

Equity and Cash Transfers in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico



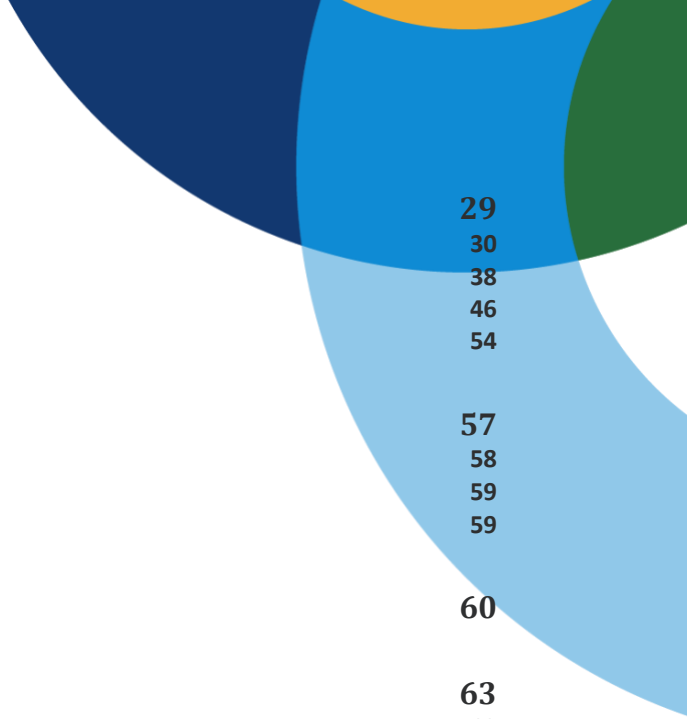
Escuela de Gobierno
Alberto Lleras Camargo



Mexico case study

Authors: Claudia Maldonado, Ana Razo, Mónica Pérez, Itzel Cabrero, José García, Karla Galán y Estefanía López

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	4
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES	5
1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
1.1 Context of the research	7
1.2 Objectives and research questions	7
1.3 Methodology	7
1.4 Program overview	7
1.5 Key findings	8
1.6 Conclusions	8
1.7 Key actionable recommendations	8
1.8 Suggested next steps for decision-makers	9
2. INTRODUCTION: STUDY OVERVIEW	10
2.1 Brief Background	10
2.2 Objectives and research questions	10
2.3 Methodology	11
2.4 Ethical Considerations and Data Security	12
3. COUNTRY CHARACTERISTICS	12
3.1 Population distribution: diversity and urban-rural divide	13
3.2 GDP per capita, economic growth trend	14
3.3 Human Development Index and poverty levels	15
3.4 Key vulnerable groups	16
3.5 Income inequality metrics: persisting gaps	17
3.6 Unemployment rates and labor market dynamics	18
3.7 Overview of the country's social protection system	18
3.8 Public spending on social protection and cash transfer programs	20
4. DESCRIPTION OF THE CASH TRANSFER PROGRAM	21
4.1 Program overview	21
4.2. Administrative Structure and Implementation	27



5. RESEARCH FINDINGS	29
5.1 Challenges on the Targeting Mechanisms	30
5.2 Magnitude of Exclusion Errors: quantitative estimation	38
5.3 Factors Contributing to Exclusion Errors	46
5.4 Interventions to Address Exclusion Errors	54
6. CONCLUSIONS	57
6.1 Key Insights and Their Significance	58
6.2 Knowledge gaps and future research	59
6.3 Public Policy Implications	59
7. ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS	60
8. ANNEX.	63
8.1 Estimations based on the ENIGH 2022	63
8.2 Estimations based on official data provided by the Coordinación Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez	70
9. REFERENCES	76

List of acronyms and abbreviations

BBBJ –	Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez (Benito Juárez Welfare Scholarships)
CNBBSJ –	Coordinación Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez (National Coordination of Benito Juárez Scholarships for Welfare)
CONAPO –	Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council)
CURP –	Clave Única de Registro de Población (Unique Population Registry Code)
EMIS –	Educational Management Information System
ENIGH –	Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares (National Household Income and Expenditure Survey)
FGDs –	Focus Group Discussions
HDI –	Human Development Index
INEGI –	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography)
INPC –	Índice Nacional de Precios al Consumidor (National Consumer Price Index)
INPI –	Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples)
INSABI –	Instituto Nacional de Salud para el Bienestar (National Institute of Health for Welfare)
KIIs –	Key Informant Interviews
LGBTQI+ –	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer/Questioning and others
ORE –	Oficinas de Representación Estatal (State Representative Offices)
PAM –	Pensión para Adultos Mayores (Pension Program for the Elderly)
PEF –	Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación (Expenditure Budget of the Federation)
PND –	Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (National Development Plan)
POP –	Prospera–Oportunidades–Progresión (Prospera–Opportunities–Progress Program, predecessor of BBBJ)
RCS –	Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship (Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship – upcoming reform replacing BBBJ in 2025)
RENAPO –	Registro Nacional de Población (National Population Registry)
SARE –	Sedes Auxiliares de Representación Estatal (Auxiliary Offices of State Representation)
SEGOB –	Secretaría de Gobernación (Ministry of the Interior)
SEP –	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education)
T-MEC –	Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos y Canadá (United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement – USMCA)
UNDP –	United Nations Development Programme

List of tables and figures

Figure 1. Distribution of the population by geographical area	13
Figure 2. Annual GDP Growth Rate, 2015–2024	14
Figure 3. GDP per Capita, 2015–2024 (Constant 2015 US\$).....	14
Figure 4. Poverty Rates, 2016–2024.....	15
Figure 5. Distribution of Poverty and Extreme Poverty, 2024	16
Figure 6. Social backwardness degree of municipalities	17
Figure 7. Social Protection Budget Allocation by Program, 2024.....	20
Figure 8. Exclusion errors by educational level.....	42
Figure 9. Exclusion errors by educational level.....	42
Figure 10. Total coverage by state in primary and secondary schools	43
Figure 11. Average marginal effects obtained from multiple Bayesian INLA logistic models with random effects by state.....	48
Figure 12. Coverage by state at primary level	73
Figure 13. Coverage by municipality at secondary level.....	74
Table 1. Key Vulnerable Groups: Population estimates and main barriers	17
Table 2. Main Social Protection Programs and Target Groups, 2024	18
Table 3. Benito Juárez Scholarship Program Budget, 2019–2024 (MXN, deflated to July 2024).....	26
Table 4. Exclusion errors according to poverty status and educational level	44
Table 5. Exclusion errors of DSB state groups in primary and secondary schools, and poverty status.	45
Table 6. Exclusion errors in DSB municipality groups	45
Table 7. Exclusion errors by income decile and educational level.....	46
Table 8. Exclusion errors of indigenous households according to their poverty status and educational level	46
Table 9. Exclusion errors of woman-headed households according to poverty status and educational level	47
Table 10. Exclusion errors of households with persons with disabilities according to their poverty status	47
Table 11. Exclusion errors of rural households according to their poverty status by educational level.....	47
Table 12. Comparison of beneficiary and non-beneficiary households in primary and secondary education by subgroups	48
Table 13. Summary Table: Exclusion Errors in BBBJ and Rita Cetina	60
Table 14. Total coverage and exclusion errors	63
Table 15. Coverage and exclusion errors by poverty status.....	63
Table 16. Coverage and exclusion errors by households’ income deciles.....	63
Table 17. Coverage and exclusion errors of indigenous households	64
Table 18. Coverage and exclusion errors of women-headed households	65
Table 19. Coverage and exclusion errors of households with persons with disabilities	65
Table 20. Coverage and exclusion errors of rural.....	65
Table 21. Coverage and exclusion errors of the very-high degree of social backwardness group.....	66
Table 22. Coverage and exclusion errors of the high degree of social backwardness group	67
Table 23. Coverage and exclusion errors of the medium degree of social backwardness group	67

Table 24. Coverage and exclusion errors of the low degree of social backwardness group.....	68
Table 25. Coverage and exclusion errors of the very-low high degree of social backwardness group	68
Table 26. Exclusion errors by state for primary schools.....	69
Table 27. Exclusion errors by state for secondary schools	69
Table 28. Exclusion errors by state for primary and secondary schools.....	70
Table 29. Total coverage and exclusion errors of households	70
Table 30. Coverage and exclusion errors of households by social backwardness degree region.....	71
Table 31. Coverage and exclusion errors of households by state	71

1. Executive Summary

This case study is part of the comparative project “*Equity and Cash Transfers in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico*,” which aims to understand and enhance the equity and effectiveness of cash transfer programs across Latin America. In Mexico, the focus is on the Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez (BBBJ) program and its transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship, analyzing how these initiatives meet—or fail to meet—the needs of the country’s most vulnerable populations.

1.1 Context of the research

Mexico faces ongoing inequality: 36.3% of its population lives in poverty, and historically marginalized groups—such as indigenous peoples, women-led households, and elderly caregivers—still encounter systemic barriers to educational access. In this context, BBBJ, launched in 2019, was created to provide scholarships to low-income families, aiming to reduce school dropout rates and foster social inclusion. BBBJ is one of the most extensive social programs in the country and serves as a key test case for equity in educational opportunities.

1.2 Objectives and research questions

This study aims to identify and analyze the factors that cause exclusion errors in the BBBJ program, with a particular focus on intersectionality—the way overlapping identities (such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, etc.) influence access to benefits. Key research questions include:

- How do targeting mechanisms and implementation practices contribute to exclusion?
- Which groups are most affected by exclusion errors, and why?
- What interventions can reduce these errors and promote equitable access?

1.3 Methodology

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of national survey and administrative data (ENIGH 2022, BBBJ program registers) with qualitative fieldwork (key informant interviews and focus groups) across various regions. The research occurred in three phases: national and state-level quantitative analysis, intersectional subgroup analysis, and detailed qualitative exploration of beneficiary and non-beneficiary experiences. The study was carried out from early 2023 to mid-2025.

1.4 Program overview

The BBBJ program offers unconditional bimonthly scholarships of 920 pesos (\$50 dls) per family to support school attendance at the basic education level, with a focus on marginalized and indigenous communities. The program is managed centrally, with eligibility determined by school location. In 2025, it will transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship, aiming for broader and universal coverage¹.

¹ The implementation of universal coverage for the Rita Cetina scholarship will proceed gradually, starting in 2025 with secondary school students as the initial recipients through early assemblies and payments. Once this phase is consolidated, the program will expand to primary and preschool levels, supported by new registration periods and outreach campaigns. Throughout 2025 and 2026, the initiative is expected to grow through increased budget allocations and strengthened administrative systems, ultimately achieving full universal coverage for all students in public basic education by 2026.

1.5 Key findings

The program’s targeting depends heavily on geographic and school-based criteria, often leading to arbitrary divisions and excluding needy families in non-priority areas. The digitalization of registration and strict documentation requirements have introduced new barriers, especially for those lacking internet access, digital literacy, or official documents.

1.5.1 Magnitude of Exclusion Errors

- Exclusion errors are significant: over 80% of eligible primary-level households and nearly 80% of secondary-level households are excluded from the program.
- Even among the poorest, exclusion rates stay high—over 60% for those in extreme poverty.
- Errors vary across states, with coverage from 3.4% in Mexico City to 56.9% in Guerrero.
- Vulnerable groups face greater exclusion: 77.7% of women-headed households, 73.4% of households with persons with disabilities, and up to 44% of indigenous households at the secondary level remain outside the program.

1.5.2 Factors contributing to exclusion errors

- **Design flaws:** Rigid geographic targeting, a one-scholarship-per-family rule, and centralized administration restrict flexibility and responsiveness.
- **Implementation barriers:** Digital-only registration, complex documentation, lack of in-person support, and poor communication disproportionately impact indigenous families, single mothers, and elderly caregivers.
- **Intersectionality:** Overlapping vulnerabilities (e.g., being an indigenous single mother or an elderly caregiver) increase barriers, resulting in higher exclusion rates for these groups.

1.5.3 Interventions to address exclusion errors

Some improvements are underway, such as piloting hybrid registration systems and offering more direct support in indigenous languages. However, interventions remain fragmented and inadequately targeted to those with multiple vulnerabilities.

1.6 Conclusions

The BBBJ program has made progress in reaching some marginalized groups, especially in rural and indigenous areas. However, its design and implementation have created “modern exclusion errors” that systematically exclude those most in need. The move to a universal model presents a significant opportunity, but only if paired with reforms that address the real obstacles vulnerable families face.

1.7 Key actionable recommendations

1. **Simplify and diversify registration** by making the process easier and providing both online and in-person options at schools and community centers.
2. **Enhance communication:** use schools as trusted intermediaries to deliver clear, accessible, and multilingual information about eligibility and application status.
3. **Lower documentation barriers** by accepting alternative proofs and offering administrative support.
4. **Establish an appeals process:** Develop a clear and transparent system for applicants who have been denied.

5. **Provide targeted support for high-risk groups:** develop protocols for elderly caregivers, single mothers, and households with disabilities.
6. **Promote interoperability of social data systems:** integrate data systems across social programs to prevent administrative exclusion.
7. **Prioritize intersectional vulnerability:** Clearly focus on households with multiple overlapping vulnerabilities in program design and outreach.
8. **Strengthen payment logistics and school coordination:** Improve payment processes and ensure that school staff are trained and empowered to support families effectively.

1.8 Suggested next steps for decision-makers

As the Rita Cetina Scholarship is rolled out, decision-makers should:

- Prioritize the quick rollout of hybrid registration and multilingual support systems in states with high exclusion rates.
- Ensure regular, transparent communication of eligibility criteria and program updates.
- Invest in local capacity-building, especially within schools and community organizations, to serve as trusted intermediaries.
- Enforce mandatory training for all program staff on cultural sensitivity and managing cases involving intersecting vulnerabilities.
- Use intersectional data to track exclusion errors and guarantee vulnerable groups are fully supported.
- Assess and monitor the impact of switching to the Rita Cetina Scholarship, with an emphasis on reducing exclusion errors and enhancing outcomes for the most vulnerable.
- Maintain continuous communication with affected communities to ensure reforms address their needs and realities.

By adopting these recommendations, Mexico can turn the promise of fair and inclusive educational support into an authentic experience. This is a time to make sure every child, no matter their background or situation, has access to the nation’s cash transfer system. Moving toward universal coverage is not just a policy decision but a shared commitment to dignity, justice, and opportunity—so that no girl or boy is ever left behind as Mexico strives for a more caring and equitable future.

2. Introduction: Study Overview

2.1 Brief Background

The *Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez (BBBJ)* program, initiated in 2019, consolidated Mexico’s educational cash-transfer policies under a rights-based framework that prioritizes universality over conditionality. The upcoming transition to the *Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship* deepens this vision by standardizing benefits and expanding coverage. Section 4 provides a detailed account of the program’s evolution and governance arrangements.

