

## Skills for Youth Program



*Photo: Bárbara García Batista (AVE-RD project)*

The Skills for Youth Program (SYP) seeks to identify and rigorously evaluate innovative solutions to improve youth employment in Latin America. Specifically, one of its goals is to address the gap between youth skills and labor market demand.

J-PAL's Skills for Youth Program (SYP) will support the evaluation of new programs to address the mismatch between youth's skills and labor market demands in Latin America. Today, 19.1 percent of Latin Americans between the ages of 15 and 24 are neither employed nor currently being educated or trained (NEET). On the other hand, more than one third of Latin American firms believe that a key factor constraining the region's growth is the lack of adequate skills in the labor force. SYP aims to generate rigorous evidence

addressing this mismatch.

Using the evidence generated through randomized evaluations, we aim to disseminate lessons learned and scale up what works. To accomplish this, SYP will fund three to seven randomized evaluations of innovative programs and then encourage policymakers to use this new evidence to inform their decisions.

## **RESEARCH PRIORITIES**

The Skills for Youth Program (SYP) aims to generate rigorous evidence on what programs work to increase or improve youth employment. SYP focuses exclusively on Latin America and the Caribbean (excluding Brazil).

We have conducted a literature review with the research priorities for the region.

[/ Review Paper /](#)

Ten identified open questions extracted from the review paper are:

- What is the optimal structure of job training programs? How long should youth remain in training programs to fully develop their skills? Is there an ideal combination of in-classroom training and on-the-job training?
- How can we teach students "soft" skills that will help them work in teams, proactively solve problems, and innovate in their future jobs?
- What can training programs offer youth and employers to help them assess the quality and relevance of the training participants receive?
- Why is demand for trainings low? What are the greatest barriers to participating in training

programs and what are the most effective ways to address them?

- How can we improve the quality of what students learn in vocational training programs? How can we improve the content of these programs? Do we need to select or prepare instructors differently?
- How can targeting of youth employment programs be improved to identify youth who are likely to benefit from these programs? How can youth be informed about which options are best for them?
- What is the best way to provide targeted information to youth about existing training options and the labor market impacts of those programs?
- How can we connect educational institutions and potential employers to ensure that training provides adequate skills for the job market?
- Can helping youth navigate the transition to the labor force improve other aspects of their well-being, such as psychological and emotional well-being, health, and participation in criminal activities?
- Are young people's expectations and aspirations mismatched with the realities of the labor market? Can providing youth with information about the realities of the labor market help them to make better decisions?

#### Co-Chairs and Review Board

J-PAL affiliates [Marianne Bertrand](#) (University of Chicago) and [Bruno Crépon](#) (ENSAE, École Polytechnique) will serve as co-chairs. The two co-chairs, plus J-PAL LAC's Scientific Director [Francisco Gallego](#) (PUC Chile) and J-PAL affiliate [Claudio Ferraz](#) will serve on the review board.

## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS OF FIRST ROUND OF PROPOSALS**

In the first round, SYP funded two proposals:

*Impacts and Cost-Effectiveness of Post-Secondary Vocational Scholarships for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students in Colombia*

*Researchers: Juan Saavedra, [Eric Bettinger](#), [Michael Kremer](#), Carlos Medina, and Christian Posso*

*In this study, researchers will collaborate with Sapiencia, a public-private partnership that promotes post-secondary vocational training in Medellín, Colombia, to evaluate the impacts of post-secondary vocational scholarships for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth.*

*Working While Studying in Uruguay*

*Researchers: Thomas Le Barbanchon and Diego Ubfal*

*This evaluation studies the effects of a program offering temporary employment to young people enrolled in schools in Uruguay on employment, earnings, educational attainment, time use, and non-cognitive skills.*

In the second round, SYP funded two proposals:

*Building a better future with informed investment in higher education:  
Evaluating the impact of personalized provision of information on  
earnings and financial aid in the Dominican Republic*

*Researcher: [Christopher Neilson](#)*

*Researchers will collaborate with the government of the Dominican Republic to construct an information system and deploy a state-of-the-art application that leverages innovations in artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve the quality of personalized information provision.*

*Making the Leap from School to the Workforce in Chiapas*

*Researcher: [Craig McIntosh](#) (UC San Diego)*

*This pilot examines the impact of entrepreneurial training for students in Mexican high schools on earnings, employment, and socioemotional skills. The purpose of the pilot is to a) conduct a small qualitative/quantitative study comparing an entrepreneurial curriculum alone to an enhanced curriculum that focuses on growth mindset, b) understand the incentive structures that work to get normal secondary teachers engaged with the curriculum, and c) field test the survey and tracking protocols for a larger, properly-powered RCT to follow.*

*Overcoming Informational and Behavioral Obstacles in Access to Tertiary Education*

*Researchers: [Juan Saavedra](#), [Eric Bettinger](#), [Michael Kremer](#), [Carlos Medina](#), [Stephanie Majerowicz](#), [Christopher Nielson](#), [Christian Posso](#)*

*Researchers will collaborate with the government of Colombia to investigate whether information and behavioral frictions affect the decision of whether and where to enroll in tertiary education. The project also tests low-cost, innovative, personalized approaches to overcome informational and behavioral obstacles at scale using a randomized research design.*

## **CONTACT**

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Published on *The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab*  
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