto-taxis, but also even in the capital and large urban centers, where public transportation is more developed (i.e., there is a metro system). A government official and various civil society actors working with young people with disabilities reported that public transportation including the metro, and public spaces in general, were rarely accessible for these young people. As noted elsewhere, distance to education institutions and health services are barriers to youth's access to services, especially for young women or vulnerable youth in rural areas.

Both youth and key informants described the limited number of places for "healthy recreation" (recreación sana) in many communities. As the director of one educational NGO noted, "Our neighborhood is full of lottery banks, bars, and billiards." Many echoed this sentiment, noting that the only places available for youth to meet and socialize implied drinking alcohol or smoking hookah. The recreational areas that do exist were often described as being in bad or unsafe condition. During a Youth Day, when research participants were asked to write something positive, negative, and/or neutral about their community, this was repeatedly listed as something negative. As one young person said, "Here, we don't even have a park where we can play, nor where we can have fun." In a few cases, when they did exist, youth described these places and the people associated with them positively: the importance of a soccer or baseball field to play sports, have fun, and develop skills; a coach who was described as an important community leader and activist for youth; or a local soccer player who succeeded at playing in international competitions, bringing pride to his peers and community.

IDENTITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY[135]

Snapshot of Relevant Statistics

- One-fifth of all youth (20 percent) live in moderate poverty (17 percent of males, 24 percent of females) and nearly 3 percent live in extreme poverty (2 percent males, 3 percent females).[136]
- The census has not included a question for people to identify as Afro-descendants since the 1960s, leading to the invisibility of these youth.[137]
- During a 9-day period alone in November 2022, the Dominican Republic Government deported more than 20,000 Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent.[138]
- Of youth and adults (ages 15+) with disability, 36 percent do not know how to read or write (compared to just 10 percent of people of the same age without disabilities); of adults (ages 18+)

[135] This section does not address gender or specific barriers girls and boys face, because gender norms are explored in more depth in the section on Social Norms *on page 32*.

[136] Ministerio de Juventud Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes, drawing on data from the *Encuesta Nacional Continua de Fuerza de Trabajo*. Link.

[137] Freire, G., C. Diaz-Bonilla, S. Schwartz Orellana, J. Soler Lopez, and F. Carbonari. 2018. *Afro-descendants in Latin America: Toward a Framework of Inclusion*. World Bank. Link.

[138] Kestler-D'Amours, J. 2022. "Dominican deportations to Haiti fuel growing fears, frustration." *Al Jazeera*. November 24. Link.

with disabilities, only 15 percent are employed (compared to 63 percent of those without disabilities).[139]

- Gender-diverse people are at high risk of violence, abuse, and murder in the Dominican Republic.[140]

Poverty was described as the most common and far-reaching vulnerability youth face. Financial or economic barriers hinder many young people's access to quality and comprehensive services, and poor youth may face more discrimination and/or violence at the household and community levels. Poverty especially affects female-headed households, including youth who are single mothers or the children of single mothers. It also intersects with geographical location, including rural and remote communities, such as *bateyes*, especially in the border areas, and/or very urban communities outside the centers of major cities such as Santiago and Santo Domingo.

Many key informants, including USAID implementing partners, expressed doubts over whether they were actually able to reach the poorest youth, especially adolescents or older youth who more commonly had to support their families with paid work or household chores. The "immediate needs" of young people to eat or put food on the table for their families were frequently mentioned as a key challenge for both youth and implementing partners. Poverty, in other words, became a programmatic challenge, limiting young people's access to school or non-formal education and youth development programs. A few stakeholders even retold stories of youth who were hungry, malnourished, and/or fainted during program activities.

Race, ethnicity, and language play an important role in equal opportunities for youth. Nearly all participants described this pattern. As one stakeholder from a woman's political activism group in Santo Domingo stated, "In this country, people aren't known as Afro-descendants. They're known as Haitians. Because of this, the issue of discrimination doesn't end, nor does the fear towards Haitians." The informant described a common circumstance in the Dominican Republic, where people of Haitian descent are racialized and discriminated against for their blackness. Anthropological and ethnographic research points to the historical roots of the social and political exclusion of Haitians, and how Dominican national identity is often described in opposition to Haitian identity: Haitians are black, French- and Creole-speaking, and practice voodoo, while the Dominican Republic is a mulatto (mixed-race), Spanish-speaking, and Christian country.[141] Because of this, Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans are often discriminated against, while Eurocentric notions of whiteness shape standards of beauty. Similarly, other characteristics that are perceived as Haitian, such as the Creole language or voodoo, result in an *othering* process, where individuals are marginalized and/or provided with fewer social, civic, or economic opportunities.

Media perpetuate discrimination and xenophobia toward youth of Haitian descent, often portraying Haitian migrants as dangerous and contributing to social, economic, and political exclusion and discrimination. The risks undocumented youth face become even more exacerbated. Many informants and youth explained how the media, news, and the internet often circulated false stories or misinformation, which negatively affected how youth of Haitian descent were perceived and treated.[142] Almost all research participants reported that people of Haitian descent

[139] ONU. 2021. *Estudio sobre la situación de las personas con discapacidad en base a los datos del SIUBEN 2018: Resumen ejecutivo*. Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU). Link.
[140] TGEU. 2018. Transrespect Versus Transphobia Worldwide: TvT TMM Update: Trans Day of Remembrance 2018. TGEU.
[141] See, for example: Wucker, M. 1999. "Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola." Hill and Wang.
[142] Stakeholder, government institution, Santo Domingo.

were denied certain rights and liberties, such as the simple act of renting a house, because they were seen as a "threat."[143] Young people of Haitian descent experience higher prevalence of violence in schools, their neighborhoods, and public transportation, which has restricted their mobility to *bateyes*.

Some key informants reported that the lack of documentation was the "starting point" for a "chain" of exclusionary practices toward youth. Without documentation, a young person cannot obtain a *cédula,* or Dominican national identity card, and without a *cédula*, one cannot open a bank account, buy health insurance, receive a housing contract, legally work, or access public services such as health, education, or TVET. Because of this, these young people are more at risk of violations of human rights, physical and verbal abuse, and in some cases, even deportation.

Many stakeholders used the words "null," "none," and "zero" to describe the opportunities of youth with disabilities. Youth with disabilities face unique barriers based on their individual circumstances and the type of disability they have. For example, youth who have mobility difficulties experience infrastructural and physical barriers in accessing public spaces, services, and transportation. For youth with hearing or speaking difficulties, communication barriers were identified as a key issue that hindered their access to services and relevant information, news, current affairs, and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, safety and health protocols. Youth who have difficulty seeing face both challenges—the inability to access certain places due to lack of means to travel independently, and/or no to access textual information, particularly in the absence of assistive technologies. Respondents working with persons with disabilities reported limited number of quality and relevant assistive technologies and devices (such as wheelchairs, walking sticks, screen readers, or other software) in the Dominican Republic.

