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**LONGER-RUN
PERSPECTIVES ON
INTERGENERATIONAL
MOBILITY IN LATIN
AMERICA: 1933-1992**

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LONGER-RUN PERSPECTIVES ON INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA: 1933-1992¹

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Abstract

This background paper shows the development of intergenerational mobility of education in Latin America for people born between 1933 and 1992. New estimates for relative and absolute educational mobility for 18 Latin American countries are provided, highlighting differences among countries, cohorts, and genders. Intergenerational mobility trends in selected countries are discussed and evaluated within the region's historical context. The background paper is accompanied by a dataset containing all estimates of intergenerational mobility over time for each country.

JEL Code: I24, I26, J24, J62, N36

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1. Introduction

The recent rising interest in income inequality has given rise to another relevant question for researchers and policy makers: how persistent is inequality over time? This one cannot be answered by observing inequality snapshots. Arguably, most people would perceive a society as more just or fair, even if it had a constantly high degree of income inequality, if in each generation families changed their ranks on the social ladder. However, suggestive evidence shows that inequality and its degree of intergenerational persistence are interconnected (Corak, 2013). Despite undeniable progress over the last centuries, the ideal world where inequalities depend only on the effort exerted by individuals, and not on circumstances they cannot influence, like the families they were born into, still seems far away.

Of course, substantial heterogeneities exist around the world. While in some countries family background is the main determinant of individual success, other countries show higher levels of intergenerational mobility and are closer to the objective of equal opportunities. Developing countries, such as most Latin American countries, are more likely to belong to the former group than to the latter (Behrman et al., 2001; Daude & Robano, 2015; Hertz et al., 2008; Torche, 2014). However, there are also important and interesting differences between Latin American countries (Neidhöfer, Serrano & Gasparini, 2018). For instance, intergenerational mobility levels and trends differ substantially across countries. It is important to observe and contextualize these differences in order to understand the dynamic nature of inequality and its persistence over time.

This background paper traces the intergenerational persistence of unequal educational opportunities in 18 Latin American countries. More specifically, it shows the strength of the association between the educational attainment of parents and children in different cohorts and in different countries. The produced estimates build upon and update the analysis of intergenerational mobility in Latin America provided by Neidhöfer, Serrano and Gasparini (2018). They provide new evidence on absolute and relative educational mobility for older and younger cohorts of Latin American residents. The patterns are also analyzed separately by gender, linked to economic indicators, and, for selected countries, placed within the region's particular historical context. Finally, the measurement of intergenerational income mobility and its relationship to educational mobility is discussed and contextualized.

2. Conceptualization and measurement of intergenerational mobility

Since humans organize within societies, the power of affluent families over certain resources may persist for generations. Drawing from a long-standing literature in sociology, Becker and Tomes (1979; 1986) brought the topic to modern economics with their pioneering work that models and conceptualizes the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status. In these models, the transmission of economic inequality from one generation to the next is shown to be mainly related to the inheritability of abilities and other endowments, as well as parental investments. Recent works on intergenerational mobility, including those by Raj Chetty and co-authors (Chetty et al., 2014a; 2014b), brought the topic back into the public interest and placed it high on the political agenda by showing empirically with high quality data that (for instance in the US) social mobility is far lower than many people realize (see also Alesina, Stantcheva & Teso, 2018).

The analysis will focus on the association of parental education with the educational achievements of their children. The aim of such an analysis is to approximate the intergenerational persistence of latent socioeconomic status, or well-being, of families over two generations in a society. Theoretically, it could be measured in other ways, such as wealth, lifetime income, or occupation (see Black & Devereux, 2012; Blanden, 2013; Jäntti & Jenkins, 2015). However, the outcome measures used to measure intergenerational persistence crucially depend on the available data. There are very few countries where longitudinal administrative data on parents' income or wealth can be linked to the same or similarly qualitative high records of their children. Studies of developing countries, in particular, usually rely on cross-sectional household surveys where parents and children can be linked by retrospective questions about parental education.

Measuring the intergenerational persistence of education has two advantages. First, education is an important driver of human development. Second, it is a meaningful proxy of social status. Indeed, measures based on education, income, and occupation all quantify the intergenerational association between closely-related summary measures of long-run socioeconomic status (see Hertz et al., 2008). As shown by Blanden (2013), estimates of intergenerational income mobility and educational mobility across countries are highly correlated with each other. Education also has practical advantages with respect to income-related measures. First, it is time-invariant in adulthood, while income has a much higher volatility over a lifetime. Hence, a single cross-section is sufficient to obtain consistent estimates of educational mobility, while measuring income mobility requires panel data with several observations (Solon, 1992). Second, retrospective information on the educational attainments of parents is more reliable than on income and occupation. Therefore, for a cross-country study of the 18 Latin American countries under examination, the education of individuals and their parents, recorded using retrospective questions in the survey questionnaires, is arguably the most suitable alternative for analyzing the intergenerational persistence of socioeconomic status, as it reduces bias deriving from measurement error (Solon, 1992), lifecycle bias (Nybom & Stuhler, 2016), and coresidency bias (Emran, Green & Shilpi, 2018).

Like income, the persistence of education comprises two dimensions, absolute and relative, which are both relevant in a context of poverty and high income inequality like the one most Latin American countries have experienced for decades. On one hand, it is important to observe absolute persistence measures that comprise the *structural mobility* component of changes in educational attainment over time, for instance due to educational expansions. On the other, it is important to capture the positional changes of families within the distribution, also known as *exchange mobility*. This analysis presents intergenerational persistence of education in Latin America from an absolute and relative perspective.

A widely used measure for the intergenerational persistence of education is the slope coefficient (β) from a linear regression where the education of children is the dependent variable and the education of their parents the independent variable, both measured in years of education.

$$Y^c = \alpha + \beta Y^p + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

Here, Y are the years of education of parents and children, respectively, α is a constant, and ε the error term. β reflects the degree of regression to the population mean between the two generations. This coefficient can be standardized to control for differences in the standard deviation (σ) of education in the children's and parents' generation:

$$r = \beta \cdot \frac{\sigma^p}{\sigma^c} \quad (2)$$

If no control variables are included in the estimation of equation (1), the standardization shown in (2) is equivalent to the Pearson's correlation coefficient. Both indexes, the slope and correlation coefficient, capture structural and exchange mobility. Therefore, r “corrects” β for changes in inequality in the distribution of the outcome (years of education). As there is a lack of consensus regarding which of the two is more suitable for cross-country (and cross-cohort) comparisons, both are reported (see Jäntti & Jenkins, 2011). Furthermore, persistence is measured by Spearman's rank correlation (ρ) applied to the ranks of parents and children in their respective distributions. This last index captures the pure positional (or relative) dimension of intergenerational persistence (Chetty et al., 2014a,b; Nybom & Stuhler, 2017). Higher values of β , r , and ρ display a higher association between parents' and children's education, stronger intergenerational persistence, and lower intergenerational mobility.

Further intuitive measures of absolute persistence of education are so-called transition probabilities. For Latin America, it is relevant to focus on the probability that children from a disadvantaged social background, measured by parental education, will complete secondary school (see e.g., Neidhöfer, Serrano & Gasparini, 2018). This measure of upward mobility from the bottom of the distribution offers an intuitive picture of a society's opportunity structure, although it does not reveal much about the rising overall pattern of education. Therefore, it is also insightful to display the probability that children from an advantaged background complete secondary school. Advantaged parents are defined as those who have completed secondary school or more, while disadvantaged parents are those who have not completed a secondary education. Comparing both indexes and their trends offers a comprehensive view on absolute educational persistence and upward mobility in a society or groups therein, such as men and women.