Notably, the program explicitly recognizes that indigenous, highly marginalized, Afro-descendant communities, or otherwise underserved areas, are given priority for scholarship allocation. Additionally, the program extends its reach beyond officially designated priority localities to schools identified as “susceptible to attention,” thereby broadening access for students in need beyond strict geographic or socioeconomic boundaries. This inclusive vision reflects a commitment to addressing historical inequities and ensuring that the most vulnerable are not left behind.

2.2 Objectives and research questions

This case study is part of the comparative project “Equity and Cash Transfers in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico,” which aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities of promoting equity through cash transfer programs across Latin America.

A central goal of this study is to develop a detailed understanding of the factors that lead to exclusion errors within Mexico’s BBJJ cash transfer program. By exploring the barriers that hinder vulnerable populations’ access to crucial educational support, the research aims to illuminate the dynamics of social exclusion—particularly how they intersect with identities such as gender, race, class, Indigenous status, and geographic location. Guided by a core set of research questions, the study seeks to answer:

- What are the features of the targeting mechanisms used in Mexico’s cash transfer program, BBJJ?
- How is BBJJ specifically designed to handle the inclusion or exclusion of people with intersectional identities?
- What types of exclusion errors does this program have, and how significant are they?
- Which specific groups of people are being excluded from BBJJ due to targeting errors?
- What are the main causes identified as factors contributing to exclusion errors in the BBJJ program?
- Are there effective practices, promising strategies, or good approaches to improve equity in BBJJ’s targeting mechanisms?

By addressing these questions, the study aims not only to analyze the current landscape of program implementation but also to provide actionable recommendations that can improve inclusion and ensure that BBJJ fulfills its promise of reaching those most in need.

2.3 Methodology

To achieve these objectives, the research employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Drawing on intersectionality theory, the methodology acknowledges the complex interactions among overlapping identities that shape experiences of social exclusion. The study uses a utilization-focused evaluation framework, ensuring that findings are both academically rigorous and directly valuable for policymakers and program stakeholders.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) form the core of the qualitative research. KIIs involve a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society members, school principals, and academic experts, selected through stakeholder mapping and snowball sampling. These interviews examine stakeholder perspectives, confirm targeting processes, and investigate how intersectionality appears in policy design and execution.

FGDs include both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries—mainly heads of households, considering the minor status of scholarship recipients—to gather a wide range of experiences with the BBBJ program. Groups are carefully formed to reflect intersecting identities such as ethnicity, geographic location, and socioeconomic status. Administrative data and ethnographic sampling in key regions, such as Oaxaca and the Mexico City metropolitan area, guide participant selection.

All sessions are carefully documented and audio-recorded. Data analysis is performed using NVivo software, employing an abductive coding approach that combines deductive codes grounded in theoretical frameworks with inductive insights from the data. This thorough process allows for detecting patterns, synthesizing findings, and developing evidence-based recommendations.

Regarding the quantitative analysis, the exercise estimates the exclusion error (EE) in the BBBJ program, defined as the share of poor and impoverished households that meet eligibility criteria but do not receive the scholarship. The analysis, based on ENIGH 2022 and official register data from the National Coordination of Welfare Scholarships, was carried out in the R programming language at the national and subnational levels, considering households with students at primary, secondary, or both levels as the target population.

Three stages were conducted: (1) national analysis with survey and register data, (2) state-level analysis grouped by Degree of Social Backwardness with ENIGH and register data, and (3) intersectional analysis using ENIGH with a weighted descriptive analysis comparing beneficiary and non-beneficiary households across the poverty definitions as well as through the calculation of average marginal effects from Bayesian INLA logistic models with random state effects. For all stages, poverty was measured using both the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) national poverty and extreme poverty lines, and the World Bank’s international extreme poverty line (adjusted to 2022 PPPs).

ENIGH does not capture the Program’s administrative targeting criteria; therefore, exclusion errors without poverty filters are calculated across all households with children in basic education, resulting in a larger denominator than the normative target population. Estimates based on poverty conditions offer a closer statistical approximation, but still do not reproduce the formal selection process.

2.4 Ethical Considerations and Data Security

Upholding ethical standards was a foundational commitment throughout this study, reflecting both respect for participants and the need to produce credible, actionable evidence for policy improvement. Recognizing the sensitive nature of the research—focused on vulnerable populations and intersecting identities—every phase was guided by strict ethical protocols and a strong sense of responsibility toward those whose experiences inform our findings.

Our ethical approach centered on the principle of informed consent. All participants received comprehensive, accessible forms that clearly explained the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their rights as research subjects. These forms outlined the scope of participation, how data would be used, and the measures to protect privacy. Participants were explicitly informed they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or need for justification. This approach aimed to comply with international research standards while also building trust and transparency, especially among communities that may have previously experienced institutional exclusion or mistrust.

Considering Mexico's diverse population and focus on intersectional vulnerabilities, cultural and linguistic sensitivity was crucial. All research tools were carefully reviewed to detect and reduce potential biases or power imbalances. Particular care was taken to ensure that questions and procedures were respectful and relevant to participants' lived experiences. For Indigenous participants, translation services were provided, and all interactions followed culturally and linguistically appropriate standards.

All data collected was carefully anonymized, with personally identifiable information removed as early as possible. This process ensured that individual stories and testimonies could shape policy recommendations without putting participants at risk or attracting unwanted attention. The right to withdraw was repeated at several points, and participants were encouraged to share any concerns or questions about their involvement. These safeguards were fundamental given the study's focus on populations who might face greater risks of discrimination or retaliation.

All digital records were stored on encrypted, password-protected systems, with access strictly limited to authorized members of the research team. Data retention policies were clearly established: all records and documents will be maintained for three years, after which they will be securely destroyed to prevent any future risk of disclosure.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations such as informed consent, cultural sensitivity, participant protection, and data security were carefully addressed in the study. This study aimed to embody the principles of inclusion and dignity it seeks to promote in public policy. This approach was crucial not only for maintaining the integrity of the research but also for honoring the trust and voices of those whose experiences are often overlooked in the design and evaluation of social programs.

3. Country Characteristics

This section offers a detailed overview of Mexico's demographic and socioeconomic landscape, emphasizing key development indicators, ongoing inequalities, and the structure of the social protection system. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for evaluating the reach and fairness of cash transfer programs, such as BBBJ, and their ability to address deep-rooted exclusion. It combines recent literature and official statistics to offer a comprehensive context, with a specific focus on the intersectional vulnerabilities that influence exclusion and inclusion in social protection.

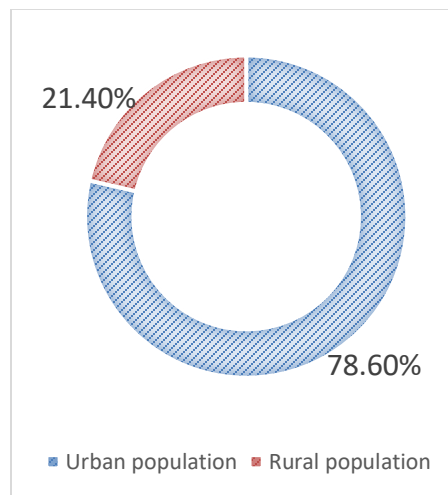
Mexico is a country of about 130 million people with a diverse population that includes indigenous and Afro-descendant groups, which have historically faced discrimination and exclusion. These groups often encounter barriers to accessing rights, including women, children, people with disabilities, and those who identify as LGBTQI+, among others. However, there are also high levels of inequality. While poverty and extreme poverty have decreased in recent years, significant gaps remain in access to education and health services, especially between rural and urban areas.

Regarding economic performance, Mexico is expected to experience below-anticipated growth rates, according to the World Bank, which forecasts stagnation in 2025, followed by a gradual recovery to 1.8 percent in 2027. This is due to uncertainty surrounding trade policy, the revision of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), and the predicted slowdown in the U.S. economy (World Bank, n.d.).

3.1 Population distribution: diversity and urban-rural divide

Mexico ranks as the second-most populous country in Latin America and exhibits significant demographic diversity. Women make up a slight majority (52.3%), with a sex ratio of about 95 men for every 100 women. The country’s population is mainly urban—78.6% live in cities—while 21.4% reside in more than 184,000 rural areas, many of which are small, isolated, and have ongoing service shortages.

Figure 1. Distribution of the population by geographical area



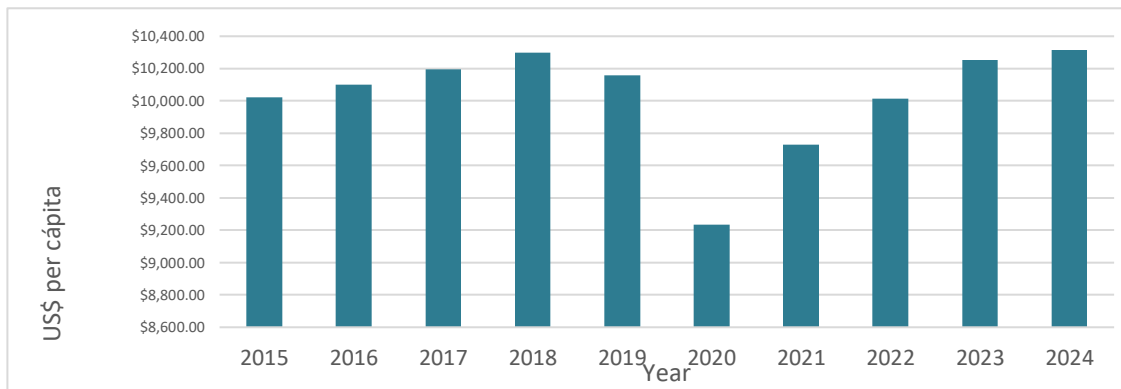
Source: Prepared with data from INEGI-ENOE 2025

This urban-rural divide is a crucial aspect of inequality, as rural communities—often with high numbers of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations—face bigger barriers to education, health, and social protection. The connection between rurality and other vulnerabilities, such as ethnicity, gender, and disability, adds to exclusion and influences the need for cash transfer programs.

3.2 GDP per capita, economic growth trend

Mexico’s economic performance in recent years has been marked by volatility and underperformance relative to national targets. In 2023, GDP per capita was \$10,241.9 (constant 2015 US dollars), with growth rates of 2.3% in 2023 and only 1.3% in 2024. The World Bank projects stagnation for 2025, followed by a gradual recovery to 1.8% by 2027, reflecting external uncertainties such as trade policy shifts, USMCA renegotiations, and a slowing U.S. economy. This slow growth limits fiscal capacity for social investment and worsens the vulnerability of those already at risk of exclusion.

Figure 2. Annual GDP Growth Rate, 2015–2024



Source: Prepared with data from the World Bank

Figure 3. GDP per Capita, 2015–2024 (Constant 2015 US\$)



Source: Prepared with data from the World Bank

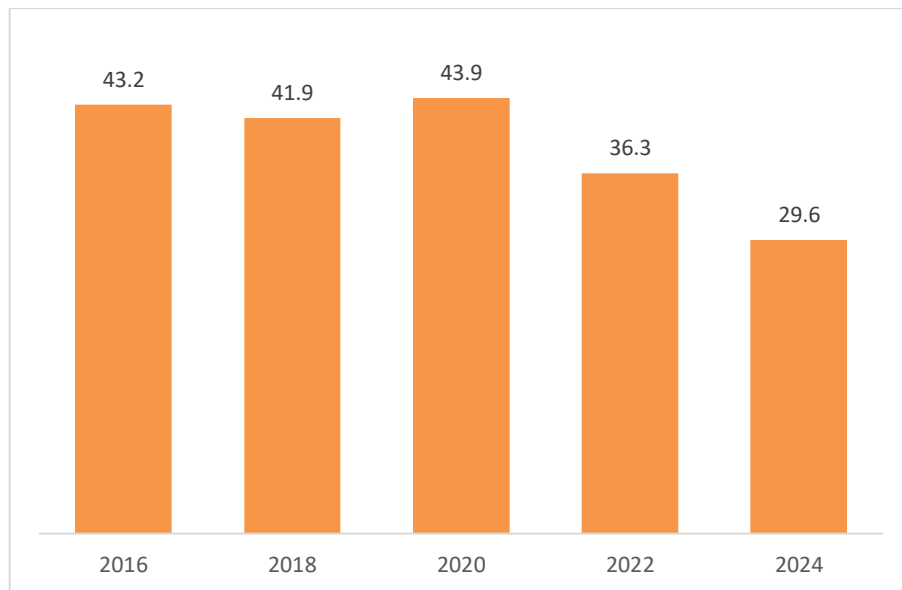
3.3 Human Development Index and poverty levels

Mexico ranks 77th out of 193 countries in the 2023/24 UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), placing it among nations with high human development. However, this overall progress masks persistent, deeply rooted inequalities. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI)'s 2024 multidimensional poverty measurement, 29.6% of the population—nearly 39 million people—live in poverty, lacking sufficient income and at least one key social right (education, health, social security, housing, basic services, or food). Extreme poverty impacts 5.3% of the population, or over 7 million people, despite recent declines.

INEGI defines poverty as: "*The population in a situation of multidimensional poverty is one whose income is insufficient to acquire the goods and services they require to meet their needs and does not have guaranteed access to any of the social rights of education, health, social security, housing, and food*" (INEGI, 2025a).

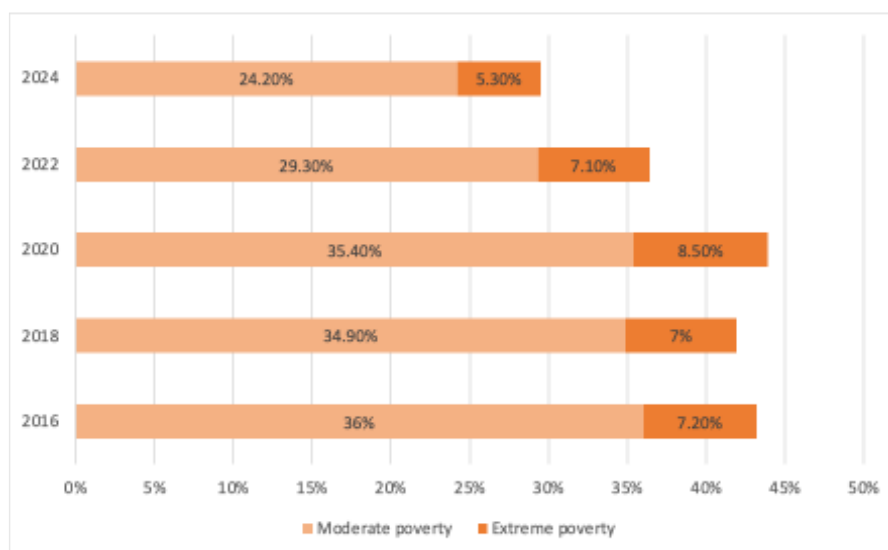
It should be noted that this is the first time INEGI has published poverty measurement data since, after the elimination of CONEVAL, it took over its functions but continues to use the same methodology. To identify the population in a situation of multidimensional poverty, those who experience deprivation in at least one of the six indicators—educational backwardness, access to health services, access to social security, quality and spaces in housing, basic services in housing, and access to nutritious and quality food—and have an income below the poverty lines, are considered in both rural and urban areas. To identify the population in a situation of extreme poverty, those who have three or more deprivations and have an income below the extreme poverty lines—based on rural and urban areas and equivalent to the monthly monetary value of the food basket per person—are included (INEGI, 2025a).

