



Young Lives Peru: Enabling a better and fairer future for young people in times of crises

The Challenge

Growing up in poverty is full of challenges, but today's young people are facing multiple intersecting crises that are deepening inequalities and having a profound impact on their opportunities and life outcomes, and across generations. In Peru, the unprecedented combination of COVID-19, weather shocks (notably El Niño), increasing poverty and political instability are affecting many areas of young people's lives, including health and nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, education, employment and mental health. Those living in the poorest households and from marginalised backgrounds are typically hardest hit, especially women and girls.

However, despite the urgency of these issues, population-based evidence on the long-term and intergenerational impacts of poverty, inequalities and intersecting global crises is very rare. In Peru, there is very little funding available for research in general, with almost non-existent support for research in social sciences. Moreover, existing research tends to focus on specific sectors, rather than adopting a holistic life course perspective.

These knowledge gaps impede effective action to prevent crises from increasing poverty and persistent inequalities. With less than six years to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement climate targets, now is the time to equip Peru's thought-leaders and

policymakers with robust longitudinal data and evidence to drive essential cross-sectoral policy action. This is particularly relevant ahead of the general election to be held in 2026.

The Opportunity

As the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal study of poverty and inequality ever conducted in the Global South, [Young Lives](#) (YL) is uniquely positioned to address these critical evidence gaps. Led by the University of Oxford, we have been following the lives of 12,000 children, from infancy into adulthood, across four countries—Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam—delivering significant research to policy impact, since 2001.

To date, YL has gathered seven rounds of quantitative data, including through child and household surveys (the most recent Round 7 completed in Peru in February 2024), five rounds of qualitative data, and two rounds of school survey data. We are also continuing to enrich our unique dataset by matching it with other external datasets, including rainfall data and public administrative records. This enhances our ability to investigate a wide range of issues that are highly relevant to public policy.

In Peru, Young Lives works in partnership with the Group for the Analysis of Development (GRADE) and the Nutritional Research Institute (IIN), following 2,800 young people originally located in 20 communities, but now living right across the country due to significant internal migration. The



study includes two age cohorts: 700 children, born in 1994-5, tracked since age 8, and 2,100 children, born in 2001-2, tracked since age 1.

Collecting in-depth information about the same individuals over time and assessing the cumulative effects of life experiences, including their participation in public programmes, provides a unique perspective and a better understanding on how early life circumstances affect later life outcomes, including intergenerational effects.

What do we know already?

Our evidence highlights the importance of early childhood investment and targeted efforts to reduce inequalities, particularly for girls and young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is crucial to prevent the compounding crises of COVID-19, climate change and political instability from hindering progress toward the SDGs.

- **[Early exposure to climate shocks](#)** has profound long-term consequences for children's nutrition, physical growth, skills and learning, including intergenerational effects. Maternal exposure to droughts and floods during pregnancy can impair a child's vocabulary by age five, with longer term effects on math and social and emotional skills.
- **Importantly, early childhood stunting can be reversed well beyond the first 1,000 days,** even into adolescence, enabling catch-up in [cognitive tests](#), and social protection can mitigate the negative effects of climate shocks and malnutrition. Our [ground-breaking new research](#)

shows that the **JUNTOS conditional cash transfer program** not only improves children's growth and nutrition, but can also have significant long-term benefits for cognitive skills and learning.