The main barrier for youth with cognitive or mental disabilities, including psychosocial disorders, was identified as "attitudinal barriers." This refers to the stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion by their peers and wider society. Youth with cognitive disabilities are often seen as "idiots"[144] or "crazy"[145] and, unlike youth with other types of disabilities, they do not have an organization where they have autonomous representation; instead, they are often represented by their parents or caregivers. The previous sections have explored the unique challenges youth with disabilities face in accessing employment, education, health, and civic participation. While the Dominican government has made progress over the years, it is just "a drop of water in the ocean" and there is still an urgent need to ensure that policies, resources, and capacities are strengthened so that youth with disabilities are fully included, equipped, and empowered to become active members of their society.

LGBTQI+ minorities are especially vulnerable due to the patriarchal nature of the Dominican society, religious beliefs, and gender norms that dictate normative expectations around what is appropriate for young people. In addition to challenges noted elsewhere, physical and emotional abuse have led to high rates of mental health issues and suicide among LGBTQI+ youth. Those living with HIV do not seek support services due to discrimination and biases on the part of health professionals. While there is evidence of some promising practices (such as the Mental Health Directory specific for LGBTQI+ communities), these young people continue to "suffer from labels, persecution, jokes, and general disrespect."[146] Within this group, youth who are more observably gay,

[143] Stakeholder, social justice group, Santiago.
[144] Stakeholder, disability NGO, Santo Domingo.
[145] Stakeholder, disability CSO network, Santo Domingo.
[146] Stakeholder, legal justice institute, Santiago.

bisexual, or gender nonconforming are even more at risk of discrimination, hate, and violence.[147] Public policies to protect and uphold the rights of these young people are not in place and recently, the Penal Code on non-discrimination removed LGBTQI+ communities from the population it protects.

Some stakeholders described other characteristics that create new vulnerabilities for young people. This includes, for example, young people who have been imprisoned or affected by the law, and who struggle to reintegrate into society due to their criminal record. Certain forms of child labor also put subgroups of young people at risk, in particular (1) those working on the streets, who may be more exposed to threats of violence, crime, or recruitment from drug traffickers and gangs; and (2) youth who spend their days collecting recyclable trash from landfills and are, thus, exposed to risks to their physical health.

Youth who are characterized by more than one of the above attributes face compounded vulnerabilities. For example, a few key informants, including youth leaders and activists, identified the most vulnerable youth as women who have dark skin, especially Haitian women or women living in *bateyes.* Likewise, in the context of discrimination against Haitian migrants, one key informant said, "If we add to that sexual preference and disability, it becomes a combination of barriers that a single person has to confront." The intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, poverty, citizenship or migration status, disability, and sexuality increases the risks young people face and limits the opportunities they are presented with.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations articulate how USAID staff can respond to evidence gathered through this CSYA. Each recommendation notes the development objective (DO) within USAID/DR's CDCS it most closely aligns to. While this report is written for USAID staff, the assessment team recognizes progress would occur in partnership with other key stakeholders, such as youth and their families, civil society, the private sector, and government actors.

OVERALL

1. Intentionally partner with youth-led and youth-serving organizations. (Cross-cutting)

- Use existing or future implementing mechanisms with co-created contracts or grants (direct or sub) to diverse youth-led organizations to leverage these partners' expertise, while including explicit capacity support and outcomes for longer term sustainability.
- Support established CSOs to build symbiotic relationships with youth-led organizations.
- Continue to promote integration of youth engagement in programming and management, for USAID's and partners' work.[148]

2. Continue to design youth-centered and holistic programs that address the specific needs of different age groups and other subgroups, including integrating young people's perspectives through implementation and learning activities. (Cross-cutting).

- Expand active engagement of youth as partners from the design stage and include sub-group- and age-specific targeting interventions consistently throughout the implementation and learning of an

[147] Stakeholder, social justice NGO, Santiago.
[148] See for example: Global LEAD Toolkit and Youth Programming Assessment Tool for organizational reflection.

activity. Practical steps for ongoing engagement include co-creation approaches, youth councils, youth advisory groups, or robust user feedback systems that intentionally include youth and youth groups beyond those known to USAID and close partners.[149]

- Include youth engagement expectations, with sufficient resourcing, in solicitations and contracts/agreements to strengthen implementation.
- Continue to implement holistic, demand-driven activities such as *Alerta Joven*.
- In measuring results, consider using qualitative tools that elevate youth's voices and capture transformative stories of change resulting from programming, such as most significant change.

3. Address intersectionality in programming by addressing systemic barriers to youth inclusion and providing supportive services for the most vulnerable, especially those who are undocumented migrants. (Cross-cutting)

- Partner with CSOs that help uphold and support the rights of vulnerable youth, including girls and young women, undocumented youth, LGBTQI+ communities, or youth with disabilities.[150]
- With domestic and development partners, advocate for policy and regulatory reform to address those that disproportionately affect vulnerable youth, including Judgment 168-13, *cédula* requirements, and changes to remove protections for LGBTQI+ youth under the Penal Code.
- Make sure that programming with youth includes population-specific referral or support services to increase equity of access (e.g., health services that are safe and friendly for people who identify as LGBTQI+, mental health services for people who experienced GBV).
- Provide support to training institutes for health, security, and other professionals to supply equitable, youth-friendly services.

4. Support the government at the national and subnational levels to strengthen policies, implementation, and learning around regulations affecting youth. (DO1)

- Support youth-led organizations and local governance interventions to facilitate this relationship-building and shift in mindsets around youth engagement, and advance capacity-strengthening outcomes.
- Build on and support "bright spots" in the government, such as the Ministry of Youth's Technical Unit of Youth Studies'[151] development of an online data dashboard for youth-focused indicators.
- Share USAID's good practices around youth engagement with government counterparts.

5. Create enabling household and community environments by working with youth, their families, community and religious leaders, and community organizations (DO3).

Having access to a supportive household environment is important for youth of all ages. Barriers to youth development often exist within their immediate environments, including limited access to educational support at home, domestic and community violence, unsafe or unkept streets and

[149] See resources on youth advisory councils presented here.
[150] Some organizations that have been successful in advancing positive results include MUDHA, Reconocid.o, and COLESDOM.
[151] Unidad Técnica de Estudios Sobre Juventudes (UESJ).

neighborhoods, and social expectations. Removing these barriers and creating more enabling household and community environments is a vital part of youth programming. Working with community organizations and civil society was also described as particularly important to address social norms and negative attitudes.

6. **Integrate social norm-shifting activities, which include dialogue within households, communities, and religious leaders, across all sectors. (Cross-cutting)**

Shifting harmful norms should be explicitly incorporated in results during activity design and throughout implementation, including being examined during assessments, monitoring, and evaluation.[152] For sector-specific examples, see findings in the body of the report.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Work with the Ministry of Education to strengthen the delivery of basic education and TVET services. (DO2) Priorities should be providing pedagogical training and supportive supervision to teachers, assisting in the development and implementation of school curriculum, or integrating career counseling and job placement support at the primary and secondary levels. Support the development of young people's foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, homework or formal school support, and the integration of life skills (e.g., critical and logical thinking, socio-emotional skills) or work-related transferable skills through professional training or healthy recreation activities, such as sports and the arts. Employ recruitment methods and training opportunities that engage more youth, especially in rural and remote areas, in high-earning TVET activities and provide youth with recognized certifications or credentials.