Figure 4. Poverty Rates, 2016–2024



Source: Based on data from INEGI's National Survey of Household Income and Expenditure (ENIGH) from 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Figure 5. Distribution of Poverty and Extreme Poverty, 2024



Source: Based on data from INEGI’s National Survey of Household Income and Expenditure (ENIGH) from 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Poverty is not evenly spread: rural, indigenous, and southern states such as Chiapas (66%), Guerrero (58.1%), Oaxaca (51.6%), Veracruz (44.5%), and Puebla (43.4%) have the highest rates, reflecting the intersection of geography, ethnicity, and marginalization.

3.4 Key vulnerable groups

Mexico’s social fabric is shaped by groups that have historically experienced discrimination and systemic exclusion. These include:

Indigenous Peoples:

39.2 million people identify as indigenous, and 7.4 million speak an indigenous language. States like Oaxaca (26.3%), Yucatán (24.3%), and Chiapas (22.4%) have the highest concentrations. Indigenous communities are mainly rural and face greater challenges in education, health, and social protection.

Afro-descendant Communities:

Approximately 2% of the population (2.6 million) identify as Afro-Mexican or of African descent, with a balanced gender distribution. These communities are mainly in states like Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz, and often face various forms of exclusion.

People with Disabilities:

Nearly 8.8 million people report having a disability, with women accounting for 53.5%. Half are 60 or older, highlighting the intersection of age and disability.

LGBTQI+ Population:

Just over 5% of Mexicans aged 15 and older identify as LGBTQI+, reflecting both increased visibility and ongoing challenges related to discrimination and access to rights.

Women, Children, and the Elderly:

These groups, especially when intersecting with poverty, rurality, or indigenous identity, encounter compounded barriers to social inclusion and accessing services.

Table 1. Key Vulnerable Groups: Population estimates and main barriers

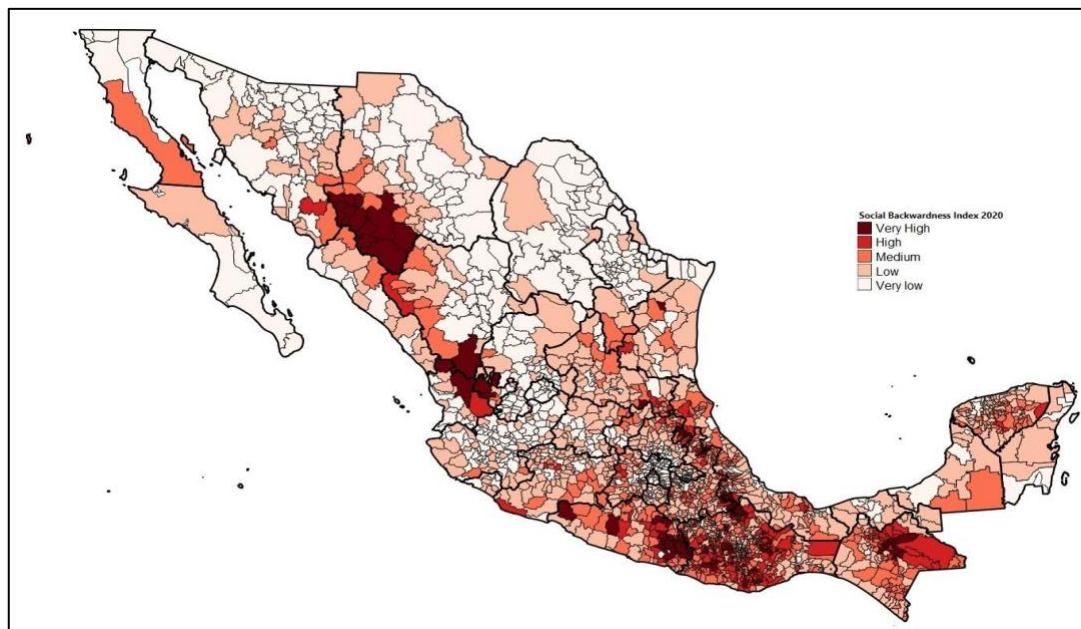
Group	Population Estimate	Main Barriers to Inclusion
Indigenous	39.2 million	Language, rurality, poverty, discrimination
Afro-descendant	2.6 million	Geographic isolation, discrimination
People with Disabilities	8.8 million	Accessibility, poverty, age
LGBTQI+	5.1% of 15+	Discrimination, lack of legal protection
Women	52.3% of total	Gender gaps, care burden, wage inequality
Children/Elderly	30%/12% of total	Dependency, poverty, access to services

3.5 Income inequality metrics: persisting gaps

Income inequality remains a key feature of Mexico’s socioeconomic landscape. The Gini coefficient has improved, dropping from 0.469 in 2016 to 0.435 in 2022, but the gap between the richest and poorest remains significant. The income ratio between the extremely poor and the non-poor increased from 2.91 in 2016 to 3.15 in 2022, showing that while overall inequality is reducing, the most vulnerable still fall behind.

The following figure shows that areas with greater marginalization—especially in southern states such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Guerrero—experience the greatest social disadvantages. At the same time, northern and central urban regions tend to have lower levels. This spatial pattern highlights ongoing regional inequalities and offers essential context for understanding the targeting and equity challenges faced by cash transfer programs such as BBBJ.

Figure 6. Social backwardness degree of municipalities



Source: Based on data from INEGI National Survey of Household Income and Expenditure (ENIGH) 2025

3.6 Unemployment rates and labor market dynamics

Mexico’s labor market features low official unemployment (2.6–3%) but high informality (54.5% of the employed population). Labor force participation is 75.3% among men and 46.4% among women, showing a 29-point gender gap. Informal employment is even more common among women (55.2%) than men (54%). Wage gaps continue in 2024, with the average monthly income in formal jobs at 13,512.7 pesos, compared to 7,205.5 pesos in informal employment. Women earn less than men in both sectors. These disparities are worsened by factors like age, education, and region, underlining the need for intersectional policy solutions.

3.7 Overview of the country’s social protection system

Mexico’s social protection system has undergone a significant transformation recently, with a renewed focus on eliminating poverty and including historically marginalized groups. The National Development Plan 2019–2024 prioritized programs such as the Pension for the Elderly (PAM), the BBBJ scholarships, and initiatives for youth, rural producers, and urban development. By 2024, 16 key social programs were active, supporting diverse groups including the elderly, youth, children, people with disabilities, and vulnerable producers. The shift to a new administration in October 2024 maintained continuity in core programs while introducing new initiatives like the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship and the Women’s Welfare Pension. The National Development Plan 2025–2030 reaffirms the commitment to preserve and expand welfare programs, with an ongoing focus on meeting the needs of those most at risk of exclusion.

The National Development Plan (PND) 2019–2024 outlined a wide range of measures to boost social protection in Mexico, including substantial investments in education and healthcare—such as the establishment of Benito Juárez García Universities and the National Institute of Health for Welfare (INSABI)—along with food security and rural development projects like Production for Welfare, Coffee and Cane Growers Support, Guarantee Prices, Livestock Credit, and Fertilizers. Throughout the administration, these programs were improved, and by 2024, CONEVAL identified 16 key priority social programs.

Table 2. Main Social Protection Programs and Target Groups, 2024

Program Name	Type of Support	Main Target Groups	Key Prioritization Criteria / Focus Areas
Pension Program for the Elderly (PAM)	Non-contributory cash pension	Adults aged 65 and over	Age, low income, rural and indigenous populations
Pension for the Welfare of Persons with Permanent Disabilities	Non-contributory cash pension	Persons with permanent disabilities (all ages)	Disability status, children and youth prioritized
Benito Juárez Basic Education Scholarship (BBBJ)	Unconditional cash transfer	Low-income families with children in basic education	School location (priority/marginalized/indigenous), low income, rural, indigenous, and afro-descendant populations
Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship (from 2025)	Unconditional cash transfer	All children in basic education (universal)	Universal, with phased prioritization for marginalized and indigenous schools
Youth Building the Future	Apprenticeship stipend	Young people (18–29) not in education or employment	NEET status, low income, rural and marginalized youth
Youth Writing the Future	Scholarship	Low-income university students	Enrollment in public universities, low income
Support for Children of Working Mothers	Cash transfer	Children of working mothers (0–4 years)	Working mothers, single mothers, low-income households
Sowing Life (Sembrando Vida)	Productive support/cash	Rural producers, small farmers	Rurality, low income, indigenous and marginalized communities
Production for Welfare	Productive support/cash	Small-scale rural producers	Rurality, low income, indigenous and marginalized communities
Guaranteed Prices	Price support	Small and medium agricultural producers	Rurality, smallholder status, staple crops
Fertilizer for Welfare Program	In-kind support	Smallholder farmers	Rurality, low income, marginalized regions
Urban Improvement Program	Infrastructure, housing	Urban poor, informal settlements	Urban marginalization, housing deficit
National Reconstruction Program	Housing, infrastructure	Populations affected by natural disasters	Disaster-affected, low income, rural and urban
Health Care and Free Medicines for the Uninsured	In-kind health services	Population without social security	Lack of social security, low income, rural and urban
Universities for Welfare Benito Juárez	Free higher education	Low-income youth in rural/marginalized areas	Rurality, low income, indigenous and marginalized youth
Universal Scholarship for High School Students	Unconditional cash transfer	All public high school students	Universal, with focus on marginalized and rural schools

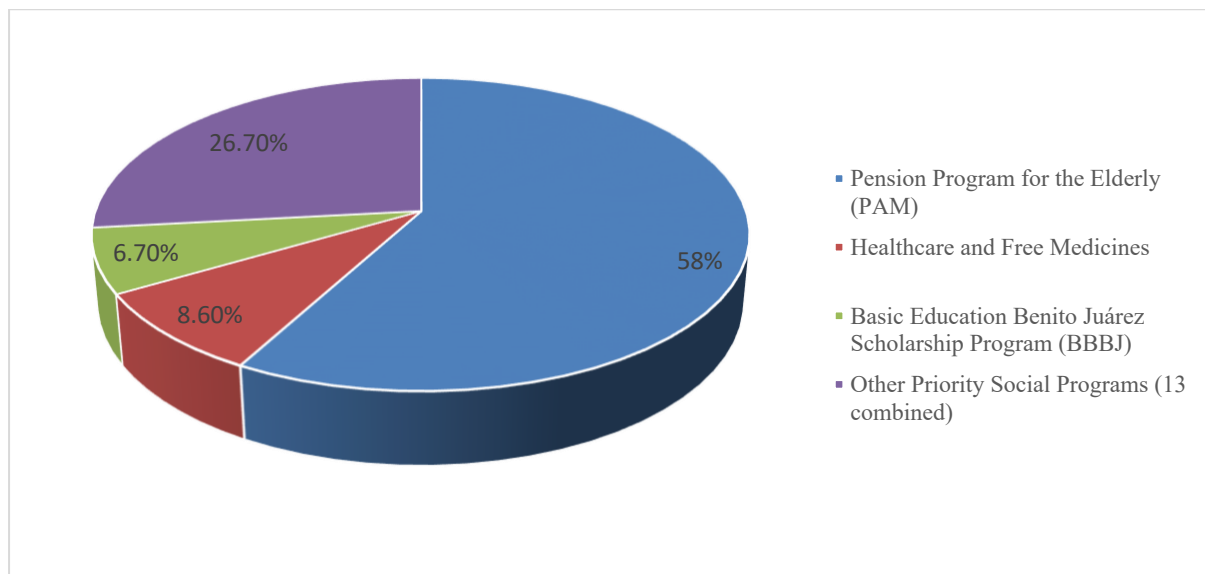
These programs focused on key groups—including the elderly, youth, children, people with disabilities, vulnerable populations, and producers—and addressed critical issues such as economic well-being, social welfare, educational improvement, productivity, and social deprivation. With the start of a new presidential term in October 2024, the government reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining the core social programs established under President López Obrador, especially the Pension Program for the Elderly (PAM).

At the same time, the new administration introduced significant changes, such as switching the Benito Juárez Scholarships to the Rita Cetina Universal Scholarship and launching new initiatives like Harvesting Sovereignty and the Women’s Welfare Pension. The National Development Plan 2025–2030 affirms this continuity, ensuring that key welfare programs—including the Benito Juárez Scholarships, pensions for people with disabilities and older adults, Sowing Life, Youth Building the Future, Fertilizer, and Guaranteed Prices—will continue. Additionally, three new programs have been created: Rita Cetina Scholarships, the Women’s Pension for Wellness, and Health in Your Home. This ongoing focus reflects a sustained national commitment to addressing the needs of historically marginalized and excluded groups, while maintaining social equity as a central part of government policy.

3.8 Public spending on social protection and cash transfer programs

Social protection accounts for a significant share of public spending. In 2024, the budget for the 16 priority programs reached 603.6 billion pesos, representing 46% of total social program spending. The PAM Program consistently received the largest share, followed by healthcare and the BBBJ scholarships. These three programs together accounted for 75% of the total budget for priority programs in 2024. The BBBJ program alone was allocated nearly 50 billion pesos, which is 6.7% of the total social program budget. Section 4.1.3 presents detailed budgetary trends for BBBJ from 2019 to 2024. Here, it is sufficient to note that education scholarships now rank among the three most extensive social-protection programs, underscoring their strategic weight in Mexico’s welfare agenda.

Figure 7. Social Protection Budget Allocation by Program, 2024



Source: Based on data from CONEVAL Analysis of social development programs and actions in the Federal Expenditure Budget, 2024.

Although funding for the BBBJ has increased in recent years, its share remains smaller than that of other flagship programs, highlighting ongoing debates about resource allocation and the prioritization of educational support within the broader social protection framework.

In summary, Mexico’s demographic diversity, ongoing inequalities, and evolving social protection system form the backdrop against which cash transfer programs, such as BBBJ, must be understood and evaluated. The country’s experience underscores both the potential and the challenges of designing equitable interventions that successfully reach those most in need, especially in a context marked by overlapping vulnerabilities and structural barriers to inclusion. The following sections will examine how these contextual factors influence the design, implementation, and impact of Mexico’s cash transfer programs, with particular attention to intersectionality and the lived experiences of the country’s most vulnerable populations.

4. Description of the cash transfer program

4.1 Program overview

The BBBJ program is Mexico’s main cash transfer initiative supporting educational equity for children and adolescents. The BBBJ program provides unconditional cash transfers to low-income families with children enrolled in public basic education, from preschool (kindergarten, ages 3–5), primary (grades 1–6, ages 6–12), to lower secondary (grades 7–9, ages 12–15). The main aim of the program is to ensure that children and adolescents from highly marginalized communities remain in school and complete their education, thereby reducing educational inequalities and dropout rates.