These summary measures for intergenerational persistence share the same advantage of high comparability between different countries and time periods. However, one of their main technical limitations is their relative impreciseness in cases of measurement error that might be present in household surveys, although these are lower for education than for other outcomes like income. This affects the slope and the correlation coefficient, which rely on the complete distribution of years of education and is less limiting for other measures that only use data on the completion of secondary education. When there are few observations within one of the two groups (children of parents with complete or incomplete secondary education), it affects the transition probabilities more than the regression and correlation measures. In this scenario, the low predicting power of the probabilities can cause very imprecise estimates.

From a conceptual point of view, every summary measure of intergenerational persistence is limited by the lack of information about the channels driving the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission. Simply observing the magnitude and change of these measures does not reveal whether the observed differences in persistence across countries are driven by differences in institutions, culture, or some other feature. These aspects can only be addressed either by conducting further investigations at the macro level, or by estimating the causal intergenerational effects driving the transmission of socioeconomic status (on the latter, see the review by Sacerdote, 2011). Even so, measures of absolute and relative intergenerational mobility reveal interesting aspects about equality of opportunity and its development over time.

3. Data

The sample comes from the annual opinion survey *Latinobarómetro*. For this study, the most important feature of the *Latinobarómetro* survey is the inclusion of retrospective questions on parental education (since 1998), which is not a universal characteristic of all household surveys in Latin America (see Neidhöfer, 2019). Another advantage of *Latinobarómetro* is that it is specifically developed for cross-country analyses and uses the same questionnaire and codification of survey items in all countries and survey waves. The survey includes 18 Latin American countries, while its representativeness reached 100 percent of the total population in all countries around 2000. Estimates of educational attainment and its distribution deriving from *Latinobarómetro* are highly comparable to estimates obtained with national household surveys (Neidhöfer, Serrano & Gasparini, 2018). Because *Latinobarómetro* only includes information on the parent with the highest educational attainment, researchers cannot estimate father-son and mother-daughter associations. However, measuring intergenerational persistence using only the parent with the highest educational attainment is the method commonly followed in the economics and sociology literature (see Black & Devereux, 2012; Erikson, 1984). For both parents and children, completed years of education is coded as a metric variable that ranges from 0 (no schooling) to 15 (completed university degree).

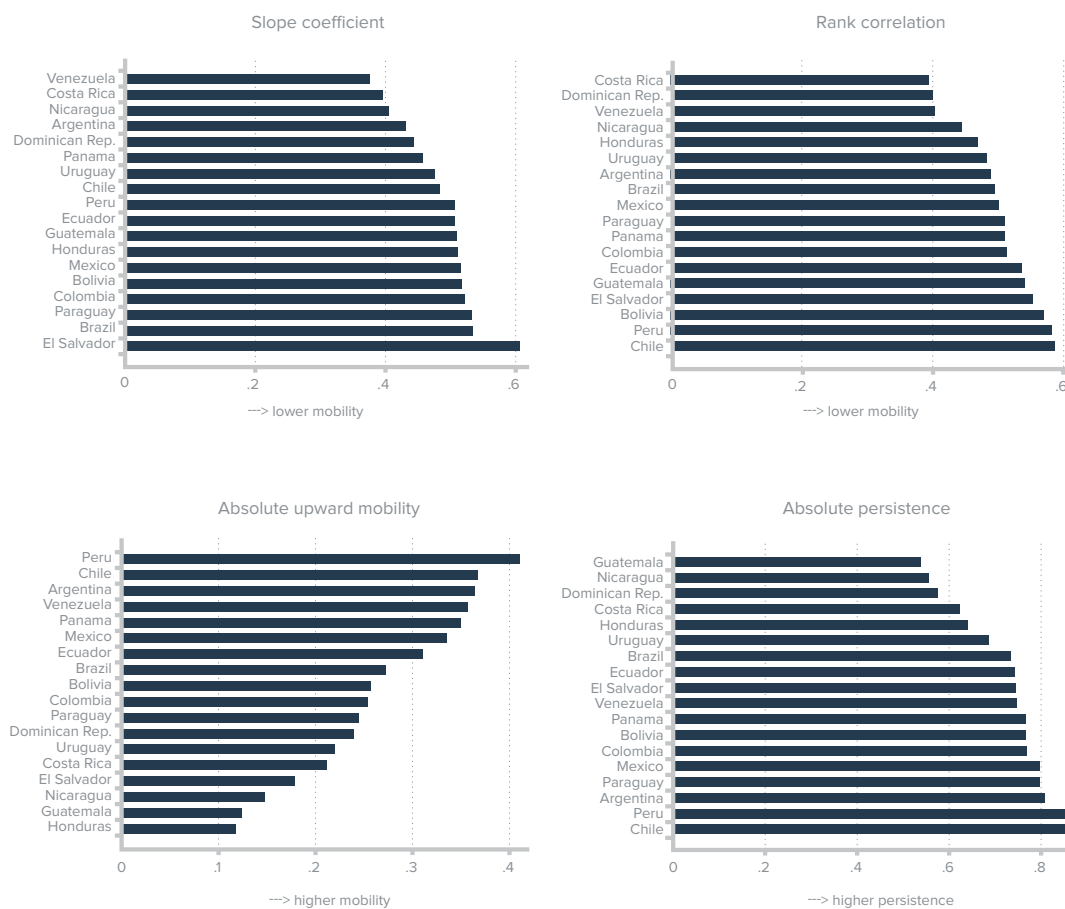
The sample comprises individuals born between 1933 and 1992, who were at least 23 years old when surveyed. While the main restriction criteria is the availability of education data for themselves and their parents, the age limit ensures that individuals are more likely to have completed their education. Since parental education is retrieved using retrospective questions, whether individuals and their parents reside in the same household is not relevant for inclusion in the sample. The final sample comprises 217,333 individuals. The sub-samples used to compute single point estimates range from 318 to 3,835 observations per country-cohort cell. The estimates are obtained by weighting each observation by the inverse probability of selection, normalizing the weights over the different survey waves from 1998 to 2017, and controlling for gender and survey year fixed effects.

4. Intergenerational mobility in Latin America

Figure 1 shows intergenerational mobility rankings, taking the average over the entire sample, i.e., people born between 1933 and 1992. Slope coefficient and rank correlation, which both use the entire distribution of years of education, display similar rankings. While the latter purely measures relative mobility, the former includes aspects of absolute mobility. Indeed, there are some discrepancies, but they are more evident in the absolute mobility rankings. Chile, Nicaragua, and Peru are the most striking cases. Chile and Peru are the countries with the highest rank correlation, and hence the lowest relative mobility. However, they are also the two countries with the highest absolute mobility, measured by the probability that children from low-educated families complete secondary education. The explanation for this is visible in the last graph—the probability that children from high educated families complete secondary education. This probability is highest in exactly those two countries, Chile and Peru. Although the educational opportunities of disadvantaged children are rather high, on average, the average persistence of families at the top of the distribution is such that no rank changes (in terms of educational attainment) take place. Nicaragua is the opposite case. Rather high relative mobility and low absolute mobility are observed. In this case, the incon-

gruence comes from relatively low persistence at the top of the educational distribution co-existing with low average levels of educational upward mobility at the bottom. This highlights the importance of displaying absolute and relative mobility.

Figure 1. Intergenerational mobility rankings. Average of cohorts 1933-1992.



Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

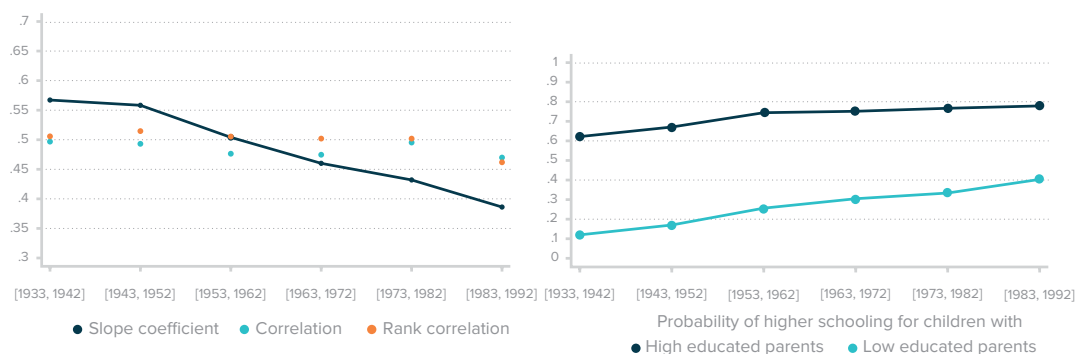
Notes. Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Slope coefficient is the estimated coefficient β in equation (1), while rank correlation is Spearson's rank correlation of parents' and children's years of education. Absolute upward mobility is the likelihood that children with low educated parents complete secondary education. Absolute persistence is the same likelihood for children with highly educated parents.