Encourage integration of evidence-based CSE into the curriculum. (DO2) This should include a discussion of gender roles, gender norms, and GBV, and a focus on youth's SRH and rights. It should also include awareness-raising activities so that young women and girls can find productive ways of achieving independence, self-sufficiency, and empowerment beyond marriage or motherhood. Design CSE that employs an intersectional lens to address the rights of LGBTQI+ communities. Ensure teachers are adequately trained and consider using peer youth support models within schools or communities.

Work with the Ministry of Education to remove or reduce additional costs of education, especially for vulnerable youth. (DO2) Priorities should be to address costs of school transportation, school uniforms, or educational materials at the primary and secondary levels. Ensure current efforts, including the distribution of materials and technologies, reach more remote areas. At the tertiary level, design scholarship schemes that consider factors other than academic performance such as student income level, ethnicity, language, or household location to make sure youth from diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities. Raise awareness around the economic, social, and civic returns to investing in young people's education.

With the Ministry of Education and other partners, design flexible formal and non-formal education programs. (DO2) Support the reintegration of youth who drop out of school—including pregnant girls and young mothers—and provide remedial learning support to students, like after-school programs.

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[152] As one example of a practical tool for designing and implementing social norms-shifting interventions, see CARE's Social Norms Design Checklist and suite of related tools, as well as capacity-development and programming resources on gender and social norms from USAID's PASSAGES project.

Integrate social norms shifting into programming. (DO2, DO3) Use media campaigns, community dialogue, and community champions to tackle the underlying gender beliefs and norms that contribute to boys dropping out, such as the acceptance of boys leaving school to work and school administrators applying of Eurocentric beauty standards.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Target programming to increase youth's access to financial services and improve their financial literacy. (DO2) Work with cooperatives and microfinance institutions to offer loans that are more accessible to youth, such as by taking into account moveable assets and alternative methods for assessing credit worthiness. Access to financial services is especially effective for youth when paired with training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and mentorship opportunities.

Conduct research on the extent to which the private sector, civil society, and government entities have instituted and enforced protective workplace policies, and use this to help improve overall working conditions. (DO2) Use this research to identify discriminatory hiring practices that could inform subsequent interventions or identify model organizations that provide a decent working environment for all employees. For example, interventions could include reviewing compensation packages to consider other costs for vulnerable youth, especially the provision of childcare for working mothers or assistive devices and accessible transportation for youth workers with disabilities. Engage youth and youth-serving organizations as partners in this advocacy effort and ensure that youth know their work rights and how to advocate for better working conditions.

Work with the education and TVET system to develop a private-sector engagement strategy to support young people in gaining practical experience. (DO2) Use this engagement strategy to support the establishment of meaningful internships, practicums, and apprenticeships, especially for young boys who are at risk of dropping out of school to search for employment.

Work with the private sector, public training institutions, and/or civil society to develop entrepreneurship programs that encompass a wider range of career paths and target self-employed youth. (DO2) This includes a program that builds entrepreneurial skills, provides practical experience in business management, connects youth with mentors who are self-employed, and enhances their financial literacy. Entrepreneurship efforts should guide youth toward more economically fulfilling jobs or positions that help them take on leadership roles.

Work with CSOs to target and incentivize youth's participation in agriculture. (DO2) To support youth living in rural areas, incentivize young people's engagement in agriculture by advocating for better pay and compensation, integrating digital technologies, or facilitating work exchanges that allow youth to explore modern and innovative approaches, such as smart agriculture.

HEALTH

Design programs that address the health needs of specific subgroups of vulnerable youth. (DO2) These subgroups include young people with disabilities or chronic health conditions, such as sexually transmitted infections or HIV/AIDs, as well as men who have sex with men.

Address social and religious norms-shaping taboos around youth's access to SRH and mental health services. (DO2, DO3) Work with families, clinicians, and other health care providers to address their implicit biases and improve their capacities to provide quality, youth-friendly, and non-discriminatory health services to youth in all their diversity. Use these changes to help improve

health-seeking behaviors among youth, especially certain vulnerable groups, such as those who are HIV positive and LGBTQI+ youth.

Advocate for the Ministry of Health to establish clear health care standards, and integrate them into training and supportive supervision. (DO2) The goal is to ensure no one can be refused health treatment and all persons must be provided with quality care and ethical treatment. This ought to be integrated into technical training for health personnel, with regular supervision. Providers' responsibilities to patients should be posted in health centers to communicate patients' rights to privacy and confidentiality. Health care providers must be trained in and held accountable for ethical standards.

Consider models to better reach youth, such as mobile clinics and tele-health. (DO2), These models should specifically target vulnerable youth in rural areas, supplying them with quality health services and care options. Free mobile clinics can reduce barriers by providing services at convenient times in locations where youth, especially young women, convene, such as schools, community centers, and *bateys*. Explore online or remote tele-health programs that allow for both timely and accessible youth-friendly service provision by trained professionals, which can also be an opportunity for private-sector engagement in health care.

GOVERNANCE

Work with the government to train local and national authorities, including police, military officials, migration officials, and relevant line ministries, using a rights-based approach in response to GBV. (DO2, DO3) Make sure all authorities working with youth are trained in safeguarding and child protection and support the establishment of grievance and accountability mechanisms. In addition to GBV focal points, ensure all law enforcement officers—men and women—are trained in trauma-informed approaches and know how to receive, process, and manage cases of GBV and how to interact with survivors in keeping with ethical codes of conduct, including confidential care referrals to case-appropriate networks.

Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues. (DO3) These dialogues should take place between government officials, civil society, communities, families, and in particular, youth from diverse backgrounds. Provide structured spaces for youth and other stakeholders to voice their concerns to build transparency and better relationships between communities and government actors.

Integrate civic education and human rights topics into formal and non-formal curriculum. (DO2, DO3) This includes sustainability education and promoting young people's active participation in their communities and wider society. Encourage activities such as community service, advocacy for social justice, or other relevant causes within their community. Train youth in digital literacy, especially how to navigate the media and the internet to differentiate between facts and misinformation.

Support CSOs in advocating for the rights of all youth. (DO1) This includes organizations focused on the rights of women and girls, persons with disabilities, migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent, rural workers, and the LGBTQI+ community. Use an intersectional lens and encourage collaboration across CSO actors and through engagement with the government in policy dialogues. Ensure that outreach and collaboration efforts expand beyond the major cities, where efforts are currently focused.

ANNEX 1. STATEMENT OF WORK

Background

Find the final Phase I Desk Review Report linked here and the assessment presentation slide deck here. The report lists the findings by sector and includes data collected in Key Informant Interviews. The Mission priority areas were Governance, Service System Capacity, and Local Resilience and main topics covered were Demographics, Policies, Education, Employment, Civic Engagement, Violence and Crime, Health, and Families and Communities.