Eligible families—regardless of how many children they have enrolled in basic education—receive a flat scholarship of 920 pesos per month, paid every two months (1,840 pesos per payment), for up to 10 months each school year. This amounts to approximately 50 USD every two months (SEP, 2023). Importantly, the benefit is per family, not per child, meaning households get the same amount regardless of the number of eligible children in basic education. This “one-scholarship-per-family” rule is a key feature of the program’s structure.

The BBBJ is unconditional: families do not have to show academic success or follow health/nutrition check-up requirements to qualify. Instead, eligibility depends on three criteria:

- (a) Having at least one child or adolescent enrolled in a priority school—public schools in highly marginalized, indigenous, or rural areas (called localities).
- (b) Having at least one child or adolescent enrolled in a school that is eligible for attention and being low-income.
- (c) No child in the household can receive another educational scholarship for the same purpose at the same time.

The program’s design and targeting criteria have been continually improved, with a strong focus on reaching the country’s most marginalized populations—primarily indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural communities. In October 2024, with the start of a new presidential administration, the government announced a major reform: the BBBJ will be renamed the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship in 2025. This latest version will expand coverage to all students enrolled in public basic education, regardless of location or income, moving toward true universality. The scholarship amount will increase to 1,900 pesos every two months per family (about 105 USD), with an additional 700 pesos (about 39 USD) for each extra student beyond the first.

The BBBJ aims to solve the deep-rooted problem of educational exclusion and dropout among children from poor and marginalized backgrounds. By offering a reliable source of financial support, the program seeks to lower the economic barriers that cause families to withdraw their children from school, especially in rural, indigenous, and other underserved areas. In essence, the BBBJ marks a significant evolution in Mexican social protection, moving from poverty-based conditional transfers to an education rights-based approach. As it shifts to a universal model under the Rita Cetina scholarship, the program is set to expand access to education and strengthen the government's commitment to ensuring no child is left behind due to economic hardship.

BBBJ key features at a glance:

- **Type:** Unconditional cash transfer
- **Target group:** Families with children enrolled in public preschool, primary, and lower secondary education, prioritizing highly marginalized, indigenous, and rural localities
- **Benefit:** 920 pesos/month per family (bimonthly payment, up to 10 months/year); one scholarship per family, regardless of the number of children
- **Conditions:** None beyond school enrollment and not receiving another scholarship for the same purpose
- **Upcoming reform:** Transition to Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship in 2025, expanding to universal coverage and increasing the benefit amount.

4.1.1 Evolution over time

The BBBJ program was officially launched in May 2019, following the publication of the presidential decree that established the National Coordination of Scholarships for Welfare (CNBBBJ). This marked a significant turning point in Mexico's social policy, as the BBBJ replaced the iconic Prospera-Oportunidades-Progreso (POP) program, which had operated for nearly twenty years as a conditional cash transfer initiative aimed at reducing poverty.

The shift from POP to BBBJ was not just administrative—it marked a fundamental change in both the goals and methods of social support. While POP was created as a poverty alleviation program, combining cash transfers with strict conditions related to school attendance, health check-ups, and nutrition, BBBJ was developed as an educational rights program. The new approach removed those conditions and shifted the focus from poverty targeting to educational inclusion, especially for children and adolescents in highly marginalized, indigenous, and rural communities. Under the 2019 decree, all resources previously assigned to the National Coordination of the PROSPERA Social Inclusion Program were transferred to the newly established National Coordination of Scholarships for Welfare. This new agency was responsible for designing, coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating all educational scholarship programs under its jurisdiction, signaling a commitment to a more integrated and education-focused approach.

Key differences between POP and BBBJ:

- **Conditionality:** POP required compliance with health and education co-responsibilities; BBBJ is unconditional, removing barriers that previously excluded the most vulnerable families.
- **Targeting:** POP used strict poverty targeting based on household surveys and socioeconomic assessments. BBBJ emphasizes territorial and school-based criteria, focusing on schools in marginalized communities and indigenous populations. Additionally, it no longer requires families to prove poverty status if their children attend a priority school.

- **Scope:** POP tackled various aspects of poverty (education, health, nutrition), while BBBJ specifically aims to promote educational inclusion and prevent school dropout.
- **Administrative Structure:** BBBJ is centrally managed by the National Coordination of Scholarships for Welfare, with a streamlined governance structure and a focus on educational outcomes.

Since its inception, BBBJ has been the country’s leading educational scholarship program, with its Operating Rules first published in December 2019 for the 2020 fiscal year. The program maintained its core design through 2024, offering unconditional cash transfers to families with children enrolled in public basic education—preschool, primary, and lower secondary—with a focus on those in highly marginalized or indigenous communities. A significant change is planned for 2025: the BBBJ will become the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship. This reform is more than just a name change; it indicates a move toward universal coverage. The new program will ensure that all students enrolled in public basic education, regardless of socioeconomic status or location, are eligible for support. The scholarship amount will increase to 1,900 pesos biweekly per family, with an additional 700 pesos for each student beyond the first, offering greater financial support for larger families.

The shift to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship demonstrates a firm policy commitment to ensuring that no child in Mexico has to leave school due to financial difficulties. Universality means that eligibility will no longer be limited by location or income, but will include all students in public basic education. This change aims to remove the mistakes and unfair barriers that have remained under previous targeting methods, bringing Mexico closer to guaranteeing the constitutional right to education for every child.

The transition from Prospera to BBBJ, and now to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship, demonstrates Mexico’s continuous efforts to adapt its social protection system to address educational exclusion and inequality. By moving from poverty-focused, conditional transfers to a universal, rights-based model, the program seeks to break down structural barriers and make sure every child—regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances—can access and complete a basic education. This change is not just a technical update but a reaffirmation of the country’s dedication to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

4.1.2 Target population and prioritization criteria

The BBBJ program aims to ensure access to education and reduce disparities by providing unconditional financial aid to families with children and adolescents enrolled in basic education, including preschool, primary, and secondary levels. Its targeting and prioritization methods are based on both geographic and socioeconomic factors, with a strong focus on reaching historically underserved populations.

The eligibility for the BBBJ program is based on two main pillars:

1. **School-Based Targeting:**

Children must enroll in schools designated as “priority institutions.” These include public schools in indigenous communities, areas with very high, high, medium, or low marginalization, as defined by the National Population Council and the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (CONAPO and INPI, respectively), and small localities without an official marginalization index. This strategy focuses on serving historically marginalized and socioeconomically vulnerable groups.

2. One-Scholarship-Per-Household Rule:

Each family is eligible for only one scholarship, regardless of how many school-age children they have. While this rule aims to maximize coverage, it can reduce the benefit for larger families and unintentionally disadvantage households with multiple children in basic education.

In terms of population, the BBBJ program targets two main groups:

1. Families with children and adolescents enrolled in public basic education schools located in “priority localities.”
2. Low-income families with children and adolescents enrolled in public basic education schools outside priority areas, as long as these schools are classified as “eligible for attention.”

The program targets children and teenagers aged 3 to 15, aligning with the official ages for preschool, primary, and lower secondary education in Mexico. Eligibility is assessed at the family (household) level. Each family can receive only one scholarship, regardless of how many children are enrolled, although this will change with the shift to the universal model in 2025.

For families outside priority localities, “low income” is defined as having a per capita monthly income below the national poverty line, as established by CONEVAL. In 2024, this threshold is roughly \$190 USD (around 3,370 MXN) per person per month in urban areas and about \$140 USD (approximately 2,500 MXN) in rural areas. Families must provide socioeconomic information to verify their income status when applying outside priority areas.

What is “Marginalization” and how is it measured?

Marginalization is a multifaceted concept used in Mexico to identify areas with the most significant social and economic disadvantages. The CONAPO calculates a Marginalization Index based on indicators such as illiteracy, lack of access to basic services (water, electricity, sanitation), housing quality, and income levels. Localities are categorized into five levels of marginalization: very high, high, medium, low, and very low.

Indigenous localities are identified in the INPI catalog, which considers the percentage of indigenous-language speakers and households that self-identify as indigenous.

School Classification and Prioritization

The BBBJ program employs a school-based targeting method to implement its prioritization criteria. Schools are divided into three categories:

- **Priority Schools:**

Public schools located in indigenous localities or areas with very high, high, medium, or low levels of marginalization, as well as those in localities with fewer than 50 residents (regardless of marginalization level), automatically prioritize students for the scholarship. Their families are not required to provide proof of low-income status.

- **Schools Eligible for Attention:**

Public schools in non-priority localities may still consider some students for the program if their families are classified as low-income. Here, families must show that their income is below the poverty line.

- **Schools Not Eligible for Attention:**

These include private schools, co-educational or non-schooled public institutions, and any school that does not meet the above criteria. Students in these schools are not eligible for the BBBJ program. To promote transparency, the program offers a public tool called the “School Finder,” which allows families to check if their child’s school is classified as a priority or eligible for attention.

Geographic and Demographic Reach

The program’s prioritization criteria mean that states with high concentrations of indigenous populations and significant levels of marginalization—such as Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veracruz, and Puebla—have the most important shares of priority schools and, as a result, greater program coverage. In these areas, the combination of rural living, ethnicity, and poverty is most intense, making the BBBJ a vital intervention for educational equity.

- As of 2024, the BBBJ program helps about 6.5 million families nationwide.
- Most beneficiaries are found in rural and indigenous communities, highlighting the program’s geographic focus.
- Despite this, exclusion errors remain significant, particularly in urban areas with pockets of poverty and among families whose children attend non-priority schools.

While the BBBJ’s school-based and territorial targeting has allowed the program to reach many of Mexico’s most marginalized children, it also creates new forms of exclusion. Families living in poverty but whose children attend non-priority schools—often in urban or peri-urban areas—may be left out. Additionally, reliance on digital registration and documentation requirements can further disadvantage indigenous, rural, and low-literacy households.

A combination of school location, marginalization level, indigenous status, and family income determines the target population for the BBBJ program. Prioritizing indigenous and highly marginalized areas ensures the program reaches those most at risk of educational exclusion, while also emphasizing the need for ongoing improvements to address gaps and guarantee that all vulnerable children, regardless of their location or school attendance, have equal access to educational support.

4.1.3 Approved budget. Financing sources and budget distribution

The BBBJ has become one of the most essential social investments in Mexico’s recent history, showcasing the government’s dedication to promoting educational equity and aiding vulnerable families. Over the past six years, the program’s budget has increased significantly, highlighting its key role within the country’s social protection system.

Between 2019 and 2024, the BBBJ program’s annual budget grew by nearly 50%, increasing from about 33.8 billion pesos in 2019 to almost 49.9 billion pesos in 2024 (all figures adjusted to July 2024 using INEGI’s National Consumer Price Index). This consistent growth highlights the program’s importance in federal spending and its expanding reach among Mexico’s most marginalized groups.

Table 3. Benito Juárez Scholarship Program Budget, 2019–2024 (MXN, deflated to July 2024)

Year	Budget (MXN)
2019	\$33,788,529,900
2020	\$36,687,058,978
2021	\$37,502,875,178
2022	\$36,293,763,713
2023	\$36,618,411,530
2024	\$49,869,758,606
Source: Federal Public Finance Account 2019–2023; Expenditure Budget of the Federation 2024; deflated with INPC (INEGI).	

The BBBJ program is financed entirely through federal resources, allocated annually in the Federation's Expenditure Budget (Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación, PEF). The program's funding is managed by the National Coordination of Scholarships for Welfare (CNBBBJ), under the oversight of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP). No external or subnational funding sources are involved, ensuring centralized control and uniformity in program delivery nationwide.

The BBBJ budget mainly funds direct cash transfers to beneficiary families, with most resources reaching households through bimonthly scholarship payments. Administrative and operational costs—including outreach, registration, and monitoring—account for a small share of the total budget, underscoring the program's focus on maximizing the impact of public spending on educational outcomes.

In 2024, the BBBJ represented about 6.7% of the total budget allocated to Mexico's 16 priority social programs, making it the third-largest social initiative after the Pension for the Elderly and the healthcare and medicines program. These three programs together accounted for 75% of the total budget for priority social programs, highlighting the importance of educational support within the broader welfare strategy.

The significant increase in the BBBJ budget in 2024 reflects both the rising demand for educational support and the government's decision to expand coverage, especially in preparation for the transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship. This change, planned for 2025, is expected to further increase the program's budget as it moves toward universal coverage for all students in public basic education.

In summary, the Benito Juárez Scholarship Program's strong and growing budget highlights its strategic role in Mexico's efforts to address educational exclusion and poverty. The program's centralized funding and efficient budget management ensure resources are allocated where they are most needed—supporting millions of families and helping to create a more equitable future for the country's children and youth.

4.2. Administrative Structure and Implementation

4.2.1 Agencies involved in program design, execution, and governance structure

The BBBJ program is centrally managed by the National Coordination of Scholarships for Welfare (CNBBBBJ), an autonomous body under the SEP. The CNBBBBJ is responsible for the design, coordination, oversight, monitoring, supervision, implementation, and evaluation of all scholarship programs under its authority, including the BBBJ, Benito Juárez Scholarships for Upper Secondary Education, Youth Writing the Future, and Elisa Acuña Scholarships.

To ensure nationwide coverage and effective local implementation, the CNBBBBJ functions through a multi-level structure.

- **State Representative Offices (ORE):** Administrative units in each state that oversee program operations, beneficiary services, and coordinate with local education authorities.
- **Auxiliary Offices of State Representation (SARE):** regional support units that expand the reach of the OREs, especially in remote or highly marginalized areas.
- **Temporary Operating Offices:** Established as needed to assist with enrollment, offer guidance, and address beneficiary issues, particularly during peak registration or payment times.

While the program is federally managed, local educational authorities and public schools play a vital role in its implementation. Schools act as central points of contact for families, sharing information about the program, helping with registration, and providing the necessary enrollment data. They also facilitate communication between families and the CNBBBBJ, helping to close gaps in outreach and service delivery.

The governance structure is designed to guarantee both centralized oversight and local responsiveness. The CNBBBBJ establishes policy and operational guidelines, while state and regional offices tailor implementation to their local contexts. Coordination with the Ministry of Public Education ensures consistency with national education policy, and collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) supports the inclusion of victims of crime or human rights violations.

4.2.2 Implementation Processes: from outreach to benefit delivery

The BBBJ's implementation follows the Fundamentals of Social Protection Delivery Systems framework (Lindert et al., 2020), covering the following key phases:

1. Outreach and Communication

The CNBBBBJ conducts extensive outreach campaigns through digital (official website, social media, WhatsApp, and SMS), print (posters and flyers), and in-person channels (school assemblies and community meetings). These efforts inform communities, school principals, and parents about scholarship availability, eligibility criteria, and application procedures. However, field research shows that communication is often less organized in marginalized areas, and schools are not always fully equipped to act as reliable information centers.

2. Intake and Registration

Identification of eligible schools and families:

The CNBBBBJ compiles a list of priority schools (called a catalog) using the Educational Information and Management System (EMIS), which includes data on school location, marginalization level (using CONAPO and INPI indices), and student enrollment.