Figure 2 show the trends in relative and absolute mobility for the average over all Latin American countries. Table A1 in the Appendix shows all estimated indexes for each country and cohort separately. Absolute mobility increased substantially over the almost 60-year period under analysis, while relative mobility (especially measured by the rank correlation) stayed almost constant over time. However, there was also an increase in exchange mobility for the youngest cohort. Inequality in the completion of secondary education also declined substantially. In the oldest cohort, the probability of advantaged children completing secondary school was almost five times higher than for disadvantaged children, while in the youngest cohort it was less than two times higher. On average for all countries, the probability of disadvantaged children completing secondary education increased by almost 30 percentage points.

Measured by the slope coefficient, the countries where mobility rose most over time are Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, and Venezuela. In contrast, mobility stayed almost constant and even slightly decreased over the observation period in Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In

these countries, the educational opportunities of disadvantaged families did not increase: the probability that children from low-educated families complete secondary education is constantly lower than 20 percent. In comparison, in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, in the oldest cohort (1933-1942) the probability was lower than 20 percent, while in the youngest cohort (1983-1992) the probability is higher than 50 percent.

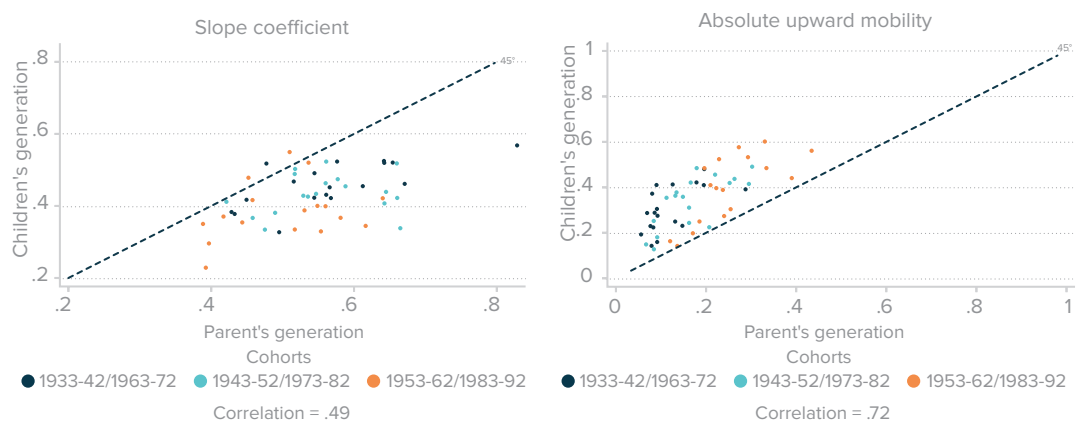
Figure 2. Intergenerational mobility trends in Latin America. Relative and absolute mobility.



Latin America (unweighted average). Source: Latinobarómetro, 18 countries.
 Notes. Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Slope coefficient is the estimated coefficient β in equation (1). Absolute upward mobility is the likelihood of children with low-educated parents completing secondary education. Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

Figure 3 puts the mobility experienced by a cohort in relation to the mobility experienced by their parents' cohort. Children experienced a higher aggregate level of absolute mobility than their parents in all countries. Furthermore, a country's current mobility is highly correlated with its past mobility. However, although the correlation between the two time periods is relatively high, the changes in mobility over time are much less path dependent than could be assumed.

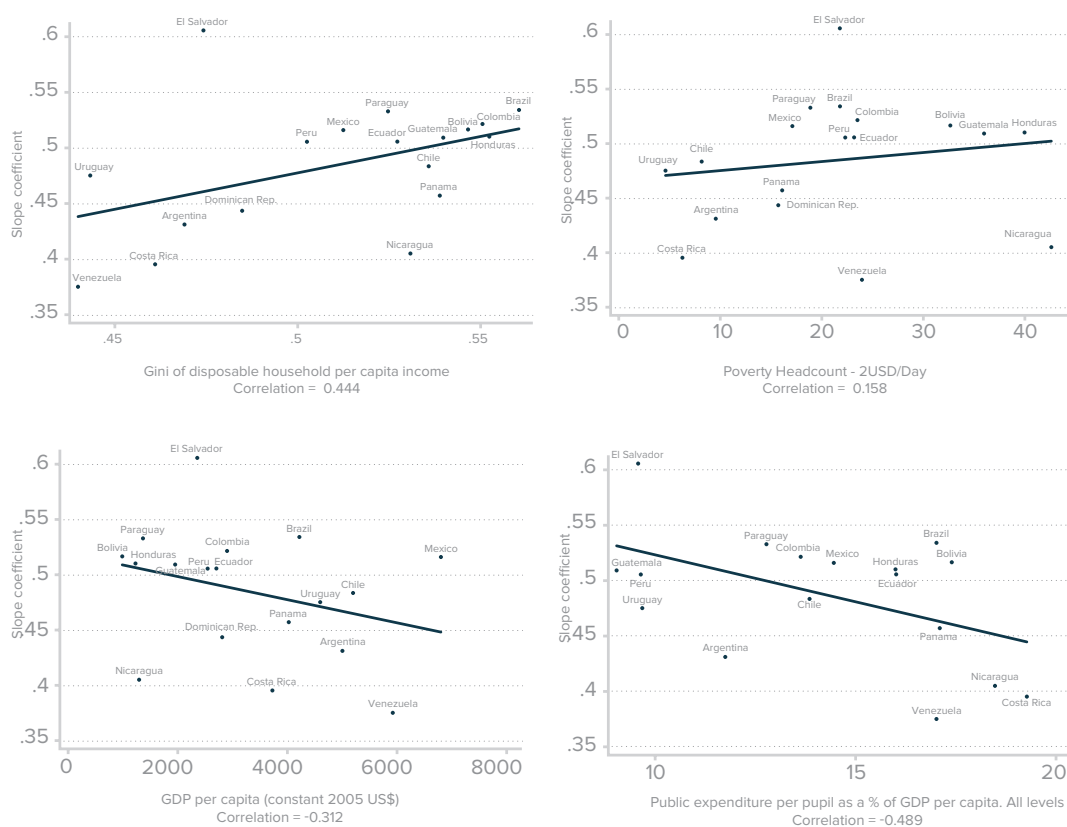
Figure 3. Relationship between intergenerational mobility over time

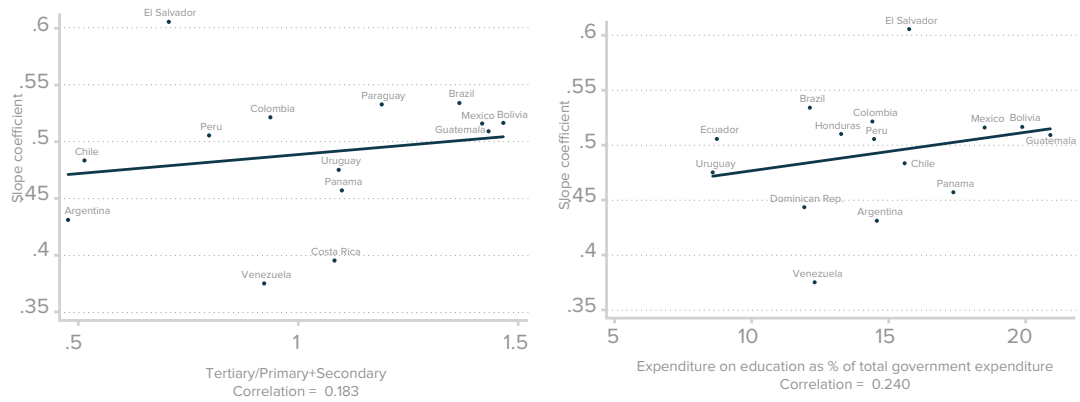


Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.
 Notes. Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Slope coefficient is the estimated coefficient β in equation (1). Absolute upward mobility is the likelihood of children with low-educated parents completing secondary education.