Next steps identified at the end of Phase I:

- Conduct Phase Two field assessment that includes focus groups and interviews with youth to explore and validate themes and recommendations identified in Phase I, including the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on youth.
- Conduct interviews with key individuals from national and local government, private sector, civil society, legal and security, public health and others as needed to review recommendations and identify additional actionable ideas.
- Facilitate Phase Two review and discussion among USAID programs and policy staff on how to integrate recommendations.

The USAID/DR CDCS for 2020-2025 can be found publicly available here.

Phase Two: In-country Fieldwork and Final Report

KEY OBJECTIVES

Provide specific programmatic recommendations to USAID/DR across sectors and thematic areas (USAID cross-cutting themes). The overall recommendations will consider challenges and opportunities for USAID to support the holistic needs of youth and impactful opportunities and ideas for USAID/DR to engage more meaningfully in partnerships with the DR national and local government and private sector in support of high-quality, accessible and appropriate youth services contributing to the following examples of outcomes and impacts:

- Increased youth educational attainment and acquisition of appropriate skills to enter the workforce
- Increased healthy behaviors overall, including a decrease in teen pregnancy
- Decreased youth violence and/or participation in crime-related activities
- Strengthened resilience of youth populations to life-shocks, including pandemics.
- Increased enabling-environmental like education and livelihood opportunities for youth in remote and rural settings to promote generational replacement and economic growth in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and environmental conservation.
- Increased youth civic engagement and decision-making autonomy and capacity.

FIELD WORK

The contractor should conduct multiple focus groups with diverse youth, teachers, families, private sector, and youth serving organizations, as well as conduct key-informant interviews with a range of stakeholders (Government of the Dominican Republic officials, Ministry of Youth key officials, other donors, youth experts, NGOs working in the area of youth, prominent employers). Information collected in the Phase II focus groups and interviews with youth should build upon the questions asked in Phase I and ensure no duplication of redundant information.

The CSYA Team will have discussions with the in-country point of contact to check in on the progress of deliverables every week. Consultations will ensure regional representativeness, the contractor should plan to interview representatives from all regions of the country (take in charge travel, lodging and per diem for participants from the regions when applicable).

ILLUSTRATIVE FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS BY TOPIC

The CSYA should be structured around three key questions for each of the assessment areas: (1) what is the *landscape/situation* youth are facing in the given area, (2) what are the *barriers* youth face, and (3) what are the *current opportunities* for youth? See sector-specific example questions from SOW Phase I linked here, starting on pg. 3

- Demographics
- Policies
- Education (Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary)
- Employment
- Civic Engagement
- Violence and Crime (including GBV)
- Health (including mental health)
- Families and Communities

ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

TASK	DESCRIPTION
Work Plan Approved	Prior to the rollout of Phase II, the contractor should submit a detailed plan of the data collection with assumptions, methodologies, assessment questions and tools for collection and plan for analysis. USAID DR will support initial contact with key stakeholders within context, contracting and context limitations and will create necessary agreements with the contractor.
In-briefing	Within two (2) working days of the start of approved workplan, the assessment team will have an in-briefing with the COR and expanded USAID team for introductions and to discuss the team's understanding of the assignment and assessment work plan.
Fieldwork	As part of the implementation of the Assessment Work Plan, USAID DR and the contractor will convene regularly to discuss progress of the fieldwork. This will allow for adjustments based on challenges and opportunities identified during fieldwork.
Final Presentation	The assessment team is expected to hold a final presentation for USAID/DR and the key stakeholders consulted at the end of the field work, to discuss the preliminary findings,

TASK	DESCRIPTION
	conclusions, and recommendations. This presentation and format will be scheduled as agreed upon during the initial in-briefing.
Draft Assessment Report	The draft report is due within 35 days of the completion of field research. The draft assessment report must be consistent with the guidance provided below. The report must answer the questions identified in the SOW and any other issues the team considers to have a bearing on the objectives of the assessment. Any such issues can be included in the report only after consultation with USAID. The submission date for the draft assessment report will be ten working days after the final presentation. Once the initial draft assessment report is submitted, USAID/DR will have ten working days in which to review and comment on the initial draft, after which point the assessment COR will submit the consolidated comments to the assessment team. The assessment team will then be asked to submit a revised final draft report five business days hence, and again the Mission will review and send comments on this final draft report within ten business days of its submission.
Final Assessment Report	The assessment team will be asked to take no more than five working days to respond/incorporate the final comments from USAID/DR. The contractor will then submit the final report to the COR. This submission should also include both a PPT version of key findings and recommendations, and a visual summary of key aspects of the situation of youth.

Reporting Guidance

The Final Report will be submitted to the COR in electronic format within five (5) working days following receipt of comments, if any, from the COR. The Final Report should not exceed more than 30 pages (excluding annexes), will follow the format suggested below, and will be prepared in English and follow USAID branding procedures. The final report shall take into consideration comments and clarifications received from any and all debriefings. While it is understood that one contractor team member may have the lead responsibility for writing the final report, all contractor team members shall provide input and clearance for the final report submitted.

All quantitative data collected by the assessment team must be provided in an electronic file in machine-readable, non-proprietary formats as required by USAID's Open Data policy (see ADS 579). The data should be organized and fully documented for use by those not fully familiar with the project or the assessment. USAID will retain ownership of the survey and all datasets developed. In accordance with AIDAR 752.7005, USAID/DR may make the final assessment reports publicly available through the Development Experience Clearinghouse within 30 calendar days of final approval of the formatted report.

While the Assessment Team may include sections and information that they consider add to the value and utility of the report, the basic format for the assessment report is as follows:

1. **Title Page** – see USAID Branding and Marking Guidelines (http://www.usaid.gov/branding/) for logo and other specifics

2. **Table of Contents** – Should list all the sections that follow, including Annexes. List (with page numbers) all figures, tables, boxes, and other titled graphics.

3. **Acronyms and Abbreviations** – Include only those acronyms that are actually used in the report.

4. **Executive Summary** – Should serve as a standalone abbreviated version of the entire report and summarize the purpose, background of the project being evaluated, main assessment questions,

methods, and, most importantly, the findings, conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned (if applicable). (3-5 pages).

5. **Introduction** – (3-5 pages)

Description of the Activity: Describe the context in which the assessment took place, specific development problem addressed, USAID project strategy and activities.

Assessment Purpose and Methodology – Describe the purpose of the assessment and its intended use; describe assessment methodology in detail, including limitations with the assessment methodology, as well as other constraints and gaps; provide specific assessment questions addressed. (Note: this section can refer to an Annex that would provide fuller details).

6. **Findings/Recommendations:** Although this section may be organized in different ways and divided into several chapters, the report should clearly differentiate between Findings and Recommendations, and should be organized in such a way that it is clear which assessment questions are being addressed (20-30 pages).