Registration Process:

- For Priority Schools: CNBBBBJ conducts fieldwork and in-person campaigns to identify and register eligible families. Families can also self-identify and apply through the online “School Finder” tool.
- For Schools Eligible for Attention: Families can apply online using the Incorporation Application Card (CSI), an electronic form that gathers personal, academic, and socioeconomic details. Results are posted online, and qualified families are invited to submit documentation at local offices.

Steps in the Current Enrollment Process

1. Online Pre-Registration:

Families start the process by filling out an online form on the BBBJ program website during designated registration periods. The platform instantly checks if the child’s school is labeled as a “priority school” (i.e., situated in a highly marginalized or indigenous area) or is “eligible for attention.” Only families with children attending these schools can move forward.

2. Document Submission and Verification:

After online pre-registration, families must verify their information by submitting a complete set of documents. These generally include:

- Proof of school enrollment (credential, registration form, grade report)
- Parent/guardian ID (INE, passport, or equivalent)
- Legal guardianship documentation, if applicable
- Identity documents for the student and guardian (such as the birth certificate, CURP—Clave Única de Registro de Población, Mexico’s national identification code), or immigration documents
- Proof of residence
- Additional documentation for guardianship, if applicable

Document submission can occur at designated program offices, such as the state Representative Offices (ORE) or Auxiliary Offices (SARE) of the CNBBBBJ, or, in some instances, at the school itself.

3. Internal Validation:

The CNBBBBJ performs an internal validation process by cross-referencing submitted information with national registries (such as RENAPO) and other social program databases to prevent duplication and verify eligibility.

3. Assessment of Needs and Eligibility

The CNBBBBJ verifies submitted information using RENAPO (National Population Registry) and cross-checks with other scholarship databases to prevent duplication. Families are excluded if they cannot verify their identity, are already beneficiaries, or do not meet school or income criteria.

4. Enrollment and Notification

Eligible families are added to the beneficiary registry based on prioritization criteria and available budget. Notification of results is sent via the program’s online platform, SMS, and, whenever possible, through schools and local offices. Families receive instructions for onboarding and setting up payments.

5. Benefit Delivery

Scholarship payments are transferred electronically to a Banco del Bienestar account registered in the name of the parent or guardian. After verifying identity and account details, funds are deposited every two months. Using a national banking partner guarantees standardized, secure, and traceable payments, although some families report difficulties accessing cash in remote areas.

6. Beneficiary Management and Case Resolution

The CNBBBJ maintains and updates the beneficiary registry, adding new families as funds allow and removing those who no longer qualify (e.g., aging out, completing school, voluntary withdrawal, duplication, or failing to meet documentation requirements). Families are responsible for keeping their information current and reporting any issues with scholarship collection.

7. Exit and Appeals:

Beneficiaries may leave the program for reasons such as graduation, reaching the age limit, voluntary withdrawal, or administrative review. However, the lack of a formal grievance redress process remains a challenge, as families have limited options to appeal decisions or fix errors.

4.3.3 Coordination with Other Social Protection Initiatives

The BBBJ program is part of a wider social protection system in Mexico, working alongside other key programs such as the Pension for the Elderly, Sowing Life, and Youth Building the Future. Coordination is achieved through shared data systems and inter-agency agreements, especially for including victims of crime or human rights violations. However, integration with other social programs still needs improvement, particularly in preventing administrative exclusion and providing comprehensive support for families with multiple vulnerabilities.

Ultimately, the administrative structure and implementation of the BBBJ program show a strong, multi-level governance model that combines centralized policy guidance with local service delivery. While the program has made notable progress in reaching marginalized groups, ongoing issues in communication, digital access, documentation, and appeals indicate the need for continuous reforms—especially as it shifts to a universal model under the Rita Cetina Scholarship. Improving local capacity, expanding registration options, and creating precise grievance mechanisms will be essential to ensuring the program effectively provides fair and inclusive educational support to all Mexican children and teens.

5. Research Findings

This section presents the main findings from our detailed analysis of the BBBJ program and its transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship. Findings draw on the mixed-methods design outlined in Section 2.3, which integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand how targeting mechanisms shape exclusion and inclusion. This section focuses on interpreting those patterns rather than repeating methodological details.

The findings highlight both the successes and ongoing challenges of the BBBJ program, focusing on beneficiary selection processes, the scale and types of exclusion errors, and the effects of intersecting vulnerabilities such as indigeneity, gender, disability, and rurality. By carefully examining these aspects, we aim to provide policymakers and program managers with practical insights to improve the inclusivity and effectiveness of Mexico’s educational cash transfer system as it moves toward universal coverage.

5.1 Challenges in the Targeting Mechanisms

The shift from the targeted Prospera program to the BBBJ program marks a significant change in Mexico’s approach to educational support. While this change has expanded the program’s reach and made some processes easier, it has also created new complexities and challenges in effectively ensuring that support reaches the most vulnerable. As the BBBJ prepares to transition into the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship in 2025, a thorough review of its current selection methods is crucial for guiding future policy and practice.

The BBBJ program aims for universal coverage, but its operational framework still depends on a mix of geographic and categorical targeting. Schools are designated as “priority” based on their location in marginalized, indigenous, or rural areas, using data from the Educational Management Information System (EMIS) and the CONAPO marginalization index. This school-based targeting intends to direct resources to communities with the greatest need.

However, field research shows that this approach often leads to arbitrary divisions: families living in similar socioeconomic conditions but attending different schools—sometimes blocks apart—can have very different eligibility outcomes. This reliance on school location, rather than direct assessment of household need, can unintentionally exclude vulnerable families in non-priority areas, especially in urban settings where poverty is more spread out and less visible.

The Rise of “Modern Exclusion Errors”

A key feature of the BBBJ’s current selection method is its heavy reliance on digital platforms for registration and communication. While digitalization aimed to simplify processes and lower administrative costs, it has instead led to what can be called “modern exclusion errors.” Unlike traditional exclusion errors—often caused by bureaucratic inefficiency or poor outreach—modern exclusion errors arise from technological, administrative, and procedural barriers that mainly affect people with multiple vulnerabilities. For instance, elderly caregivers, indigenous families with limited Spanish skills, and households without reliable internet or digital skills face major challenges in navigating the online registration process. These barriers are worsened by strict documentation demands and the lack of flexible verification options, systematically excluding those who most need assistance.

Limited consideration of intersectionality

Despite the program’s stated commitment to equity, the current targeting approach inadequately addresses intersectionality—the way in which overlapping identities such as indigeneity, disability, gender, and age deepen disadvantage. Indigenous families, people with disabilities, single-parent households, and elderly caregivers often face multiple, reinforcing barriers at every stage of the process. For example, indigenous families may encounter language barriers and a lack of culturally appropriate information. Meanwhile, single mothers and elderly caregivers deal with time and mobility constraints that make it challenging to complete registration or provide required documentation. The program’s standardized, one-size-fits-all approach fails to recognize these diverse realities, leading to higher exclusion rates among those with multiple vulnerabilities.

Documentation and administrative hurdles

The BBBJ’s selection process requires families to submit a variety of official documents, including birth certificates, CURP, proof of school enrollment, and identification of the parent or guardian. While these requirements aim to ensure program integrity, they often present insurmountable barriers for families lacking up-to-date documents, those with non-traditional guardianship arrangements, or those living in remote areas with limited access to administrative services. The lack of alternative verification methods or support for obtaining necessary documents worsens exclusion, especially for indigenous and rural families.

Effective communication is essential for fair program access; however, the BBBJ’s outreach efforts are often scattered and inconsistent. While information is shared through official websites, social media, and occasional school announcements, many families report receiving vague, delayed, or conflicting information about eligibility, application steps, and deadlines. Schools, which could act as trusted intermediaries, often lack the tools or information needed to help families effectively. This absence of systematic, accessible, and multilingual communication channels leads to confusion, self-exclusion, and mistrust among potential beneficiaries.

The upcoming transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship aims to address many targeting challenges by shifting toward universal eligibility for all students in public basic education. The planned reforms include broader coverage, higher benefit amounts, and simpler registration processes. However, the success of these reforms will depend on the program’s ability to tackle the “modern exclusion errors” identified in this study—especially those related to digital access, documentation, and intersectional vulnerabilities—while maintaining program integrity and efficiency.

i. Outreach

Effective outreach is a key element of equitable social protection delivery because it makes sure potential beneficiaries know about the program, eligibility requirements, and how to apply. In the case of the BBBJ program, dissemination efforts mainly rely on indirect and mass communication channels, such as the program’s official website, national media ads, and social media. While these channels reach many people, their ability to inform the most vulnerable populations—especially those with limited digital access or literacy—remains limited.

Although some information is shared through educational institutions and WhatsApp groups, these efforts are not systematically coordinated or implemented. As one school principal explained, “*We do not have complete and timely information to guide families; often, we ourselves are unsure about the requirements or the application periods.*” This lack of direct, reliable communication leaves both school staff and families without the necessary details to navigate the program, resulting in confusion and missed enrollment opportunities.

Relying on mass channels instead of personalized or community-based outreach often prevents vital information from reaching those who need it most—especially in rural, indigenous, or marginalized communities. Several key challenges have been identified in the current dissemination approach.

- **Unclear and Inconsistent Communication:** Many families say that information about how the program works, who is eligible, and application deadlines is ambiguous or not consistent. As a result, families often depend on word-of-mouth or informal networks, which can spread misinformation. One parent shared, “*We only found out about the scholarship because another parent mentioned it at school; there was no official notice or clear instructions.*”

- **Limited Role of Schools:** Although they are trusted community centers, schools are not consistently involved in the dissemination process. School staff often lack current or complete information, which hampers their ability to support families effectively. As another principal observed, *“We would like to have clear guidelines and timely updates so we can help families, but often we are left in the dark ourselves.”*
- **Barriers to Direct Support:** Attempts to get clarification through official phone lines or local program offices often fail. Families report long wait times, unresolved questions, or being redirected without answers. This lack of accessible support further discourages participation, especially among those with limited time or resources.
- **Risks of Misinformation:** Social media, while widely used, is a double-edged sword. It can quickly spread information, but it can also spread rumors or incorrect details. Without authoritative, direct communication, families might act on false information, causing frustration and exclusion.
- **Missed Opportunities for Community Engagement:** The lack of systematic, face-to-face outreach—such as information sessions at schools or community centers—leaves many eligible families unaware of the program or unsure how to apply. This is particularly a problem for populations with limited internet access or digital literacy.

The current dissemination strategy for the BBBJ program mainly relies on indirect, mass communication channels, with limited involvement of schools and community members as trusted intermediaries. This approach has created significant information gaps, confusion, and barriers to access for the most vulnerable families. Improving dissemination by engaging schools, providing clear and timely information, and offering direct, culturally and linguistically appropriate support will be crucial for ensuring equitable access as the program moves toward reaching everyone.

ii. Intake, Registration, and Assessment of Needs and Conditions

The process for admission and enrollment in the BBBJ program has changed significantly in recent years, shifting from a mostly administrator-led, in-person system to a mainly technology-driven, online model. This shift reflects broader trends in public administration, but it also brings new challenges and barriers, especially for the most vulnerable populations.

Historically, enrollment in predecessor programs like Progresa and Prospera was conducted through proactive, in-person campaigns led by public officials who visited schools and communities to identify and register eligible families. This administrator-driven approach ensured some outreach to marginalized households, especially in rural and indigenous areas. In contrast, the current BBBJ model mainly depends on digital registration. Families now need to enroll through an online platform during specific campaign periods announced by the program. While this change aims to streamline processes and cut administrative costs, it has also shifted much of the access burden onto families themselves.

Barriers and Challenges

While digital enrollment has improved efficiency for some, it has also introduced significant barriers for many potential beneficiaries.

- **Technological Barriers:**

Many families, especially in rural or neglected urban areas, lack access to reliable internet, computers, or digital literacy. As a result, they often face extra expenses by renting computer time at internet cafés or paying unofficial helpers to assist with registration—services that don’t guarantee successful or accurate data entry. As one parent said, *“I had to pay at the internet café for help with registration.”*

- **Platform Functionality and Overload:**

The online platform is often overwhelmed during peak registration times, resulting in frozen pages, lost data, and error messages. Both families and school staff helping with registration describe the process as frustrating and unreliable: *“The page was overloaded, I couldn’t get in, it went blank. I had to do it at two or three in the morning.”*

- **Complexity and Documentation Requirements:**

The registration process is lengthy and requires a lot of information, including current documents. The lack of clarity about which documents are needed, and the requirement for “recent” versions (without clear validity periods), often forces families to pay for new copies of birth certificates or proof of residence. This creates additional financial and logistical challenges, especially for those with limited resources or guardians caring for multiple children.

- **Uncertainty and Lack of Feedback:**

Many families express uncertainty about whether their registration went through, as the platform sometimes doesn't provide confirmation or timely notifications. *“We never knew if we were accepted or not, and no one explained what happened with our application”*, noted one participant.

- **Geographic and Institutional Barriers:**

The lack of nearby in-person support options means families often travel long distances to program offices, adding transportation costs and taking time away from work or caregiving duties. Poor treatment or unclear information at local offices further discourages participation.

- **Political and Social Interference:**

In some areas, external actors—such as local political groups—are perceived as affecting access to the program or the sharing of information, which adds uncertainty and sometimes leads to mistrust among potential beneficiaries.

Special Challenges for Non-Beneficiaries

Non-beneficiary students from priority schools face additional difficulties, including:

- Technical or administrative errors in the recognition of identity documents (e.g., CURP mismatches or missing records)
- The need to invest significant time and money in the registration process, often without any guarantee of success
- Negative experiences at local offices, including unclear guidance and, at times, discriminatory treatment

Notably, the BBBJ program does not perform individualized assessments of household needs or living conditions during the enrollment process. Eligibility is based only on school classification and basic documentation, with no role for schools in evaluating or registering potential beneficiaries. The internal validation by CNBBJ is limited to verifying identities and preventing duplication, rather than assessing broader socioeconomic vulnerability.

The current enrollment and admission system, while modernized in appearance, has unintentionally created new types of exclusion—especially for families facing overlapping vulnerabilities such as poverty, rural living, indigenous status, limited digital skills, or non-traditional guardianship setups. Transferring administrative and financial responsibilities to families, along with technological and bureaucratic hurdles, risks undermining the program’s main goal: ensuring no child is left out of educational support due to their circumstances. As the program moves toward the universal Rita Cetina Scholarship, overcoming these barriers—by expanding registration options, streamlining documentation, and enhancing in-person assistance—will be crucial to achieving fair and inclusive educational opportunities for everyone.

iii. Eligibility and Enrollment

The eligibility and enrollment process for the BBBJ program is designed to allocate resources effectively by focusing on school-based targeting and household participation criteria. However, field research shows that this seemingly simple system often creates unintended barriers and exclusion errors, especially for the most vulnerable populations the program intends to serve.

The classification of priority schools relies on a multi-tiered system that considers geographic and socioeconomic indicators. This approach aims to ensure the program benefits communities with the greatest needs. However, it can also lead to arbitrary divisions within similar neighborhoods. For instance, families living on neighboring streets might have different eligibility results solely because their children attend other schools, even though their socioeconomic conditions are comparable.