- **While access to basic education has significantly improved over the last two decades, new inequalities have emerged.** Children from poor households, rural areas, indigenous groups or with disabilities often attend lower-quality schools and score lower on standardized tests. [Inequalities in basic skills begin by age five or earlier](#), and access to [quality higher education](#) remains highly unequal.
- Our [novel research on foundational cognitive skills](#), including long-term memory, working memory, inhibitory control and implicit learning, shows that investing in these skills throughout both childhood and adulthood is critical for educational success and positive outcomes later in life.
- **Young Lives provides one of the only sources of [longitudinal data on violence affecting children](#) and young people in Peru.** Experiences of violence are gender-related, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds being particularly at risk. These experiences have long-term effects on well-being, engagement with schooling and learning.
- **Despite some progress, many girls still get married or cohabit in their teenage years and unplanned pregnancy continues to be a significant issue.** Early marriage and [becoming a parent during adolescence](#) corresponds to significantly worse life outcomes for both young women and their children, with girls from poor and marginalised households most at risk.
- **Peru was one of the most severely affected countries by the COVID-19 pandemic.** During the lockdowns and severe economic crisis, Young Lives was one of the only longitudinal studies collecting data [through our COVID-19 phone survey](#). Our findings show that the pandemic has worsened poverty and is having long-term impacts on young people's education, employment, and [mental health](#), with limited support from public policies.
- **The pandemic also revealed a [growing digital divide](#),** with students from the poorest households, rural areas and marginalised groups most likely to have been excluded from online learning. As Peru continues to move towards a digital economy, disparities in access to digital devices, internet connectivity, and digital skills will have increasing significance.
- **We have also observed increasing rates of**

overweight children and young people, and are taking forward [cutting-edge research](#) on how poor nutrition, genetic factors and lifestyle changes during the pandemic (particularly lack of physical exercise) are contributing to obesity. This is likely to become a significant health concern in the coming decades, but is currently receiving little attention from public policies.

Why Partner with Young Lives Peru?

Building on over two decades of mixed-methods longitudinal data, our holistic approach

investigates various interconnected aspects of young people's lives, including physical and mental health, learning, cognition, and social and emotional functioning, with long-term implications for their well-being, education, employment, and family lives. Our research team in Peru, led by [Country Director Santiago Cueto](#) and including [Alan Sánchez](#), [Antonio Campos](#), [Vanessa Rojas](#), and [Katherine Curi](#), brings diverse disciplinary perspectives to our cutting-edge research.

YL is internationally renowned for research excellence, with an impressive track record of innovative research and survey methodology, with findings extensively published in high-ranked and high-impact journals. The study has had a significant impact on policy, both internationally and within Peru, with more than one hundred published [policy papers](#), as well as numerous documented [impact case studies](#), comprising a distinguished record of over 900 publications on the [international website](#).

Our theory of change is built on a robust track record of exceptional research to policy impact, with active policy engagement enabled by a targeted influencing strategy and innovative communications. Being on the ground in Peru for over twenty years has enabled our team to establish exceptional long-term partnerships based on trust and collaboration, including with a wide range of government ministries, international agencies, NGOs and donors. High-profile examples of significant policy impact include:

- [Reducing child marriage](#) - directly informing

legislative change to prohibit and eliminate marriage with minors under the age of 18, as **approved into law on 25th November 2023**; Young Lives longitudinal evidence was directly cited in the related Parliamentary Bill, with our team invited to present findings at a Congressional roundtable in December 2022.

- [Improving the impact of social protection](#) – directly informing the re-design and expansion of the **JUNTOS conditional cash transfer program** to deliver better access to health and education for disadvantaged pregnant women, children and adolescents.
- [Improving early child development](#) - strengthening the focus on early learning in government programmes for preschool children to deliver the improved **Cuna Más programme**.
- [Improving secondary education](#) - evaluating the impact of Peru's **Jornada Escolar Completa (JEC) reform** through a package of measures to both extend the school day and improve the quality of schools and teaching.
- [Protecting children from violence in schools](#) - contributing to the passing of a **new law in Peru in 2015** prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment of children.

Investment Opportunity

YL Peru is looking to partner with like-minded individuals, corporations or foundations to help deliver new data collection and policy-relevant research to mitigate the impacts of multiple crises in Peru, and help meet the 2030 SDGs, including exploring opportunities for consortium funding.

Young Lives has been core funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO, formerly DFID) since 2001, with additional support in Peru from a broad range of funders, including currently from the Old Dart Foundation and the Wellcome Trust.

We look forward to taking the conversation forward.

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