Figure 4 shows the correlation between a country's average degree of intergenerational mobility, measured by the slope coefficient, and different macroeconomic indicators and institutional characteristics. The graph shows that income inequality and poverty are negatively associated with intergenerational mobility (i.e. positively with the slope coefficient of intergenerational persistence, as the graph shows), while GDP per capita and public expenditures in education have a positive cross-country correlation with mobility. The correlation between educational expenditures and intergenerational mobility is particularly high. Two more features of the education system reveal an interesting pattern. First, the more a country invests in tertiary education in comparison to its investments in primary and secondary education, the lower its level of intergenerational mobility. Second, the more a country invests in education in comparison to other public expenditures, for instance in health and infrastructure, the lower its level of mobility. The first suggestive finding shows that the timing of investment is important and investing later in life might even have regressive impacts, especially in selective education systems (see Heckman & Mosso, 2014, on the timing of human capital investments). The second shows that education, although an important factor for mobility, should not be the sole area of focus. Indeed, other factors, such as health and nutrition, are crucial for human development and shocks to these dimensions contribute to decreased upward mobility among vulnerable children and, eventually, to the rising intergenerational persistence of human capital (see e.g. Ferreira & Schady, 2009; Almond, Currie & Duque, 2018).

Figure 4. Association of intergenerational mobility with macroeconomic and institutional characteristics





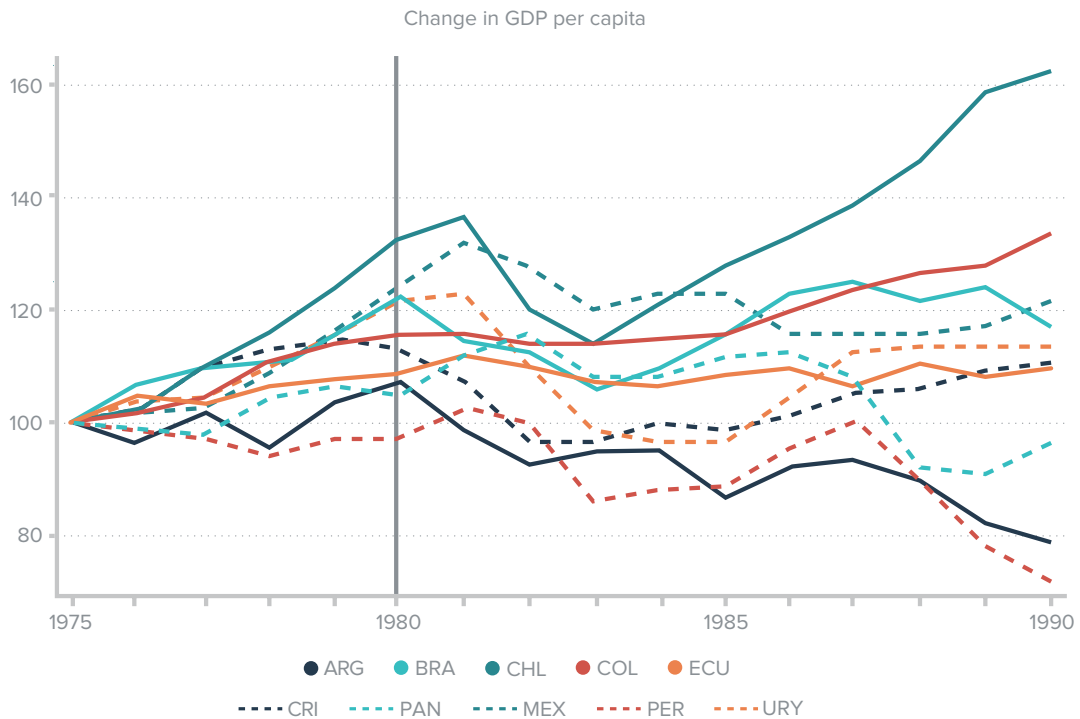
Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates, and World Bank data.

Notes. Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Slope coefficient is the estimated coefficient β in equation (1).

5. Children of the ‘lost decade’

To learn more about the development of intergenerational mobility in Latin America and the factors associated with it, this section analyzes one particular period in the region’s history and compares individual countries. One shared experience within the historical context of Latin America is the economic crisis of the 1980s. Figure 5 shows the change in GDP per capita from 1975 to 1990. The crisis and recovery was rather different across countries.

Figure 5. Change in GDP per capita in selected countries 1975-1990 (index year is 1975)



Source: World Bank Data, own elaboration.

Notes. GDP per capita in constant 2005 USD. Index year is 1975.

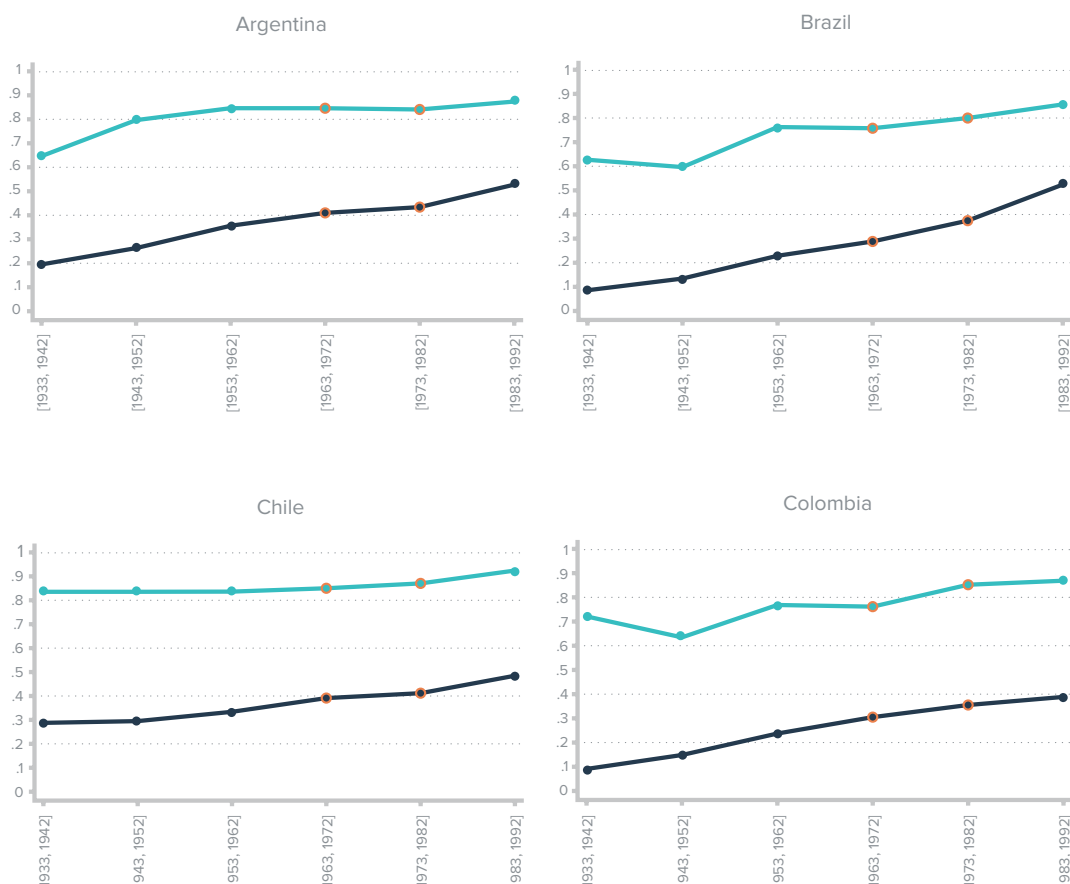
While growth rates declined in this period—also known as the lost decade—inequality and poverty increased substantially. It might be expected that social indicators, such as educational attainments, would stagnate for individuals affected by the crisis (Lustig, Fishlow & Bourguignon, 2000). However, the expected overall impact of aggregate economic shocks on human capital within socioeconomic groups is unclear because of two potentially contrasting forces: an income and a substitution effect (Ferreira & Schady, 2009). The former indicates that economic contractions provoke educational dropouts due to household income losses and parental job loss (e.g., Cerutti et al., 2019; Duryea, Lam & Levison, 2007; Thomas et al., 2004). Conversely, the latter leads to higher educational enrollment because of the declining opportunity cost of leaving school to enter the labor force (e.g., Duryea & Arends-Kuenning, 2003; McKenzie, 2003; Schady, 2004). Because the studies reached different conclusions about pro- or counter-cyclical effects on schooling in different countries, the resulting overall effect on educational attainment is ambiguous, as are the effects of the Latin American debt crisis on intergenerational mobility. Individuals in the 1963-1972 and 1973-1982 cohorts were in school during the lost decade and should be the most affected by the crisis in terms of educational attainment. This section will focus on the development of intergenerational mobility in selected countries, paying particular attention to these cohorts. While a deep analysis of mobility trends and identification of their underlying mechanisms is beyond the scope of this work, it will highlight some remarkable common patterns across countries.