7. **Annexes:** The appendices to the report shall include at a minimum:

- The Assessment Statement of Work;
- Assessment Design and Methodology – Provide a more complete description of the assessment questions, design, and methods used. Also includes copies of data collection instruments, such as questionnaires, checklists, discussion/interview guides, survey instruments, etc., and describes the sampling and analysis procedures that were used.
- Disclosure of conflict of interest forms for all assessment team members, either attesting to a lack of conflicts of interest or describing existing conflicts of interest.
- List of Persons Interviewed
- List of Documents Reviewed – Sources of information, properly identified and listed. Includes written and electronic documents reviewed, background literature, secondary data sources, citations of websites consulted.

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES WITH USAID/DR

Mariela Pena, Mission Youth point of contact, will act as in-country focal person for the assignment, along with Maricela Ramirez from the Program Office. The Assessment Team is expected to arrange logistics and schedules. However, USAID/DR will assist with key informant interviews and meetings with USAID staff as needed.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE ASSESSMENT TEAM

Linking with government structures, policies, and programs: The Assessment itself, as well as recommended strategic approaches to youth programming, should consider priorities and policies established by the government of the Dominican Republic.

Leverage existing resources: Many studies regarding youth have already been conducted by USAID and others in the Dominican Republic. The Assessment team should leverage these resources to facilitate the desk review and to tailor questions to fill gaps in the existing knowledge base rather than duplicate previous efforts.

Using a cross-sectoral focus: Key U.S. government priorities for a multi-sector youth strategy include fostering livelihoods and economic growth, addressing basic health needs and promoting peace, stability, and development in the Dominican Republic. The Youth Assessment will not only explore the linkages between sectors that support positive youth development, but also those instances where such linkages present challenges. Assessments of the linkages between sectors will help to provide ideas for the Mission on how to create synergies and support youth with innovative and cross-cutting programs.

Creating a cross-cultural Assessment Team: The Assessment Team will include both Dominican and international experts at all stages of the work. Due to the diversity of opinions and backgrounds, a cross-cultural team can produce a multitude of benefits, including reductions in bias and creative problem-solving. Spanish Proficiency is required.

Engaging youth as Assessment Team members: Youth will function as active members of the Assessment Team at all stages of the activity. Doing so provides increased capability to youth, deeper knowledge of those issues affecting youth and local buy-in from communities where future youth programming may be implemented. For any engagement with Dominican youth, the Assessment Team must make sure that those youth are well informed of the objectives of their engagement and that they are volunteering to do so at their own best preferred time.

Working in partnership with USAID: The contractor will work closely with the USAID Mission in the design and implementation of the Assessment. Close communication will allow the Assessment to be customized to the strategic objectives and funding streams of the Mission.

Including voices from key stakeholders: The contractor will solicit diverse participant samples. The Assessment Team will recruit participants from youth, relevant ministries, implementing partners, other donors, and the private sector, among others. This data diversity supports the validity of findings while also creating a nuanced picture of youth development in a given setting.

Employing rigorous social science methods: Valid conclusions can only be drawn from valid data. The contractor will ensure the integrity of its data and findings through a carefully crafted research design based on rigorous social scientific methods (e.g., sampling strategies, data collection, data analysis, data display). Wherever possible, the contractor will employ a mixed methodological approach, thereby offering both qualitative and quantitative data.

Generating development hypotheses and theories of change: The Assessment should suggest an overall development hypothesis (or multiple if needed) that provides a logical foundation to USAID's interventions to empower youth and can be tested to check whether underlying assumptions remain valid in the future.

ANNEX 2. YOUTH DAY ITINERARY[153]

TIME	ACTIVITY
9:00–10:00	• Research team setup of venue, materials, snacks • Play music and create welcoming space
10:00–10:30	• Ice breakers (Significant Object) • Introducing research objectives • Consent • Ground rules • Questions
10:30–12:00	• Community mapping (1 group per community) – 1 hour • Presenting it to the wider group – 30 mins
12:00–1:00	• Lunch
1:00–2:30	• Focus group discussions about dreams/aspirations and opportunities or challenges in the community and important people/places in the community
2:30–3:30	• Diamond Ranking activity (by community) – 30 mins • Presenting it to the wider group – 30 mins
3:30–4:00	• Break into smaller groups not by community, but by gender or ethnicity so that we can dive deeper into some of these challenges (e.g., doing the "Worry Exercises") (p.48)
4:00–4:30	• Last words – Ask for final contributions • Next steps – Participation in follow-up interviews
4:30–5:00	• Wrap-up • Feedback • Questions

[153] Youth Day Activities were inspired by the GAGE (2017) Participatory Research Instruments. Link.

ANNEX 3. NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTED BY SECTOR

SECTOR	NUMBER OF STAKEHOLDERS
USAID/DR Staff	10
Education	50
Health	18
Civic Engagement / Good Governance	8
Economic Empowerment	17
Agriculture	1
Multisectoral	117
Local Leaders	10
Parents	12
Youth	205
Total	448

ANNEX 4. DATA ANALYSIS

A participatory, whole-of-team approach was used to analyze the significant amount of qualitative data collected in this CSYA. This included a 3-day full-team in-person data analysis, where we coded all the individual interviews, Youth Day activities, and FGDs. Each team member coded all the data across the various sectors. We then came together as a group to collectively discuss the codes and identify the themes. This bottom–up approach ensured the themes were grounded in the data. See *Photo 2* for an example of our mapping of initial codes.

Image: Sample mapping of initial codes

ANNEX 5. SITUATION OF YOUTH IN THE DR

The Dominican Republic has a youthful demographic. With a total population of 11 million, 62 percent are under the age of [154] and approximately 27 percent are aged 10 to 24 years.[155] Young people living in rural areas represent 18 percent of the country's population, reflecting the tendency for young people to migrate from rural regions to bigger cities.[156]

Although these statistics illustrate young people's demographic potential, members of this generation in the Dominican Republic experience various structural, social, and individual barriers to effectively attaining and realizing the roles society expects of them. Obstacles such as lack of quality education, normalization of teenage pregnancy, high rates of child marriage/informal unions, lack of job opportunities, youth violence, and limited family support all serve as risk factors that hinder the well-being of young people in the Dominican Republic.