To ensure program integrity, the BBBJ uses internal validation mechanisms that check enrollment certificates against program databases and national registries. While these processes are crucial for preventing duplication and fraud, they often create technical and administrative bottlenecks. As one school principal explained, “*Many times, families don’t know if they were accepted because they never receive any email notification.*” This lack of clear communication leaves families uncertain about their application status and may delay or block access to benefits.

Exclusion Errors and Barriers

Field research and qualitative evidence identify several key areas where the current eligibility and enrollment system causes exclusion errors.

- **Digital Divide and Communication Gaps:**

The program’s reliance on digital notifications—mainly through email and the online platform—creates significant obstacles for families with limited internet access or digital skills. Many eligible families say they never received official confirmation of their application status, which causes confusion and delays.

- **Arbitrary School-Based Divisions:**

The priority school ranking system can create inequalities within communities. Field reports suggest that families in similar financial situations might be treated differently just because of the school their children attend.

- **Technical and Administrative Hurdles:**

The internal validation process, although necessary for accuracy, often causes delays and technical issues. Families frequently face problems with document verification and database cross-referencing, which can lead to unnecessary exclusions. For example, errors in CURP (national identification code) entries or mismatches in documentation can prevent otherwise eligible students from receiving the scholarship.

- **Lack of Feedback and Appeals:**

The absence of a formal appeals process or clear feedback methods means that excluded families have little way to understand or contest the decision. This lack of transparency damages trust in the program and may discourage future involvement.

The targeting system of the BBBJ program has shown major structural and operational problems that regularly block access for many of Mexico’s most vulnerable groups. Both field studies and program reviews consistently identify a range of key issues that lead to exclusion errors—cases where eligible individuals or families cannot receive benefits—thus undermining the program’s primary goal of helping those most in need of educational aid.

The program’s reliance on geographic targeting, specifically the classification of schools as “priority” or “eligible for care” based on their location in marginalized areas, has led to arbitrary eligibility boundaries that do not reflect the complex and diverse nature of poverty in Mexico. Fieldwork shows that families living just a few streets apart may experience very different eligibility outcomes solely because their children go to other schools, regardless of their actual socioeconomic need, which creates unfair access to benefits. This problem is severe in urban areas, where pockets of poverty are often ignored because they are located within otherwise “better-off” zones, resulting in the systematic exclusion of needy families.

The program’s heavy reliance on digital platforms for registration had become a significant source of exclusion, especially for families with limited internet access, low digital literacy, or insufficient funds to cover related costs. Elderly guardians are particularly at a disadvantage, often struggling with technology requirements and, in many cases, paying intermediaries to complete the registration. As one caregiver noted, *“I had to pay someone to help me with the registration.”* Technical issues with the online platform—such as frequent crashes and time-outs during peak registration periods—exacerbate these problems, widening the digital divide and increasing the administrative burden for the most vulnerable.

Rigid documentation requirements create a major barrier to access. Families need to provide current official documents, such as birth certificates and proof of residence, which often involve additional costs and time. These requirements disproportionately affect Indigenous families, those with limited literacy, and elderly guardians, who may face significant challenges in obtaining or updating the necessary paperwork. The absence of flexible verification methods or alternative documentation options has led to the exclusion of eligible families who cannot easily meet these administrative demands. As one Indigenous parent shared, *“I don’t have the updated documents and I don’t know how to get them.”*

Significant gaps exist in program communication and transparency. Families often receive vague, inconsistent, or incomplete information about eligibility criteria, application procedures, and deadlines. Schools—potentially trusted intermediaries—frequently lack timely and comprehensive information to help families navigate the process effectively.

The current targeting approach shows limited sensitivity to intersectional vulnerabilities—the combined disadvantages faced by individuals or households due to overlapping effects of multiple social identities and structural barriers. Indigenous families, persons with disabilities, elderly caregivers, and single-parent households often encounter various intersecting challenges when accessing the program. For instance, indigenous families with limited Spanish skills must deal with both language barriers and technological hurdles. Meanwhile, families with disabled members face additional obstacles in providing documents and reaching registration sites. These intersectional factors increase exclusion and emphasize the need for a more nuanced, equity-focused approach.

The shift away from previous programs has weakened strong socioeconomic verification methods. Consequently, there are documented instances where higher-income families—such as professionals like dentists, teachers, and police officers—receive benefits, while families in greater need are left out. As one school director noted, *“There are families of professionals who receive the scholarship, while the children who need it most, those who come with broken shoes, do not have it.”* This misdirection damages the program’s fairness goals and damages public trust.

Finally, the program’s implementation varies significantly across regions and schools, leading to unequal access to benefits. Some schools actively assist families during registration, while others offer little to no help. This inconsistency especially impacts vulnerable populations who need extra support to navigate the application process successfully. As one parent noted, *“At my school, no one helped us, but at my sister’s school, they explained everything to them.”*

5.1.2 Other implementation barriers

While the BBBJ’s eligibility and enrollment framework is designed to allocate resources efficiently, its implementation has uncovered significant challenges in reaching all vulnerable populations effectively. The combination of digital barriers, rigid school-based targeting, and administrative hurdles has led to the systematic exclusion of families most in need of support. These exclusion errors are especially severe for households facing multiple vulnerabilities, such as indigenous families, single mothers, elderly caregivers, and those living in remote or urban-marginalized areas. As the program shifts to the universal Rita Cetina Scholarship, addressing these barriers—by simplifying processes, diversifying registration channels, and improving communication—will be essential to ensure that the goal of equitable educational support becomes a reality for everyone.

5.1.3 Intersectionality Analysis

Building on earlier findings, this section examines how gender, ethnicity, disability, and caregiving roles combine to shape access to BBBJ. Rather than restating barriers, it identifies how these factors intersect within policy design and implementation to produce differentiated outcomes.

Despite the BBBJ Program’s stated commitment to supporting students from marginalized backgrounds, its current selection methods reveal major limitations in addressing intersectionality—the way multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities combine to create unique barriers to access. While the program’s design focuses on students in marginalized and indigenous communities, it does not systematically consider how factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and family structure intersect, often leading to the exclusion of those who need support the most.

Field research consistently highlights this gap. For example, elderly guardians caring for school-age children face challenges that go far beyond economic hardship. As one grandmother from Oaxaca shared, *“I take care of my granddaughter because her parents migrated, but I don’t know how to use a computer, and no one helps me with the paperwork. In the end, we couldn’t enroll her.”* This testimony shows how the combination of age, caregiving duties, and digital illiteracy can effectively prevent access to the program.

Indigenous families face a triple burden: language barriers, technological challenges, and complicated documentation requirements. The online registration system is primarily designed for Spanish speakers and assumes a certain level of digital literacy and familiarity with bureaucracy, which many indigenous families lack. As one indigenous father explained, *“They ask us for documents we don’t have, and everything is in Spanish. In the community, almost no one understands how to do the process online.”* These combined barriers often lead to exclusion, even for families living in extreme poverty.

Single-parent households—especially those led by working mothers—face extra time and resource challenges. The need to gather and submit detailed paperwork, often requiring visits to multiple government offices during working hours, creates a significant financial and logistical burden. One mother from Puebla shared, *“I am a single mother and work all day. I can’t take time off to do paperwork, and when I went, they told me I was missing a document. I couldn’t go back, and my son was left without a scholarship.”* Many families, despite being eligible, face similar issues and struggle to overcome the barriers caused by the program’s complex administrative process.

The program’s heavy dependence on digital platforms for registration and document submission worsens exclusion for vulnerable groups. Elderly caregivers, for example, often lack the technological skills or resources to navigate these systems on their own. Many families are forced to pay intermediaries for help, which increases their financial vulnerability and exposes them to potential exploitation. As one participant noted, *“We had to pay someone to help us with the registration because we didn’t know how to do it on the computer.”*

The program’s limited focus on intersectionality in its selection process has several important implications:

1. **Exclusion of Highly Vulnerable Groups:** Families facing multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities—such as indigenous single mothers or elderly caregivers in rural areas—are often the most likely to be excluded, even though they are among those who need support the most.
2. **Increased Economic Burden:** Navigating multiple administrative and technological barriers often involves extra costs, such as paying for document updates, transportation, or digital support, which further strains already limited household resources.
3. **Self-Exclusion:** The belief that barriers are insurmountable, or previous negative experiences with bureaucratic processes, cause some families to give up on the application process entirely. As one mother said, *“After so many attempts and problems, I just stopped trying. I felt it wasn’t for us.”*

Quantitative evidence from the ENIGH 2022 survey and program administrative data confirms these qualitative findings. Exclusion errors are exceptionally high among woman-headed households (over 77% at the primary level), households with persons with disabilities (over 73%), and indigenous households at the secondary level (up to 44%). These figures highlight how intersectional vulnerabilities lead to real and ongoing barriers to program access.

Lastly, while the BBBJ Program has made progress in reaching some marginalized groups, its current selection methods do not fully address the complex realities of intersectionality. The lack of tailored processes or accommodations for families facing multiple vulnerabilities continues to exclude certain groups and undermines the program’s equity goals. As Mexico shifts to the universal Rita Cetina Scholarship, it is essential to incorporate intersectionality into the program’s design and implementation explicitly. This can be achieved by using multilingual support, flexible documentation requirements, hybrid registration options, and targeted outreach to those with overlapping vulnerabilities, ensuring that no child is left behind due to compounded disadvantages.

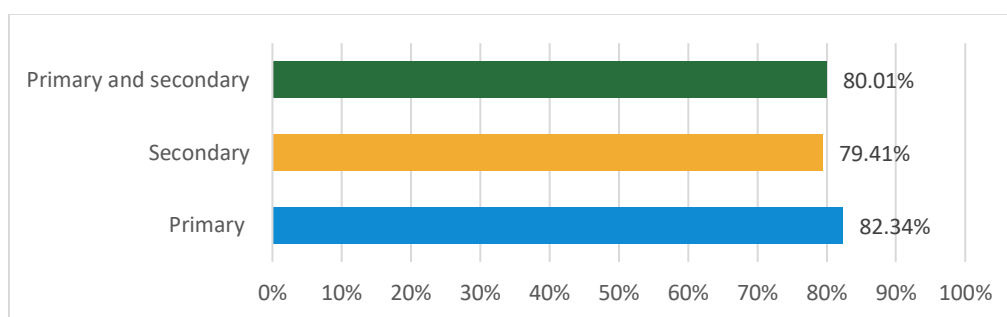
5.2 Magnitude of Exclusion Errors: quantitative estimation

5.2.1 Coverage of the eligible population

A thorough assessment of the program’s reach uncovers a stark truth: most eligible households are still not participating in the BBBJ scholarship program. Two complementary analytical methods were used to estimate coverage. The first, based on the 2022 National Survey of Household Income and Expenditure (ENIGH), offers a nationwide view. The second uses administrative data from the National Coordination of Welfare Scholarships, enabling breakdowns by school, state, and level of social disadvantage.

According to ENIGH 2022, exclusion errors are alarmingly high. At the primary education level, 82.34% of the estimated 10.3 million eligible households do not receive the scholarship. For secondary education, the exclusion error is 79.41% of the nearly 5.9 million eligible households. When both levels are considered together, 80.01% of the 13.5 million eligible households are excluded from the program.

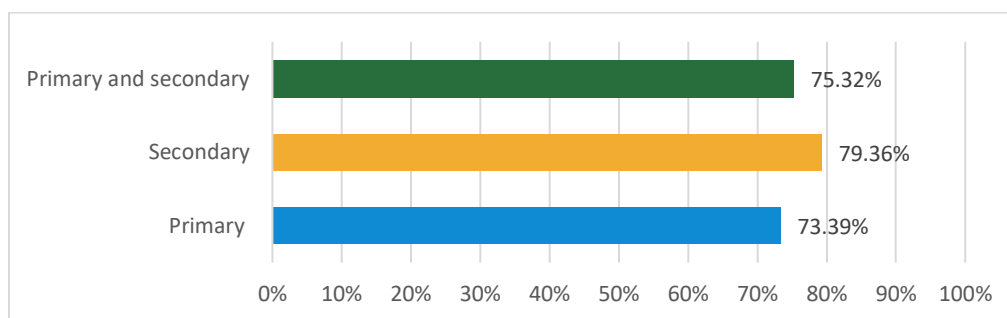
Figure 8. Exclusion errors by educational level



Source: ENIGH 2022

Exclusion errors estimated using official program records are also very high. Here, the exclusion rate is 73.39% for primary education and 79.36% for secondary education. Overall, 75.32% of eligible households are excluded.

Figure 9. Exclusion errors by educational level



Source: National Coordination of Welfare Scholarships

Coverage varies widely across states. In Mexico City, only 3.37% of eligible households are covered, whereas in Guerrero, coverage reaches 56.9%. Other states with significant indigenous and marginalized populations—such as Yucatán (41.49%), Oaxaca (50.34%), and Chiapas (55.7%)—also report higher coverage rates. This pattern shows the program’s focus on marginalized regions but also highlights ongoing gaps in urban and less marginalized areas.

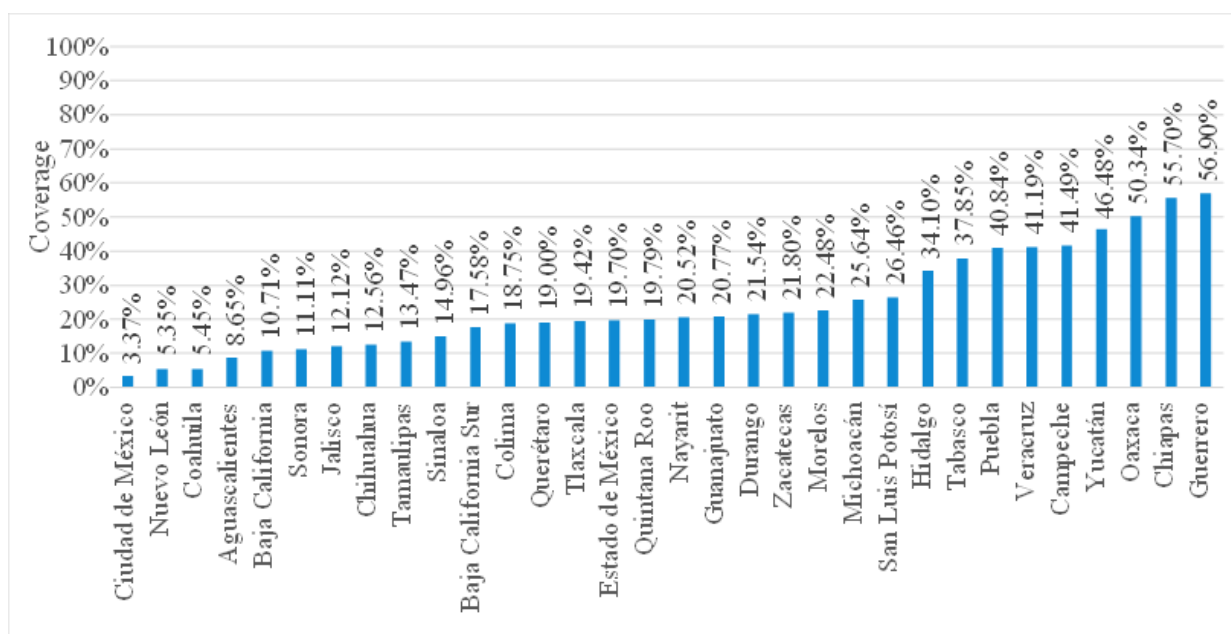


Figure 10. Total coverage by state in primary and secondary schools

Source: National Coordination of Welfare Scholarships

5.2.2 Coverage of the extreme and moderately poor population

When the analysis is fine-tuned to focus on poverty status, the exclusion errors remain alarmingly high—even among the poorest households:

- **Primary education:** 77.18% of eligible households below the national poverty line are excluded; 65.73% of those in extreme poverty (according to the national definition); and 48.92% of those below the World Bank’s extreme poverty threshold.
- **Secondary education:** Exclusion errors are 73.00% at the national poverty line, 63.75% at the national extreme poverty line, and 52.41% at the World Bank extreme poverty line.
- **Combined levels:** 73.52% of eligible households are excluded from national poverty, 61.41% from national extreme poverty, and 40.93% from World Bank extreme poverty.