Figure 6 shows the likelihood of secondary school completion for children with low (lower curve) and highly (higher curve) educated parents in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia. The point estimates for the cohorts most affected by the crisis are highlighted. The *children of the lost decade* in both groups are affected, although to a very different degree. In Argentina, the predicted probability that children from highly educated families complete secondary schooling is very high (between 80 and 90 percent), then stagnates over the highlighted time period, and rises again for individuals that went to school between 1989 and 2010. The upward mobility of disadvantaged children rises constantly, but suffers a visible slowdown for individuals born between 1963 and 1982. In Brazil and Colombia the completion rates of both groups were initially lower. However, for individuals that went to school during the lost decade, the trends in both socioeconomic groups remain steeper. In Chile, where the intergenerational persistence of advantaged children and the upward mobility of disadvantaged ones are at similarly high levels as Argentina in the 1960 and 1970s, stagnation is more evident for children from low-educated families. Educational attainments of children from highly educated families even improve. Comparing this (stylized) evidence suggests that highly educated families in Brazil, Chile, and Colombia were more likely to behave counter-cyclically during the debt crisis with respect to their human capital investments than those in Argentina.

One likely explanation for differences in educational attainments during economic crises, as evidenced by the literature, lies in social spending and public investments in human capital (e.g., Davies, Zhang & Zeng, 2005; Ferreira & Schady, 2009). During the 1980s, austerity programs forced Latin American governments to make structural adjustments and reallocate public expenditures, for instance, in education (Lustig, 1995). However, as shown in Figure 7 for selected countries for which comparable data is available, the level of expenditure in the pre-crisis period, and the adaptation to the economic downturn, differ substantially. Interestingly, in some countries this spending does not decrease immediately in the first years of the crisis nor in the subsequent years. Other evidence shows that in Argentina, there was no drop in public educational expenditure relative to other types of public expenditures, and no fall in educational coverage or enrollment ratios during the crisis (Beccaria & Carciofi, 1995). Public spending was also rather pro-poor over the entire period (Cruces and Gasparini, 2009). In

Chile and Colombia, public educational expenditures rose in the first years of the crisis; then they declined in Chile while they persisted at a new, higher level in Colombia. In Brazil, public educational expenditures fell from 3.4 percent to 1 percent of GDP between 1980 and 1984, and slowly rose to 1.7 percent in 1994 and then to 3.9 percent in 1999 (Torche, 2010).

Figure 6. Likelihood of upward mobility and top persistence during the ‘lost decade’ in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia



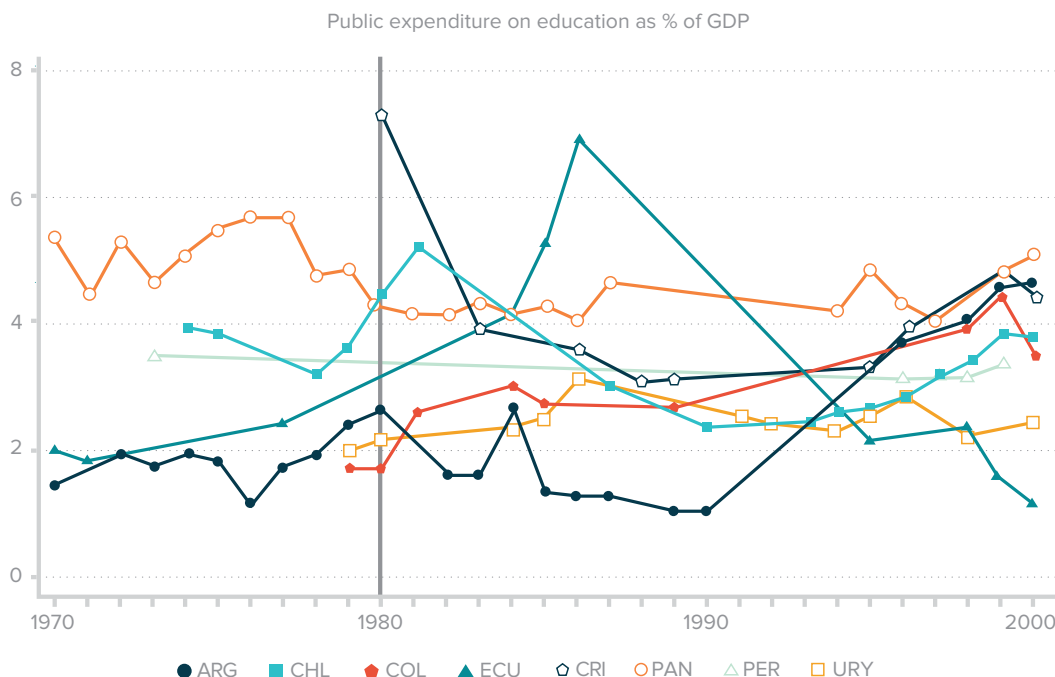
Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

Notes: Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. The lower line shows the likelihood that children of low-educated parents complete secondary education (upward mobility), while the upper line shows the same likelihood for children with highly educated parents (top persistence). Highlighted cohorts went to school during the crisis of the 1980s.

Costa Rica, Panama, Peru, and Uruguay also offer interesting case studies. Figure 8 shows that these countries have similar patterns of intergenerational mobility. While in Panama and Peru completion rates stagnate at the bottom and slightly decrease at the top, in Costa Rica and Uruguay they decline for both socioeconomic groups, a pattern that confirms the decline in overall educational attainment in Costa Rica found by Funkhouser (1999). In Costa Rica, public educational expenditures fell by around 50 percent at the beginning of the 1980s, and slowly recovered at the end of the 1990s (see Figure 7). In Panama, they declined from 1978 onwards and persisted at a new, lower level. In Uruguay, educational expenditures did not change, or even increased, over the 1980s and 1990s. Although there is no comparable data for Peru during the crisis, available observations of public educational expenditures in

the 1970s and late 1990s show a very similar level of expenditure. Furthermore, available evidence on the drop in social spending from 1981 to 1991 suggests a similar development for public educational expenditures (Brown & Hunter, 1999). By comparison, in Ecuador and Mexico, secondary completion rates steadily increased for both socioeconomic groups (see Figure 8). During the first years of the Latin American debt crisis, the two countries behaved differently regarding public educational expenditures. In Ecuador, expenditures tripled and then fell back to pre-crisis levels in the 1990s (see Figure 7). In Mexico, they dropped from 3 percent to 1.6 percent of GDP between 1980 and 1984 and then recovered to 3.7 in 1990 (Torche, 2010).