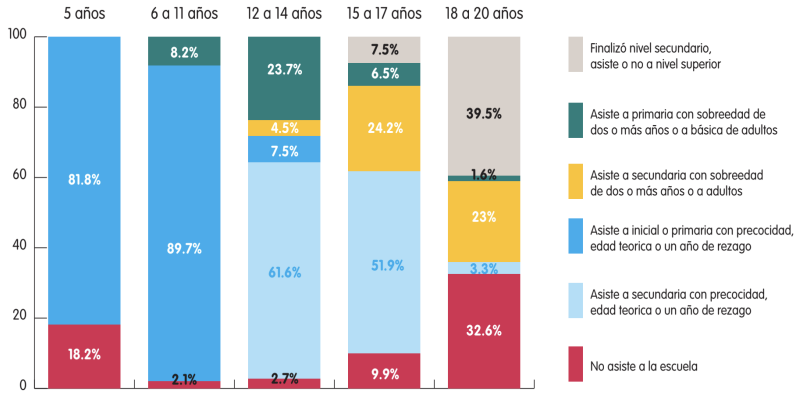
To address the various structural, social, and individual barriers youth experience, the Dominican Republic formally approved a national youth policy in January 1998 and enacted a General Youth Law (Law No. 49-2000) in August 2000. The objective of the General Youth Law (Law No. 49-2000), which defines youth as people between the ages of 15 and 35, is to establish a legal policy and institutional framework that guides the state's actions pertaining to youth. In support of this law, the Government of the Dominican Republic has implemented various national youth policies, programs, and institutions focused on developing young people's skills and capacities.[157]

While various laws, policies, and programs are set out to support young people in the Dominican Republic, structural, social, and individual barriers continue to situate youth at the margins of the society. For example, one in four women in the Dominican Republic between the ages of 20 and 49 has had a child before turning 18 and almost half of them before turning 20.[158] In fact, the Dominican Republic is among the top five countries in Latin America with the highest proportion of teenage pregnancies.[159]

Young women are more likely to be married. More than one in three girls (36 percent)[160] are married by the age of 18, and 12 percent of those girls are married by the age of 15.[161] Likewise, there are more than 100,000 girls out of school and only 57 percent of girls complete secondary school. *Figure 3* provides a glimpse of school enrolments by age.

[154] World Bank Data. 2020. Link
[155] United Nations Population Fund. 2022. Country Program Data. Link
[156] National Survey of Working Conditions. 2019.
[157] For a list of policies targeting young people, see link.
[158] UNICEF. Link
[159] UNFPA. 2020. Link
[160] Girls Not Brides. 2020. Link
[161] Ibid.

Figure 3. Primary and secondary school enrollment rates, by youth age



Source: UNICEF. 2017.

Most young people in the Dominican Republic live in poverty—two out of three youths aged 15 to 24 live in poverty. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 2017, youth held 14 percent of the national unemployment rate and 20 percent of female youth experienced unemployment. Likewise, ILO (2017) reports that 18 percent of male youth are not employed, attending school, or in a training program.[162]

[162] USAID. 2022. Country Profile. Link

ANNEX 6. BOXES AND TABLES

BOX 1. PARTICIPANT-IDENTIFIED PROMISING PRACTICE: SAVINGS GROUPS, OR *SAN*

Stakeholders described savings groups, known locally as *San,* as a more accessible credit option for young people. A *San* is a rotating savings group. A group of people (among colleagues, within a community, at work) form the core group of participants. Each agrees to make regular contributions to the fund, which is given in whole to each contributor in rotation. Savings groups are widespread at the community level and a more favorable credit option for youth, particularly those in rural areas, as reported by many informants.[163] Savings group members are not subject to similar requirements for accessing loans from microfinance institutions and they can access microloans with favorable repayment terms to support their businesses or needs.[164] Additionally, savings groups are reported to have various financial and non-financial benefits, including building stronger community networks and social capital with those in their savings group.

BOX 2. PARTICIPANT-IDENTIFIED PROMISING PRACTICE: YOUTH PEER NETWORKS

Young people's engagement and participation in peer networks has helped them build their job market skills and self-confidence to be able to navigate their life. Dedicated youth programs and youth networks have supported young people in bridging the gap in skills required to gain employment. Various stakeholders also mentioned the importance of providing youth with certifications or other proof of their training to help them build their resume and look like more attractive candidates for employers. According to all stakeholders, programs such as the USAID-funded *Alerta Joven Network* and the national government-funded *Oportunidad 14–24* have worked directly with youth to build their technical skills, life skills, communication skills, and self-confidence to be able to advocate for their rights and prepare them to enter the workforce. Both youth and CSOs serving youth perceived these programs favorably, because they took a community-based approach in supporting young people. While both programs seek to support vulnerable youth, *Oportunidad 14–24* does not serve undocumented youth.

BOX 3. PARTICIPANT-IDENTIFIED PROMISING PRACTICES: SRH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Research participants mentioned few promising practices or effective health interventions. Many participants described the need to build awareness within communities, train personnel, and combat stigma and prejudice. This includes working with families and community leaders and empowering youth, especially women and girls, to know their rights, particularly in relation to SRH. For example, several implementing partners mentioned the SRH component of USAID's *Alerta Jóven*. In addition, certain efforts have been successful in supporting subgroups of vulnerable youth. As part of its project *Being LGBT in the Caribbean* the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Dominican Republic created a *Dominican Directory of Affirmative Mental Health Providers*[165] who have been trained to provide quality and

[163] Stakeholder interview, Samana. October 2022.
[164] Stakeholder interview, Santo Domingo. October 2022.
[165] UNDP. n.d. *Directorio dominicano de salud mental afirmativa LGBTQ+ | Programa De Las Naciones Unidas Para El Desarrollo.* UNDP. Link

non-discriminatory psychological services to LGBTQI+ minorities. Access to relevant and youth-friendly information is the first step in ensuring young people seek the comprehensive, quality health care they need.

BOX 4. PARTICIPANT-IDENTIFIED PROMISING PRACTICES: CAPACITY-BUILDING OF AUTHORITIES

Military officials, migration authorities, and the police must be equipped not just with the skills and knowledge, but also the values, ethics, and professionalism to work with vulnerable youth and uphold their rights. Capacity-building must also be provided to political leaders at the national and subnational levels, including, for example, officials in important youth-relevant ministries, such as the *Oficina de las Mujeres.*[166]

BOX 5. PARTICIPANT-IDENTIFIED PROMISING PRACTICES: CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION FOR YOUTH

Citizenship education can inform young people of their many rights, from SRH and bodily autonomy to free transit, so that they know what to do when police stop them unjustly.[167] Life skills, youth leadership, civic participation, global human rights, and Dominican law were all mentioned as topics that should be integrated into non-formal and formal education curricula.[168] Several key informants also noted that parents and families must be educated on human rights issues, because they themselves may hinder the full growth or potential of their children, either by not protecting them under the law or in the case of youth with disabilities, prohibiting them from leaving the house due to perceived stigma.

