BRIDGING THE SKILLS GAP
**Why do so many youth in Latin America and the Caribbean complete secondary education without the skills they need to join the workforce?**

**Findings**

1. There is a hierarchy of critical skills needed for employment.

2. The relative demand for cognitive and technical skills varies by:
   - **Country**
   - **Economic sector**
   - **Firm size**

3. Educators and employers lack a common language to define, and measure social emotional skills.

4. Within the hierarchy, social emotional skills are the most highly demanded by employers.

5. Secondary school students are expected to pursue higher education before entering the workforce.

6. Despite these challenges, innovative initiatives are improving the skills of lower secondary students, so they are better equipped to succeed in school, work and life.

**Recommendations**

- **Collaboration**
  - Employers and educators define social emotional skills, agree on priority skills and assess skill development similarly.

- **Communication**
  - Employers communicate which skills they require from employees with a secondary education.

- **Capacity Building**
  - Education systems support teachers to teach social emotional skills in the classroom.

- **Scale-up**
  - Governments implement and scale-up innovative education models that promote social emotional skills and provide labor bridging services.
INNOVATIVE MODELS THAT BRIDGE THE SKILLS GAP

GOVERNMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN ARE BEGINNING TO PLACE YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY AT THE TOP OF THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA.

To bridge the skills gap, countries are implementing innovative models that bolster youth employability by providing post-secondary connections for students entering the workforce.

**EL SALVADOR**

The Gradual Educational Model of Technical and Technological Learning (MEGATEC) tailors technical education to the demands of the local labor market. MEGATEC facilitates collaboration and coordination between secondary and tertiary-level technical institutions, and works to improve quality and access for students studying or working in technical professions. The program implements progressive educational policies such as eliminating redundant coursework, and providing flexible schooling models for students with varying needs and education tracks.

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

New Employment and Opportunities for Youth (NEO-DR) works to increase employment opportunities for low-income youth living in urban areas in 13 provinces across the country. The program is working to improve the quality of technical training programs by building teacher capacity and developing curricula aligned with the labor market. NEO-DR also works to support policies that promote youth employment, and focuses closely on youth who are neither working nor in school (NINIs) as well as young women who are pregnant or have children.

**COLOMBIA**

One of the oldest public-private education collaborations in Colombia, the Alliance model operates at both the regional level (in partnership with the Caldas regional government) and the local level (in partnership with Manizales municipal government) to offer thorough technical skills development and help students transition to the workforce. At the regional level, the Alliance has partnered with local secondary schools, universities, and the Coffee Growers Committee in Caldas to offer a tuition-free program in which upper secondary students can earn a technical degree or receive university credits. Known as the University in the Coffee Fields, the model offers a curriculum that is locally relevant, thereby promoting a new generation of coffee growers and improving the region's competitiveness.

**ABOUT FHI 360**

FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions. FHI 360's post-primary education programs support youth by strengthening the capacity of education systems to provide relevant, quality learning opportunities and by aligning education policies with student needs and labor market demands. Our interventions focus on strengthening education at the classroom, school and system levels while ensuring that youth receive comprehensive support across the learning continuum, from transitioning from primary to lower secondary school, to advancing to upper secondary and tertiary programs, to successfully joining the workforce.

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