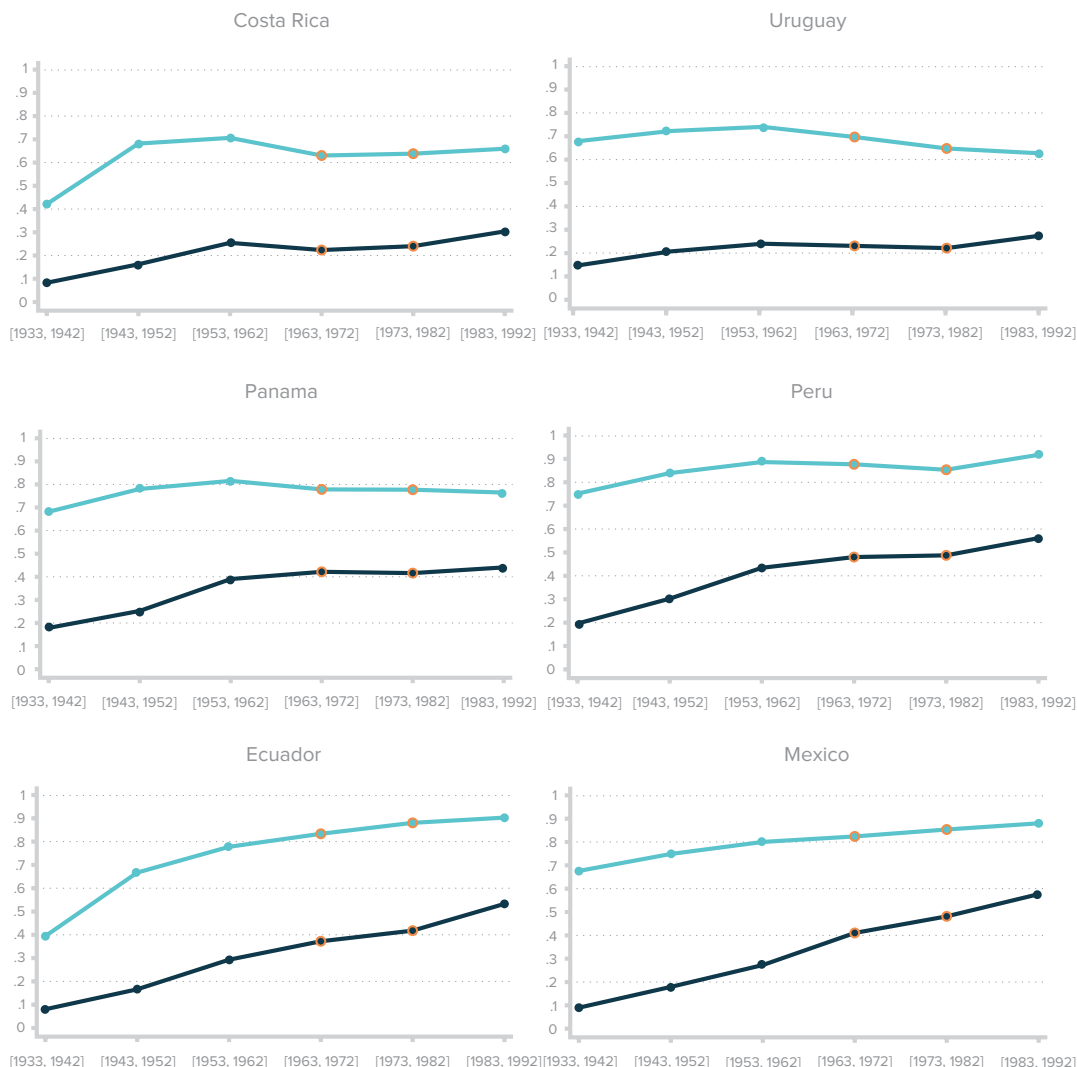
Figure 7. Public expenditure on education in selected countries 1970-2000



Source: World Bank data, own elaboration.

In conclusion, this very stylized and descriptive analysis of educational mobility trends during the Latin American debt crisis shows that, although public educational expenditures may contribute to intergenerational mobility and may be able to cushion the effect of a crisis, different characteristics of this expenditure have to be taken into account, as highlighted in Section 4. Other features, such as social spending and assistance programs for the most vulnerable, might play an even more important role, for instance, by offsetting the effect of declining family income on the educational attainments of vulnerable children. The role of authoritarian regimes in defining the structure of the economy, social spending, and the entire society in the period before and during the crisis in some Latin American countries must be taken into account as well (see Brown & Hunter, 1999; 2004). Digging deeper into the mechanisms that might define the intergenerational persistence of education, especially during crises, goes beyond the scope of this work. However, the overall picture of the development of social intergenerational mobility in Latin America provided here in a unified framework confirms that there are interesting questions for future research.

Figure 8. Likelihood of upward mobility and top persistence during the ‘lost decade’ in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Panama, Peru, Ecuador, and Mexico



Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

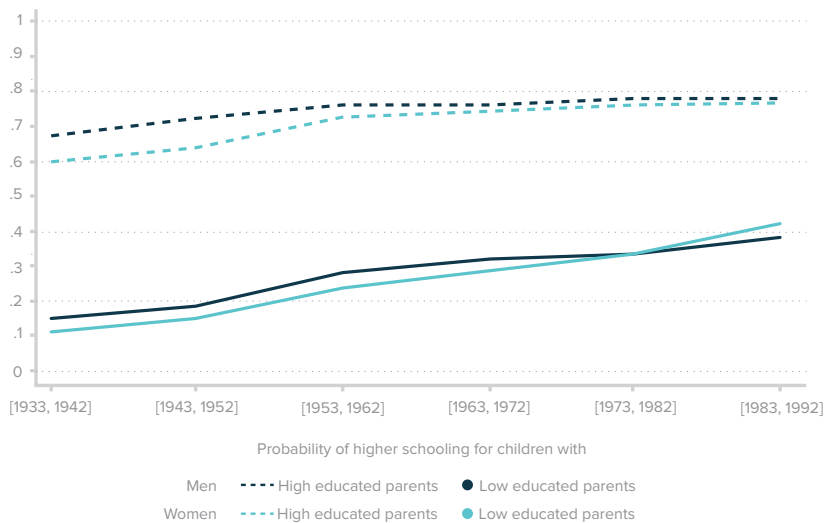
Notes: Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Lower line shows the likelihood that children of low-educated parents complete secondary education, while upper line shows the same likelihood for children with highly educated parents. Highlighted cohorts went to school during the crisis of the 1980s.

6. Intergenerational mobility of men and women

Figure 9 shows intergenerational mobility trends measured by upward mobility and top persistence estimates for men and women with respect to their parent with the highest educational attainment. The trends are rather similar and, most of the time, women’s mobility is lower than men’s. This changes for the youngest cohort, where women’s upward mobility surpasses men’s. Interestingly, average secondary school completion rates stagnated during the lost decade for men and women with highly educated parents, but only for men with low-educated parents. The increase in average completion rates of women from disadvantaged families seems less affected for the cohorts impacted by the crisis.

However, the reversal in men's and women's mobility does not apply to all countries. Figure 10 shows the difference in the probabilities of disadvantaged men and women completing secondary education over time. While disadvantaged women belonging to the 1943-1952 cohort had a lower probability of completing secondary education than their male peers in all but three countries, in 13 of 18 Latin American countries, the likelihood of disadvantaged women in the 1983-1992 cohort completing secondary education is higher than the same likelihood for disadvantaged men. In four of these countries, the difference between the two groups is more than ten percentage points.