BOX 6. IMPROVING DONORS' APPROACHES TO FUNDING, MONITORING, AND REPORTING

Funding: Various key informants, including USAID implementing partners, identified challenges or gaps related to donor funding models. One challenge local organizations noted was that often, they could not apply directly to donor funds due to strict eligibility requirements. As a result, international NGOs that do qualify receive the funds and subcontract to local organizations. In this process, the funds distributed are significantly reduced due to the intermediaries involved. Another perceived challenge is that implementing partners end up working on a "shoestring budget" due to the amount of money skimmed off the top of donor funds. For example, salaries, hotels, and transportation for project coordinators takes away from the money that actually goes to youth beneficiaries. Likewise, another key informant reported that regulations prohibited some of the donor money to go to important, yet overlooked, resources, such as food, water, or transportation for youth collaborators. Although donor contracts often limit the amount of money that can be spent on these "basic needs," it is these types of resources that attract the most vulnerable and impoverished youth to a program. Being able to offer a glass of water or snack to a youth who is hungry or thirsty, the key informant stated, is of utmost importance. Another issue raised was the distribution

[166] Key informant, social justice NGO, Dajabón
[167] Key informant, social justice NGO, Santiago
[168] Stakeholder, educational NGO, Boca Chica

of donor money to respond to challenges, not prevent them. The example one key informant gave was how donor money may be provided based on the number of people living with HIV in a given community. An unintended negative consequence of this approach is that implementing partners end up getting "excited" to find new cases of beneficiaries with HIV, because they associate those cases with new funds and resources to support their programming.

Monitoring: USAID implementing partners and other key stakeholders engaged in this CSYA were asked to speak to their measures of impact on youth beneficiaries. Few organizations were able to provide data or relevant indicators used to monitor and evaluate the impact or effectiveness of their programming. In fact, various organizations identified limitations with their current approach to program monitoring—an approach often imposed by donors themselves. For example, they reported that some donors focus largely on reach or scale (e.g., the number of beneficiaries affected, the number of scholarships provided, the number of workshops facilitated or participants who attended these workshops). Some key informants noted how this approach to monitoring failed to capture real impact or the change people involved in the program experienced. It looked to quantify programming, without considering the transformational stories and firsthand experiences of people affected by the donor funding. It looked at "quantity rather than quality."

Reporting: A third key challenge USAID implementing partners and other stakeholders identified was the need to be "flexible" in terms of expectations regarding reporting and the human capacity to produce such reporting. As one key informant explained, organizations that received funding were often expected to complete a significant amount of documentation. Although "the majority of Dominican organizations do not have that type of personnel … they still do important work," so requirements and expectations placed by donors on "donees" need to be "more attached to the [local] reality," instead of being based on international standards.

Table: Youth asset profiles

PROFILES WITH CONSIDERABLE ASSETS	PROFILES WITH THE LEAST ASSETS
• Heterosexual men • Older than 25 years • Can rely on their network and family support • Completed tertiary/university education • Work full-time and in the formal sector • Live in an urban setting with greater access to resources	• Young women • 15–24 years old • Lack work or engage in sex work (possibly unprotected) • Lack schooling (either altogether or did not complete primary education) • Lack family or other social support (may be single mothers or household heads) • Live in rural settings • Have multiple children • Suffer from poor health, including HIV/AIDS and/or sexually transmitted infections • Are undocumented or described by other characteristics of vulnerability, such as Afro-descendant or Haitian • Live with a disability

ANNEX 7. PYD FRAMEWORK AND CSYA FINDINGS

PYD DOMAIN	PYD PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY FINDINGS	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Assets	Skill building	• The quality of education broadly, and limited support provided to teachers in particular, has contributed to the situation of many young people graduating without basic skills. • The last several years have seen increased national investment in TVET to prepare students to enter the productive sector, but only certain youth have access to these opportunities.	• Work with the Ministry of Education to strengthen the delivery of basic education and TVET services. • Use a holistic approach to education and training curriculum and programming, including by supporting the development of young people's foundational skills, life skills or work-related transferable skills. • Target programming to increase youth's access to financial services and improve their financial literacy
Agency		• Young people's economic participation is limited to lower paid and informal activities, due to a gap between skills learned in school and skills and experience employers require. Young people are disproportionately employed in the tourism sector, because employers in this sector value and look for basic cognitive rather than technical skills • Entrepreneurship and self-employment are survival mechanisms for young people in the Dominican Republic. Many young people keep their businesses informal and avoid registering them because of a lack of incentive to formalize. Limited access to credit and professional networks significantly hinders young people's entrepreneurship potential, despite national strategies to promote entrepreneurship.	• Develop a private-sector engagement strategy to support young people in gaining practical experience. Work with the private sector, public training institutions, and/or civil society to develop entrepreneurship programs that encompass a wider range of career paths and that target self-employed youth. Work with CSOs to target and incentivize youth's participation in the agriculture sector.

PYD DOMAIN	PYD PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY FINDINGS	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
Contribution	Youth engagement and contribution	• Research participants described youth's engagement and participation in civic and political life as minimal and several related this to the Dominican Republic government's lack of concern. • Those opportunities that do exist for youth to participate were described as tokenistic and inaccessible to some of the most vulnerable young people. • Many stakeholders emphasized the importance of children and youth in all their diversity having agency and ownership over the decisions that affect them.	• Engage youth meaningfully in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the projects, programs, and policies that affect them. • Establish programs that move beyond the tokenistic involvement of youth and encourage and promote meaningful youth engagement and participation in civic life.
Enabling environment	Healthy relationships and bonding	• Family and Community: Marriage is a form of emancipation for vulnerable girls in rural areas. Lack of tools to support conflict resolution forces young people to use violence as a method to resolve conflict. Stakeholders report low confidence in the justice system to prosecute cases that have normalized violence at the community level. • Government: There is a general feeling of distrust among youth toward the government and local or national authorities, including police and politicians. Communication and collaboration across youth and diverse stakeholders are essential to building positive relationships, transparency, and accountability.	• Cross-Cutting Recommendation: Use and integrate into USAID programming social norm-changing activities (which include dialogue within households and communities, and with religious leaders) that are adapted to the Dominican context. • Government: Facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogues between government officials, civil society, communities, and families, and especially youth from diverse backgrounds.
	Belonging and membership	• Education: The stigma and non-acceptance of pregnant girls in school influences their consistency with school completion (young women dropping out while they are pregnant and re-enrolling, if possible, after their child is born).	• Education: Fund programs that work with the Ministry of Education to support the continued education of pregnant girls. • Employment: Intentionally partner with organizations focused on improving the lives of undocumented youth.

PYD DOMAIN	PYD PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY FINDINGS	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
		• Employment: The requirement of a *cédula* for a work contract affects both undocumented and transgender youth. • Health: Certain subgroups of youth, such as those who are poor or from rural and remote communities including *bateyes,* youth of Haitian descent, undocumented youth, those with disabilities, or from the LGBTQI+ community, are particularly at risk of not accessing quality health services. • Governance: Many subgroups of vulnerable youth, including LGBTQI+ communities, migrant youth, those of Haitian descent, or undocumented youth, are more at risk of being denied basic human rights.	• Health: Design programs that address the health needs of specific subgroups of vulnerable youth. • Governance: Support CSOs in advocating for the rights of all youth, including those organizations focused on the rights of women and girls, persons with disabilities, migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent, rural workers, and the LGBTQI+ community
	Positive norms, expectations, and perceptions	• Education: Discriminatory practices related to Eurocentric standards of beauty have contributed to low attendance rates, specifically among boys. Social norms contribute to boys' disengagement with school. Social norms expecting young men to be economic providers for their families have led to them dropping out of school at a young age. Social norms expect women to have children at a young age. • Employment: Overt and covert hiring practices discriminate against vulnerable groups' access to employment opportunities. Harmful social norms are embedded in hiring practices that prevent young people from accessing equitable employment opportunities. • Health: Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of many young people, mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) are still stigmatized, which deters young people from seeking help. Seeking sexual and reproductive health services, especially for young unmarried youth, is seen as taboo due to cultural and religious norms around	• Cross-Cutting Recommendation: Use and integrate into USAID programming social norm-changing activities (which include dialogue within households and communities, and with religious leaders) that are adapted to the Dominican context. • Education: Design community-level activities informed by social norms research. • Employment: Conduct research on the extent to which the private sector, civil society, and government entities in the Dominican Republic have instituted and enforced protective workplace policies. • Health: Address social and religious norms shaping taboos around youth's access to SRH and mental health services.