These figures show that, even among those experiencing the most severe deprivation, most are not reached by the program.

Table 4. Number of observations by educational level and poverty line.

Educational level	Poverty status					
	Under national poverty line		Under national extreme poverty line		Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	
	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation

Primary	77.18%	0.83%	65.73%	1.95%	48.92%	7.05%
Secondary	73.00%	1.05%	63.75%	2.33%	52.41%	7.55%
Primary and secondary	73.52%	0.85%	61.41%	2.08%	40.93%	8.41%

Source: ENIGH 2022

Grouping states by their Degree of Social Backwardness (DSB) further highlights the program’s limitations. Exclusion errors are lowest in states with very high DSB—49.47% for households below the national poverty line—while states with low or very low DSB experience exclusion errors above 80%. This indicates that, although the program works better in the most marginalized areas, it misses vulnerable households in less marginalized regions, where poverty might be less obvious but is no less serious. As one individual explained from the qualitative data collection, “*In my community, they haven’t come to do censuses for years. Many families should be in the program, but have never been visited.*”

Table 5. Number of observations by DSB and poverty line.

Degree of Social Backwardness Region	Poverty status					
	Under national poverty line		Under national extreme poverty line		Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	
	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Very-high	49.47%	3.10%	37.54%	5.51%	25.77%	15.99%
High	69.45%	2.41%	58.61%	5.11%	54.79%	16.00%
Medium	68.35%	1.66%	63.24%	3.31%	37.73%	17.09%
Low	88.68%	0.72%	85.49%	1.41%	76.30%	5.99%
Very Low	82.25%	2.16%	84.33%	4.11%	84.49%	12.89%

Source: ENIGH 2022 and DSB 2020

The annexes show the coverage of social backwardness among degree state groups in primary and secondary schools, along with poverty status, based on ENIGH 2022 data.

Aggregating data by municipality within DSB regions shows that the highest coverage occurs in high DSB regions, with a slight decrease in very high DSB areas. Coverage drops significantly as social backwardness decreases, with exclusion errors in very low DSB municipalities exceeding 88%.

Table 6. Number of observations by DSB municipality groups

Social Backwardness Degree Region	Exclusion errors		
	Primary	Secondary	Primary and secondary

Very High	29.72%	41.46%	32.73%
High	28.26%	41.87%	32.14%
Medium	34.03%	49.43%	38.76%
Low	53.43%	65.12%	57.16%
Very Low	88.53%	89.42%	88.83%

Source: National Coordination of Welfare Scholarships

5.2.3 Distributive incidence: exclusion errors according to income deciles

Analysis by income decile shows that exclusion errors are lowest among the poorest households, but still significant, at 57.49% in the lowest decile. Exclusion errors increase steadily with income, exceeding 90% in the eighth decile and reaching 96.67% in the tenth. This pattern indicates that, although the program is somewhat progressive, its coverage is far from universal, even among the poorest.

Table 7. Number of observations by income decile and educational level

Household income decile	Primary		Secondary		Primary and secondary	
	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation

1	62.16%	2.10%	60.55%	2.44%	57.49%	2.20%
2	77.72%	1.26%	74.62%	1.80%	74.16%	1.27%
3	82.76%	1.12%	76.72%	1.70%	78.94%	1.14%
4	83.95%	1.02%	77.60%	1.95%	80.11%	1.13%
5	86.50%	0.99%	82.08%	1.63%	84.31%	0.94%
6	88.76%	1.07%	86.99%	1.34%	87.01%	0.98%
7	90.26%	1.05%	88.63%	1.32%	89.28%	0.90%
8	93.11%	0.89%	89.96%	1.51%	91.49%	0.89%
9	95.47%	0.71%	93.14%	1.44%	94.29%	0.79%
10	97.51%	0.58%	95.89%	0.88%	96.67%	0.55%

Source: ENIGH 2022

5.2.4 Quantitative evidence of excluded groups and intersectionality issues

Despite the BBBJ program’s explicit aim to reach Mexico’s most marginalized students, quantitative evidence reveals persistent and significant exclusion errors within key vulnerable groups. These errors are not evenly distributed; instead, they mirror the complex interplay of poverty, gender, ethnicity, disability, and rurality. Understanding these patterns is crucial to enhancing the program’s effectiveness and promoting educational equity.

Exclusion errors by group and poverty status

Indigenous Households

The program achieves relatively high coverage among indigenous households, but exclusion remains a significant concern—especially for those in secondary education and facing severe poverty.

Table 8. Number of observations of indigenous households by educational level and poverty line

Poverty Status	Primary Exclusion Error	Secondary Exclusion Error	Combined Exclusion Error
National poverty line	40.44% (4.38%)	39.82% (5.14%)	33.99% (4.83%)
National extreme poverty line	31.52% (6.39%)	30.57% (7.68%)	23.12% (7.69%)
World Bank extreme poverty line	28.64% (13.52%)	44.15% (12.51%)	20.07% (19.70%)

Note: Values in parentheses are coefficients of variation.

Source: ENIGH 2022.

Exclusion errors for indigenous households decline as poverty worsens, but secondary-level exclusion remains worryingly high under the World Bank’s extreme poverty line, indicating ongoing barriers to secondary education access.

Woman-Headed Households

Woman-headed households experience the highest exclusion rates across all groups analyzed, with only slight improvements under stricter poverty definitions.

Table 9. Number of observations of woman-headed households by educational level and poverty line

Poverty Status	Primary Exclusion Error	Secondary Exclusion Error	Combined Exclusion Error
National poverty line	81.27% (1.07%)	76.47% (1.78%)	77.74% (1.12%)
National extreme poverty line	73.10% (2.52%)	70.25% (3.97%)	69.15% (2.63%)
World Bank extreme poverty line	57.56% (11.77%)	57.11% (17.57%)	52.26% (12.47%)

Source: based on data from the ENIGH 2022

More than three-quarters of woman-headed households in poverty are excluded from the program, highlighting a critical gender gap that persists even among the most vulnerable.

Households with Persons with Disabilities

Households with members who have disabilities also face significant exclusion, especially at the secondary level.

Table 10. Number of observations of households with persons with disabilities by educational level and poverty line

Poverty Status	Primary Exclusion Error	Secondary Exclusion Error	Combined Exclusion Error
National poverty line	76.98% (1.63%)	72.76% (2.27%)	73.43% (1.59%)
National extreme poverty line	67.53% (3.54%)	67.77% (4.35%)	63.72% (3.39%)
World Bank extreme poverty line	44.40% (16.17%)	56.60% (15.40%)	37.00% (17.43%)

Source: based on data from the ENIGH 2022

Exclusion errors for households with disabilities remain high, particularly in secondary education, highlighting compounded barriers at the intersection of disability and poverty.

Rural Households

Rural households gain from improved program coverage, as exclusion errors decline with increasing poverty.

Table 11. Number of observations of rural households by educational level and poverty line

Poverty Status	Primary Exclusion Error	Secondary Exclusion Error	Combined Exclusion Error
National poverty line	56.40% (2.17%)	54.49% (2.40%)	51.14% (2.30%)
National extreme poverty line	45.89% (3.76%)	45.18% (4.36%)	39.51% (4.27%)
World Bank extreme poverty line	40.08% (8.68%)	42.37% (9.59%)	31.14% (10.83%)

Source: based on data from the ENIGH 2022

While rurality strongly predicts program inclusion, exclusion errors remain significant, especially for those not in the most severe poverty.

Comparative Profile: Who Benefits and Who Is Left Behind?

A comparison between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households across different poverty definitions reveals stark contrasts.

- **Indigenous and rural households** are disproportionately included among beneficiaries, highlighting the program’s focus on regional and ethnic targeting.
- **Women-headed households** are underrepresented, indicating ongoing gender-based barriers.
- **Disability status** shows no significant difference, indicating that the program neither systematically reaches nor excludes these households.

Table 12. Comparison of beneficiary and non-beneficiary households in primary and secondary education by subgroups

Subgroup	Non-Beneficiaries (%)	Beneficiaries (%)	Difference (pp)
Female head	30.66	24.37	-6.29***
Indigenous	6.87	37.04	+30.17***
Disability	17.90	17.98	+0.08
Rural	20.40	54.11	+33.70***

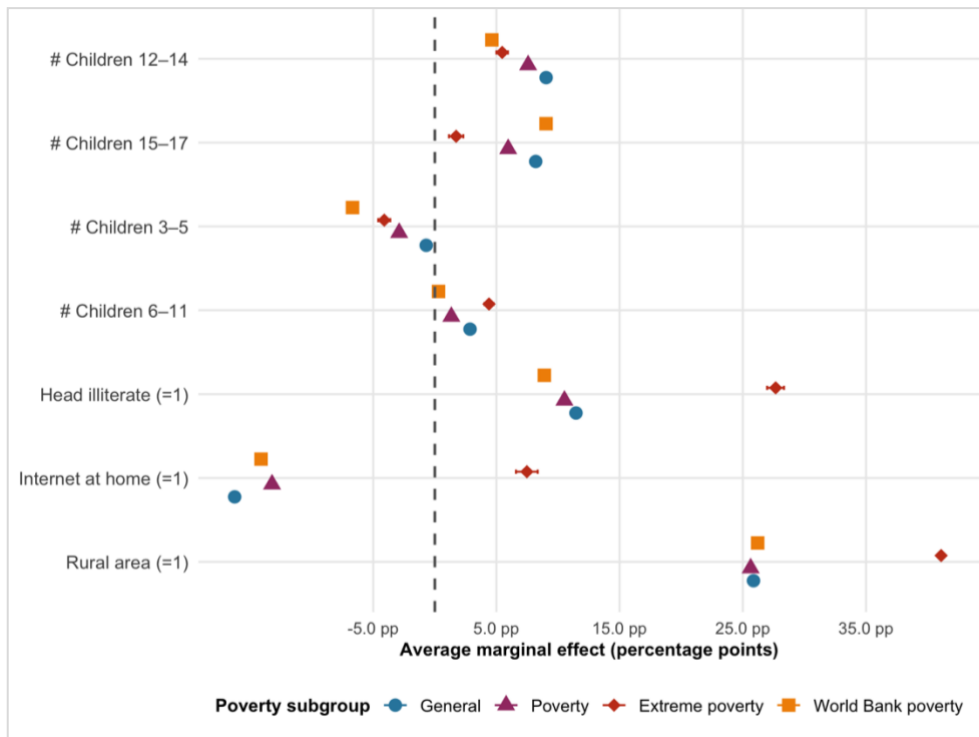
*Notes: Difference = Beneficiaries – Non-beneficiaries (percentage points); *** p<0.01.*

Source: Author’s calculations based on ENIGH 2022.

The descriptive statistics show notable differences between beneficiary and non-beneficiary households across various poverty subgroups. Beneficiaries are disproportionately indigenous (37.0% versus 6.9%) and rural (54.1% versus 20.4%), reflecting the program’s territorial and ethnic targeting strategies. In contrast, households headed by women participate at lower rates (24.4% among beneficiaries compared to 30.7% among non-beneficiaries), indicating potential barriers for this group. Disability status, however, does not show systematic differences between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, as the proportions are nearly identical. These patterns are consistent across different poverty measures, with beneficiary households exhibiting significantly higher rates of extreme and World Bank poverty, emphasizing the program’s focus on more vulnerable populations (tables 17-20). Overall, the descriptive evidence aligns with the program’s stated design and provides a basis for the multivariate analysis in the next section.

The following figure shows the average marginal effects from Bayesian INLA logistic models with random state effects. The models include all households with children enrolled in primary or secondary school and estimate how selected household characteristics influence the likelihood of receiving the Benito Juárez scholarship. Results are shown separately for the overall sample and for subgroups defined by national poverty, extreme poverty, and World Bank poverty.

Figure 11. Average marginal effects obtained from multiple Bayesian INLA logistic models with random effects by state



Source: Author’s calculations based on ENIGH 2022.

On one hand, descriptive comparisons show that indigenous households, rural households, and woman-headed households display marked differences in program participation across poverty subgroups. On the other hand, the logistic models confirm that rural residence, head illiteracy, and limited digital connectivity are strongly associated with higher participation, especially among those in extreme poverty. Together, these patterns align and indicate a consistent focus on the most disadvantaged households.

The BBBJ program has made significant progress in reaching indigenous and rural students, in line with its stated goals. However, ongoing exclusion—especially among woman-headed households and people with disabilities—shows the limits of current targeting methods. Fixing these gaps requires a more intersectional approach, paying attention to the overlapping and combined disadvantages faced by Mexico’s most marginalized families.

Summarizing, indigenous and rural households show greater inclusion but continue to face second-level and intersectional barriers. Women-headed households remain consistently overlooked, even in situations of severe poverty. Households with disabilities experience significant exclusion and underscore the need for more nuanced and targeted policy responses.

5.3 Factors Contributing to Exclusion Errors

5.3.1 Design factors: targeting tools, geographical targeting, and others

Although the BBBJ program was designed to expand educational opportunities for Mexico's most vulnerable students, some structural features of its design have unintentionally created systematic barriers to access. These design choices—especially the reliance on geographic targeting and strict administrative procedures—have led to significant exclusion errors, often affecting the very populations the program aims to support.

Geographic Targeting and School Classification System

The core of the BBBJ's selection process is a geographic targeting system that classifies schools as “priority” or “non-priority” based on their location in marginalized, indigenous, or rural areas. In practice, this means scholarship eligibility is determined not by the student's or their family's specific circumstances, but by the school's location.

While this approach was meant to streamline beneficiary selection and allocate resources to high-need areas, it has created several mechanisms of systematic exclusion.