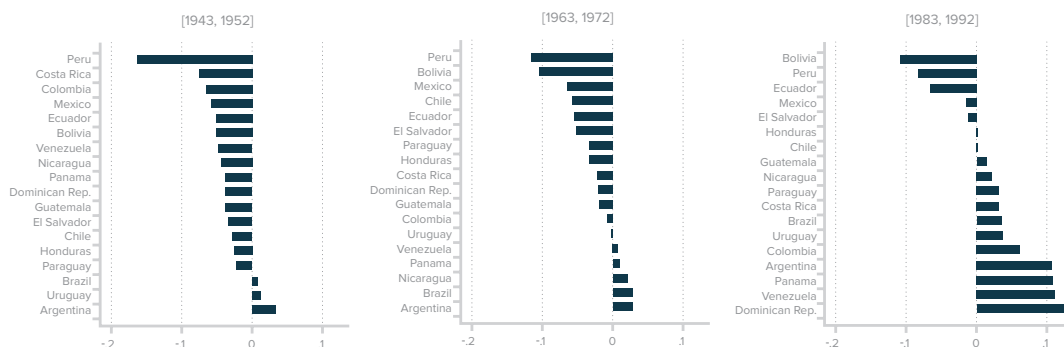
Figure 9. Intergenerational mobility of men and women in Latin America.



Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

Notes: Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Probability of higher schooling is the likelihood that children complete secondary education. Low-educated parents have not completed secondary school, while highly educated parents have at least completed secondary school.

Figure 10. Difference in the likelihood of disadvantaged women and men completing secondary education over time.



Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

Notes: Intergenerational mobility measured in terms of educational attainment. Values show the difference in the likelihood that women and men with low educated parents complete secondary education. Positive values indicate that the likelihood of women is higher than the likelihood of men (e.g. 0.1 indicates a positive difference of 10 percentage points). Negative values indicate that the likelihood of women is lower than the likelihood of men (e.g. -0.1 indicates a negative difference of 10 percentage points). Low-educated parents have not completed secondary school. Labels show the corresponding cohorts.

7. From education to income mobility

As explained in Section 2, an analysis of intergenerational mobility in Latin America on educational attainments has several practical and conceptual benefits. Indeed, the data requirements to measure intergenerational income mobility are such that consistent estimates are impossible to obtain for most countries (see Jäntti & Jenkins, 2015). Estimates based on directly observed links between parents’ and children’s lifetime incomes are available for very few countries (e.g. Canada, Norway, Sweden). Although alternative methodologies have been developed for estimating income mobility, they are based either on administrative data or panel data that includes multiple income observations for parents and children. These are usually unavailable, especially in Latin American countries.

An additional alternative methodology allows researchers to estimate intergenerational income mobility by using cross-sectional data and retrospective questions about parental education and occupation and children’s current income: the Two Samples Two Stages Least Square Methodology (TSTSLs, see Björklund & Jäntti, 1997). Estimates for intergenerational income mobility based on these alternative methodologies are available for very few Latin American countries. The most comprehensive, harmonized, and comparable source for those estimates across the world is the Equalchances.org database, which includes five Latin American countries. The database includes estimates of the intergenerational earnings elasticity obtained by TSTSLs (Equalchances, 2018). Table 1 shows these estimates alongside the educational mobility of the most comparable cohort in our sample (1973-1982). The size of the estimates is different, and some weak differences in cross-country rankings are observed. However, these differences are generally not substantial and do not lead to qualitatively different conclusions about intergenerational mobility patterns across Latin America.

Table 1. Intergenerational mobility of earnings and education in Latin America

	Intergenerational earnings elasticity	Intergenerational education persistence	Rank correlation (education)	Absolute educational upward mobility
Source	Equalchances.org	Own estimates (Cohort 1973-1982)		
Brazil	.671	.437	.477	.374
Chile	.673	.432	.519	.412
Ecuador	.733	.472	.553	.418
Mexico	.500	.420	.530	.481
Panama	.732	.426	.509	.416

Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

Notes: Intergenerational earnings elasticity, retrieved from the Equalchances.org database, estimated by the Two Samples Two Stage Least Squares Methodology. Intergenerational education persistence is the slope coefficient of equation (1), rank correlation is Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, and absolute educational upward mobility is the estimated likelihood that children with low-educated parents complete secondary education.

The method developed by Lubotsky and Wittenberg (2006) to include multiple proxies within a regression framework while reducing attenuation bias has recently been applied to intergenerational correlations (see e.g., Vosters & Nybom, 2016). Neidhöfer, Serrano, and Gasparini (2018) apply this method and provide the first estimates of intergenerational social mobility (including the education and occupation of both parents) for Latin American countries. Their estimates confirm that within this context, years of schooling of the parent with the highest educational attainment captures the largest share of variation in social status, and that, in the absence of data that enables consistent analysis of intergenerational income mobility, educational mobility estimates yield a valid approximation for the overall intergenerational transmission of inequality in socioeconomic status across Latin American countries.

In conclusion, although conceptual differences surely exist and require in-depth analyses in the future, all status-based measures quantify the intergenerational association between distinct, but closely related, scalar measures of socioeconomic status (see also Hertz et al., 2008). Indeed, as shown by Blanden (2013) and confirmed here, there is usually a meaningful correlation between estimates of intergenerational mobility measured with income, education, and other measures of social status.

8. Conclusions

This analysis traces the development of social intergenerational mobility in Latin America, providing new estimates for relative and absolute educational mobility for people born between 1933 and 1992 in 18 Latin American countries. Furthermore, it discusses and evaluates intergenerational mobility trends in selected countries within the historical context of the region, with special emphasis on the repercussions of the debt crisis in the 1980s. Interestingly, secondary school completion rates of cohorts affected by the crisis differ significantly by country, and even within countries, different patterns can be observed between socioeconomic classes and genders. This confirms that families' human capital investment decisions, especially in times of crisis, crucially depend on the general context, including the structural and institutional conditions in which these investments take place. The estimates for the youngest cohorts corroborate the increasing rates of upward mobility observed in most countries in the region, especially among women from a disadvantaged background. Although the persistence of highly educated families at the top of the educational distribution is virtually unchanged over time, most recent estimates show a sizable increase in intergenerational mobility.

The overall picture seems to point to a region experiencing increasing equality of opportunity over time. However, this rather hopeful scenario is challenged by the relatively low quality of education in most Latin American countries by international standard, and consequent rather moderate improvement in cognitive skills (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012). Future studies incorporating quality in the measurement of educational mobility are therefore necessary to consider crucial aspects of intergenerational transmission of inequality (see also Filmer et al., 2020).

Furthermore, recent events seriously imperil the progress made over the last decades. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the associated school closures and economic disruptions, are likely to shock educational attainment (see e.g., Angrist et al., 2020; Aucejo et al., 2020; Azevedo et al., 2020; Psacharopoulos et al., 2020) and have persistent negative effects on intergenerational social mobility and equality of educational opportunities (see e.g., Lustig, Neidhöfer & Tommasi, 2020). Recent estimates show that average secondary school completion rates for vulnerable children in Latin America could even fall back to 1960s levels (Neidhöfer, Lustig & Tommasi, 2020). This topic, given its importance for policy makers, will therefore require study for several decades to come.