PYD DOMAIN	PYD PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY FINDINGS	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
		purity and celibacy, which ultimately, leads to discrimination by SRH personnel.	
	Safe space	• Intrapersonal: A key policy challenge in relation to public health is the fact that abortion is still illegal and punishable by law in the Dominican Republic, leading some girls to resort to clandestine or unsafe abortions. Taboos on discussions of sexuality prevent the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in classroom pedagogy. • Interpersonal: Primary data indicate that GBV is common and perpetrated with impunity, including in formal workplaces in the Dominican Republic. Limited implementation of safeguarding and protection mechanisms has led to normalization of violence at all levels of the society. • Crime: Lack of access to economic opportunities has led young people, especially young men, to engage in delinquent activities to create a livelihood. Both youth and key informants described the limited number of places for "healthy recreation" (*recreación sana)* in many communities. • Natural environment: Climate change has an impact on communities and the natural environment. Research participants also described the negative impacts of pollution on young people in the Dominican Republic.	• Intrapersonal: Encourage the Ministry of Education to integrate evidence based CSE into the curriculum. • Interpersonal: Work with the Ministry of Justice to support law enforcement departments, particularly at the local level, to have focal points trained specifically to handle cases of GBV.
	Access to age appropriate and youth friendly services; integration among services	• Education: Informal costs of schooling continue to pose a significant barrier to universal education. The limited number of schools in rural and remote communities is a barrier for young people to enroll in schooling. Young women are more likely to enroll in higher levels of education. Few youths in the Dominican Republic attend higher education or complete a university degree. The education system does not equip young	• Education: Work to remove or reduce additional costs of education, especially for vulnerable youth. Design flexible formal and non-formal education programs for youth, particularly those engaged in paid or unpaid labor. • Employment: Encourage the Ministry of Labor to assess and improve the overall work conditions of formal and informal sectors youth participate in.

PYD DOMAIN	PYD PROGRAM FEATURES	KEY FINDINGS	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS
		people with the relevant competencies and knowledge required to enter the workforce. • Employment: Economic constraints serve as a significant barrier to accessing employment opportunities for young people. Lack of job opportunities, especially in rural areas, means young people have to migrate to be employed. • Health: Clinics and hospitals in many communities are not equipped with adequate resources or infrastructure to provide quality health services to all young people. Personnel working at health clinics and hospitals often lack the skills and knowledge needed to provide quality and youth-friendly health services. There is a need to improve youth's access to general health care, nutrition, emergency care, or specialized care for persons with chronic health conditions. • Governance: Officers of the law are often under-trained or hold their own biases against certain youth. At the grassroots level, civil society plays a critical role in upholding the rights of young people, although the reach of CSOs is often limited. At the macro-level, there is an urgent need to strengthen legal or institutional frameworks and the implementation of public policies focused on young people's human rights. • Public Spaces and Transport: Many youth and other stakeholders mentioned poor and inaccessible infrastructure in communities.	• Health: Work with the Ministry of Health to conduct research and assess the public health system's reach and coverage. Advocate for the Ministry of Health to establish clear health care standards. Implement the mobile clinic model to better reach youth, specifically vulnerable youth in rural areas, with quality health services and care options. Support capacity-building and training for health care personnel to encourage ethical professional care and confidentiality in the treatment of all young persons. • Governance: Work with the government to train local and national authorities, including police, military officials, migration officials, and relevant line ministries, using a rights-based approach. Integrate human rights topics into formal and non-formal curriculum, including civic education, sustainability education, and the promotion of young people's active participation in their communities and wider society.
Cross-cutting recommendations: **Support youth programming at all levels of the ecosystem (policy, community/household, individual).** **Design youth-centered programs that address issues specifically relevant to different age groups of young people in the Dominican Republic.** **Intentionally partner with organizations focused on improving the lives of undocumented youth** **Improve tools and processes to monitor and track impact and progress.**			

ANNEX 8. SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Presentación

1. Antes de empezar, tenga la amabilidad de presentarse. ¿Puede describir su función/posición y el enfoque de su trabajo?

Barreras

2. ¿Cuáles son las principales barreras que enfrentan los jóvenes [con discapacidad/de afro-descendencia/de minoría sexual/otra vulnerabilidad]? Sondear:

   - En cuanto a la educación, entrenamiento y/o oportunidades para desarrollar habilidades de la vida
   - En cuanto al trabajo y/o oportunidades de empleo
   - En cuanto a la salud y acceso a servicios de salud
   - En cuanto al acceso a información incluyendo las Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones (TICs)
   - En cuanto a la inclusión social y/o experiencias de violencia y discriminación
   - En cuanto a la inclusión cívica y/o participación en sus comunidades, sociedad, posiciones de liderazgo, y/o la política

3. De las barreras que hemos hablado, ¿Cuáles son más importantes en su opinión? ¿Por qué?

4. ¿Usted cree que hay algunos jóvenes dentro del grupo que son más vulnerables o que enfrentan barreras nuevas/distintas (por ejemplo, jóvenes con algún tipo de discapacidad

Oportunidades y prácticas prometedoras:

5. ¿Cuáles son algunas oportunidades que estos jóvenes tienen (sea de la organización suya y/u otras organizaciones que conoce)?

6. ¿Qué diría usted que está funcionando bien para apoyar a estos jóvenes en la República Dominicana y permitirles desarrollar su potencial en los ámbitos cívico, político, social y/o económico?

COVID-19

7. ¿Cómo la pandemia del COVID-19 ha impactado estos jóvenes?

Cerrar

8. Al pensar en diferentes tipos de organizaciones internacionales, como USAID, ¿cómo pueden apoyar mejor a [organizaciones/asociaciones/empresas] como la suya para abordar estos problemas que enfrentan los jóvenes en [gobernanza / participación política / aplicación de la ley] los próximos 2-3 años dado el contexto actual?

9. Por favor, comparta cualquier otra idea o comentario final relacionado con este grupo de jóvenes [jóvenes con discapacidad, afro-descendencia, de minoría sexual, etc.].

10. ¿Tienes alguna recomendación sobre personas de organizaciones o jóvenes de su red con las que deberíamos conectar para esta investigación?