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Appendix

Table A1. Intergenerational mobility estimates

Country	Cohort	β	r	ρ	Absolute Upward Mobility	Absolute Persistence
Argentina	[1933,1942]	0.449	0.486	0.496	0.195	0.646
	[1943,1952]	0.490	0.516	0.505	0.263	0.797
	[1953,1962]	0.517	0.546	0.532	0.356	0.846
	[1963,1972]	0.417	0.487	0.480	0.410	0.846
	[1973,1982]	0.379	0.500	0.473	0.434	0.841
	[1983,1992]	0.335	0.465	0.448	0.528	0.874
Bolivia	[1933,1942]	0.576	0.518	0.571	0.092	0.534
	[1943,1952]	0.588	0.510	0.567	0.132	0.678
	[1953,1962]	0.560	0.512	0.563	0.196	0.780
	[1963,1972]	0.523	0.530	0.577	0.275	0.838
	[1973,1982]	0.453	0.541	0.581	0.360	0.854
	[1983,1992]	0.399	0.528	0.562	0.484	0.918
Brazil	[1933,1942]	0.642	0.531	0.494	0.086	0.627
	[1943,1952]	0.645	0.490	0.494	0.134	0.596
	[1953,1962]	0.616	0.513	0.516	0.229	0.762
	[1963,1972]	0.520	0.477	0.498	0.288	0.758
	[1973,1982]	0.437	0.470	0.477	0.374	0.800
	[1983,1992]	0.345	0.456	0.485	0.524	0.856
Chile	[1933,1942]	0.561	0.617	0.663	0.288	0.835
	[1943,1952]	0.547	0.623	0.631	0.295	0.835
	[1953,1962]	0.452	0.574	0.598	0.334	0.836
	[1963,1972]	0.431	0.556	0.563	0.391	0.850
	[1973,1982]	0.432	0.570	0.519	0.412	0.870
	[1983,1992]	0.478	0.672	0.545	0.485	0.924
Colombia	[1933,1942]	0.654	0.557	0.518	0.091	0.721
	[1943,1952]	0.560	0.486	0.521	0.149	0.635
	[1953,1962]	0.530	0.484	0.509	0.237	0.768
	[1963,1972]	0.520	0.514	0.537	0.305	0.762
	[1973,1982]	0.461	0.535	0.514	0.355	0.852
	[1983,1992]	0.403	0.527	0.480	0.389	0.869

Costa Rica	[1933,1942]	0.433	0.404	0.392	0.083	0.421
	[1943,1952]	0.458	0.416	0.393	0.162	0.682
	[1953,1962]	0.389	0.375	0.366	0.255	0.706
	[1963,1972]	0.378	0.416	0.395	0.224	0.630
	[1973,1982]	0.365	0.440	0.432	0.240	0.638
	[1983,1992]	0.350	0.406	0.388	0.304	0.660
Dominican Rep.	[1933,1942]	0.544	0.432	0.345	0.069	0.277
	[1943,1952]	0.665	0.554	0.524	0.112	0.618
	[1953,1962]	0.397	0.348	0.383	0.223	0.552
	[1963,1972]	0.423	0.423	0.423	0.287	0.626
	[1973,1982]	0.336	0.382	0.360	0.351	0.667
	[1983,1992]	0.296	0.376	0.364	0.397	0.710
Ecuador	[1933,1942]	0.545	0.500	0.545	0.080	0.395
	[1943,1952]	0.577	0.503	0.529	0.166	0.667
	[1953,1962]	0.549	0.495	0.518	0.293	0.778
	[1963,1972]	0.491	0.501	0.528	0.372	0.834
	[1973,1982]	0.472	0.544	0.553	0.418	0.881
	[1983,1992]	0.400	0.487	0.540	0.533	0.903
El Salvador	[1933,1942]	0.828	0.645	0.576	0.077	0.844
	[1943,1952]	0.660	0.526	0.494	0.084	0.658
	[1953,1962]	0.640	0.559	0.593	0.185	0.820
	[1963,1972]	0.568	0.531	0.576	0.230	0.761
	[1973,1982]	0.516	0.537	0.565	0.249	0.793
	[1983,1992]	0.421	0.475	0.512	0.250	0.589
Guatemala	[1933,1942]	0.477	0.417	0.513		
	[1943,1952]	0.517	0.430	0.587	0.067	0.457
	[1953,1962]	0.536	0.446	0.575	0.120	0.514
	[1963,1972]	0.518	0.447	0.584	0.159	0.627
	[1973,1982]	0.487	0.449	0.536	0.146	0.605
	[1983,1992]	0.520	0.472	0.449	0.163	0.704
Honduras	[1933,1942]	0.516	0.421	0.405		
	[1943,1952]	0.518	0.401	0.428	0.084	0.580
	[1953,1962]	0.510	0.416	0.476	0.136	0.647
	[1963,1972]	0.468	0.415	0.481	0.143	0.596
	[1973,1982]	0.501	0.485	0.519	0.124	0.621
	[1983,1992]	0.550	0.519	0.502	0.142	0.653

Mexico	[1933,1942]	0.671	0.513	0.470	0.090	0.676
	[1943,1952]	0.661	0.530	0.518	0.179	0.749
	[1953,1962]	0.554	0.518	0.530	0.273	0.800
	[1963,1972]	0.461	0.482	0.493	0.410	0.824
	[1973,1982]	0.420	0.519	0.530	0.481	0.854
	[1983,1992]	0.329	0.450	0.464	0.577	0.880
Nicaragua	[1933,1942]	0.428	0.341	0.404		
	[1943,1952]	0.421	0.355	0.442	0.092	0.411
	[1953,1962]	0.417	0.378	0.464	0.171	0.593
	[1963,1972]	0.383	0.377	0.461	0.193	0.588
	[1973,1982]	0.410	0.448	0.490	0.177	0.569
	[1983,1992]	0.371	0.409	0.402	0.198	0.500
Panama	[1933,1942]	0.568	0.492	0.557	0.179	0.682
	[1943,1952]	0.529	0.496	0.544	0.252	0.780
	[1953,1962]	0.444	0.450	0.510	0.390	0.816
	[1963,1972]	0.422	0.470	0.515	0.422	0.779
	[1973,1982]	0.426	0.508	0.509	0.416	0.777
	[1983,1992]	0.354	0.454	0.421	0.441	0.765
Paraguay	[1933,1942]	0.642	0.549	0.572	0.131	0.746
	[1943,1952]	0.561	0.505	0.546	0.162	0.730
	[1953,1962]	0.581	0.515	0.519	0.210	0.801
	[1963,1972]	0.525	0.502	0.513	0.250	0.843
	[1973,1982]	0.521	0.532	0.523	0.307	0.844
	[1983,1992]	0.367	0.400	0.382	0.410	0.819
Peru	[1933,1942]	0.612	0.559	0.633	0.196	0.751
	[1943,1952]	0.643	0.576	0.623	0.302	0.839
	[1953,1962]	0.531	0.545	0.593	0.434	0.886
	[1963,1972]	0.455	0.525	0.568	0.480	0.877
	[1973,1982]	0.405	0.538	0.544	0.488	0.853
	[1983,1992]	0.388	0.538	0.532	0.561	0.917
Uruguay	[1933,1942]	0.566	0.520	0.541	0.147	0.679
	[1943,1952]	0.535	0.498	0.489	0.207	0.723
	[1953,1962]	0.458	0.463	0.445	0.240	0.740
	[1963,1972]	0.452	0.478	0.448	0.231	0.697
	[1973,1982]	0.424	0.490	0.482	0.221	0.648
	[1983,1992]	0.416	0.487	0.485	0.274	0.627

Venezuela	[1933,1942]	0.495	0.418	0.409	0.126	0.616
	[1943,1952]	0.475	0.439	0.427	0.220	0.641
	[1953,1962]	0.392	0.417	0.406	0.330	0.747
	[1963,1972]	0.327	0.389	0.395	0.413	0.791
	[1973,1982]	0.332	0.405	0.427	0.453	0.833
	[1983,1992]	0.229	0.314	0.353	0.602	0.850

Source: Latinobarómetro, own estimates.

Notes. β is the slope coefficient, r the correlation coefficient, and ρ the rank correlation of parents' and children's years of education. Absolute upward mobility is the probability that children whose parents have not completed secondary education will complete their secondary education. Absolute persistence is the same probability for children whose parents have completed secondary education. Standard errors of the estimates are included in the Supplemental Database.

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