1. **Arbitrary Geographic Boundaries:** The strict use of geographic criteria creates artificial divisions that do not reflect the true complexity of poverty and vulnerability. Fieldwork shows that families living just a few blocks apart—sometimes in nearly identical socioeconomic conditions—can have very different eligibility outcomes simply because their children attend different schools. As one parent explained, *“My neighbor receives the scholarship, but I don't, even though our situations are the same.”*
2. **Blindness to Urban Vulnerability:** The geographic targeting system is especially harmful to vulnerable families in urban areas. Schools in cities are often automatically labeled as “non-priority,” even if they serve students from impoverished neighborhoods. This creates what can be called “urban exclusion,” in which areas of poverty within cities are systematically ignored because they are located in otherwise wealthier areas.
3. **Mismatch Between School and Family Circumstances:** The assumption that school location reliably indicates household vulnerability does not always hold. Fieldwork found several cases that contradict this logic.
 - Some parents enroll their children in schools near their workplace rather than at home, potentially excluding vulnerable families if those schools are not prioritized.
 - Others make significant sacrifices to send their children to schools in different localities to seek better educational opportunities, but are penalized by the system's rigid boundaries.
 - Highly vulnerable families might live and go to school in non-priority areas, slipping through the cracks of the current targeting system.
6. **Confusion and Perceived Inequity:** There is widespread confusion among families about which schools are designated as priority. This issue is especially noticeable in neighboring communities with similar characteristics but different eligibility results. Consequently, the selection criteria are often seen as arbitrary or inconsistent. Focus group participants repeatedly voiced frustration over the lack of clarity and transparency, describing the process as “random” or a matter of “luck.” As one participant explained: *“It seems like it's just luck. Sometimes people with better economic status get the scholarship, while those who really need it are left out.”*

Program Structure and Implementation Design

The structure and operational design of the BBBJ program, while meant to streamline delivery and maximize coverage, have unintentionally created significant barriers that lead to exclusion errors—often impacting the very families the program aims to help most.

1 - Payments of Cash Benefits

The BBBJ scholarship is paid through electronic funds transfer to a Banco del Bienestar card assigned to the student’s legal guardian or caregiver. This digital payment method aims to ensure secure and efficient fund distribution, decrease administrative work, and support financial inclusion for low-income families.

However, a significant operational challenge comes from the timing and logistics of cash withdrawals at Banco del Bienestar ATMs. Scholarship disbursement times often overlap with payments from other major social programs, like pensions and disability benefits. As a result, ATMs—especially in rural and marginalized areas—frequently run out of cash, leading to long lines, delays, and sometimes forcing beneficiaries to make multiple trips or travel long distances to access their funds. This problem is especially severe in remote communities where banking infrastructure is limited. As one beneficiary stated, *“We have to wait in line for hours, and sometimes there’s no money left by the time it’s our turn. Some neighbors have to travel to the next town to withdraw their scholarship.”* This logistical bottleneck can hinder the program’s goal of providing timely and reliable support, particularly for families with limited mobility or resources.

2. Beneficiary Operations Management

The management of beneficiary data and ongoing operations is centralized under the National Coordination of Benito Juárez Scholarships for Welfare (CNBBBJ), which is responsible for maintaining and updating the beneficiary registry annually. While this system is designed to ensure data integrity and current records, several shortcomings undermine its effectiveness and inclusiveness.

Currently, there are no clear or accessible procedures for beneficiaries or applicants to update or correct their personal information after they initially register. Errors in documentation—such as outdated addresses, changes in guardianship, or name discrepancies—are hard to fix. This inflexibility can cause wrongful exclusions or payment disruptions, disproportionately impacting families that undergo frequent household changes or have a limited understanding of administrative processes.

The program lacks a clear, user-friendly way for people to file complaints, ask about their application status, or appeal rejections. As a result, families facing issues with enrollment or payments often find themselves without guidance or options. In-person visits to local offices are sometimes needed, adding extra costs and time hurdles that are especially hard for single mothers, elderly caregivers, and those in remote areas.

The current support system is mainly passive and reactive. Beneficiaries and applicants report confusion about where to seek help and frustration with unanswered calls or emails. There is no systematic feedback or notification when an application is rejected or a payment issue occurs. The absence of an explicit appeals or review process leaves families feeling powerless to resolve problems or understand decisions that affect their eligibility.

These gaps in beneficiary management and support can weaken trust in the program and contribute to the very exclusion errors the BBBJ aims to address. Families most in need of help—such as those with low digital literacy, limited mobility, or complex family situations—are the most likely to be left out or to disengage from the program due to unresolved administrative barriers.

One-Scholarship-Per-Family Rule

A key aspect of the BBBJ program is its policy of providing only one scholarship per family, regardless of how many children are enrolled in basic education. While this policy aims to reach as many households as possible, it unfairly disadvantages larger families. The already limited financial support becomes even more strained when divided among several children, reducing its effectiveness and sometimes discouraging siblings who do not receive scholarships from attending school. Field research consistently reveals the challenges of these families: *“I have four children in school, but only one receives the scholarship. It’s not enough, and sometimes I have to choose which child can continue because we can’t cover all the expenses.”*

This design choice, although administratively efficient, fails to consider the realities faced by families with multiple dependents, which weakens the program’s ability to reduce educational exclusion among the most vulnerable.

Centralized Administration and Limited Local Engagement

The BBBJ program is overseen centrally by the National Coordination, with minimal involvement from local groups like schools or community organizations. This centralized approach creates several barriers to inclusion.

- **Reduced Role of Schools:** Schools, often well-positioned to identify and support vulnerable students, have a limited role in the selection and enrollment process. This results in missed opportunities to utilize local knowledge and trust.
- **Limited Access for Remote Communities:** Families in rural or remote areas face significant challenges reaching program offices, often incurring high transportation costs and time away from work or caregiving.
- **Communication Gaps:** The lack of clear, direct communication channels between program authorities and beneficiaries causes confusion and misinformation. Many families report uncertainty about eligibility, application status, or the reasons for rejection.
- **Insufficient Local Support:** The lack of in-person help for registration and troubleshooting leaves many families—especially those with limited digital skills—without the assistance they need to navigate the process. As one parent said: *“We waited in line since five in the morning and were never attended to. We spent a whole week trying, and no one explained anything to us.”*

Victim Status and Registry Barriers

Although the program officially includes students or families recognized as victims (of crime or human rights violations), in practice, access to this pathway largely depends on prior registration in the national victim registry. No extra outreach or support is provided to help these families get included, and the criteria for recognition remain unclear. As a result, many eligible families are left out simply because they are not officially registered or lack information about the process.

Gaps in Support for Out-of-School Children and Accountability

Lastly, while the program focuses on providing financial support to students in selected schools and ultimately aims to promote attendance and retention, its design lacks mechanisms to address two critical gaps.

- **Children Not Enrolled in School:** There are no strategies to identify or include school-age children in vulnerable situations who are not currently enrolled in any educational institution, leaving some of the most at-risk youth without support.
- **Attendance Monitoring:** The program lacks accountability measures to ensure that scholarship recipients regularly attend classes throughout the school year, which limits its effectiveness in promoting ongoing educational engagement.

Digital Infrastructure and Administrative Design

The BBBJ program's reliance on digital platforms for registration and documentation, while aiming to modernize and simplify access, has created significant and sometimes insurmountable barriers for many of Mexico's most vulnerable families.

- Technological Barriers

Accessing the online registration system requires both internet access and a level of digital literacy—resources that are often limited in marginalized communities. Elderly caregivers, single mothers, and indigenous families are especially affected. Field reports are full of stories of families struggling to use the platform, as they face frequent crashes, system errors, or frozen screens that prevent them from completing the process. Such technological challenges not only incur financial costs—families often pay intermediaries or internet café fees—but also cause frustration and discouragement, ultimately resulting in exclusion from the program.

- Documentation Rigidity

The digital system requires an exact match of official documents, with no room for minor discrepancies. These strict requirements create additional barriers for those already facing multiple challenges due to language, family circumstances, or poverty.

This strictness is particularly harsh for: Indigenous families with limited Spanish skills; households with non-traditional guardians, such as grandparents or older siblings, caring for children; and families without current documents or the resources to pay for updates.

Multiple Layers of Exclusion

These design flaws—digital demands and rigid documentation—do not impact all families equally. They disproportionately exclude those with overlapping vulnerabilities: indigenous families, elderly caregivers, people with disabilities, and those in remote areas. The evidence consistently highlights the need for a more flexible, inclusive system that acknowledges the complex realities of these families while protecting program integrity.

5.3.2. Implementation factors: data quality, data manipulation, enrollment barriers, and others

Beyond design, several operational weaknesses have been identified that further hinder the BBBJ program's effectiveness and contribute to exclusion errors:

Data Quality and Systemic Errors

The program's data management suffers from persistent issues with personal identification:

- **CURP Errors:** Students frequently appear with duplicate or incorrect CURP numbers. As one principal observed: "*Many students appear with duplicate or incorrect CURP numbers.*"
- **Invalid Records:** Mistakes in data entry or document mismatches often go uncorrected.

These technical errors can stop eligible students from receiving the benefits they rightfully deserve. Additionally, the verification process is strict and doesn't account for common variations, such as:

- Children living with guardians who are not their parents
- Name spelling differences across documents
- Changes in family composition
- Student mobility between schools or regions

This kind of inflexibility causes the exclusion of children whose situations don't align with bureaucratic standards.

Furthermore, communication with families is often fragmented, unclear, or altogether absent. Many families receive inconsistent instructions or no updates regarding their application status, which leads to confusion and self-exclusion. Additionally, support from local offices is inconsistent and often unavailable, especially in remote communities. The absence of culturally or linguistically suitable assistance further worsens barriers for indigenous families.

Absence of Appeals and Feedback Mechanisms

When applications are rejected or lost in the system, families lack a straightforward way to appeal or fix errors. This lack of a formal grievance or review process leaves many without hope of resolution: "*We called the phone number they gave us, but we never got through. No one could tell us what happened with our application.*"

Deficiencies in Information and Communication

The BBBJ program's current communication strategy has significant weaknesses that hinder its ability to reach and support Mexico's diverse and vulnerable populations. This is especially clear among indigenous families, who face immediate challenges because of the lack of information in their native languages. Fieldwork consistently shows that when program materials and instructions are only available in Spanish, indigenous communities have difficulty understanding requirements and procedures, which blocks both initial access and ongoing participation.

The language barrier is worsened by the program's reliance on written, highly technical communication formats. Many potential beneficiaries have limited formal education, and the complexity of documentation requirements and instructions can be overwhelming. As one school principal observed: "*Many parents don't understand the requirements because they are written in a very technical way.*" For example, instructions often mention official acronyms like CURP or RENAPO and specify exact document formats, which confuses families about what is required and how to get it. This formal and bureaucratic style of communication often leaves individuals with low literacy and limited experience navigating administrative systems feeling excluded.

The lack of clear and consistent guidance on eligibility and application procedures increases these obstacles. Families often receive conflicting or incomplete information from various sources—sometimes from school staff, sometimes from local offices, and frequently from informal networks. In remote communities, where official channels are limited, families rely heavily on word of mouth, which is often inaccurate or outdated. This confusion causes uncertainty and frequently leads to self-exclusion, as families abandon the process out of frustration or fear of making mistakes.

Deficiencies in the monitoring and Support System

The program’s monitoring and support systems are also inadequate, directly causing exclusion errors. When applications are rejected, families often receive no explanation or guidance on how to fix the issues. Field research shows that most families are left confused about why their application was denied or what steps they can take to correct mistakes. This lack of feedback generates frustration, anxiety, and disengagement, particularly among those who have already invested significant time and resources in the application process.

Communication about application status is inconsistent and unreliable. Many families report waiting for months without any updates, missing chances to provide additional documentation or fix mistakes. The lack of systematic status notifications means errors often go unresolved, leaving eligible families without options.

The program’s customer interaction network—whether through physical offices, mobile devices, or digital platforms—remains a weak link in the delivery chain. In-person service at local offices is often the only option for families who cannot navigate the digital system, but these offices are not always conveniently located. High transportation costs and long travel times are typical, especially for rural families. Additionally, processes sometimes require the legal guardian’s presence on short notice, which is particularly difficult for working parents or caregivers.

This information and support gap is not just a technical issue—it is a structural barrier that systematically excludes the very populations the program aims to serve. The lack of accessible, multilingual, and user-friendly communication, along with weak feedback and support systems, creates a cycle of confusion, frustration, and exclusion. Vulnerable families—especially those who are indigenous, have low literacy, or live in remote areas—are the most likely to be left behind.

Institutional Capacity Constraints

Persistent institutional capacity limitations significantly hinder the effectiveness of the BBBJ program. Local offices are often understaffed and lack personnel trained to handle complex cases or provide assistance in indigenous languages. These limitations lead to communication bottlenecks and delays, especially for families needing specialized support due to language barriers or limited familiarity with administrative procedures.

Field evidence indicates a significant decline in the ability of local offices to effectively and efficiently serve families seeking information or assistance. One of the most noticeable signs of this shortcoming is the ongoing lack of response on official telephone lines: *“We called the number they gave us, but we never got through. No one could tell us what happened with our application.”*

Local offices frequently face staffing shortages and often lack personnel trained to assist in indigenous languages or handle complex cases. Reports of discriminatory or dismissive behavior further discourage families from seeking help. The lack of multilingual staff particularly harms indigenous language speakers, and the problem is worsened by reports of discriminatory and insensitive treatment—highlighting inadequate staff training and a deficiency in cultural understanding. As one indigenous mother explained: *“When I tried to explain in my language, they ignored me and told me to come back with someone who speaks Spanish.”*

Such experiences not only erode trust in the program but also reinforce patterns of exclusion among those who are already most vulnerable.

Static and Infrequent Logging Systems

The BBBJ program depends on occasional, large-scale registration drives, with enrollment periods that are closed in between. This fixed method naturally fails to reflect the changing nature of the student population, raising the chances of exclusion mistakes over time. As families move, children switch schools, or new students qualify, the inability to register outside of specific periods leaves many eligible children without services. Field testimonies highlight these shortcomings: *“My daughter joined the school after the registration period, and now we have to wait until next year to apply. Meanwhile, she gets no support.”*

Furthermore, some students enrolled in priority schools—those supposed to receive support—were unable to register because they were not present during the intake period or faced administrative barriers. This inflexibility mainly impacts children from migratory, indigenous, or vulnerable backgrounds, whose school attendance or documentation might not match the program’s fixed schedules.

Absence of Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM)

A significant weakness in the BBBJ program is the lack of a formal grievance redress mechanism (GRM) or accessible, regular channels for submitting and resolving complaints. Without these mechanisms, errors and injustices go unaddressed. Many families and even school staff are unaware of any process through which they can:

- Follow up on pending applications
- Challenge rejection decisions
- File complaints about procedures or officials
- Correct inaccurate information in their records

This lack of options continues to create exclusion because those affected have no clear way to ask for clarification or assistance. As one participant said: *“My sister registered twice and was never told why she was not accepted. She tried to ask at the office but didn’t get an answer.”* The absence of a transparent and accessible complaints system reduces accountability, leaving vulnerable families powerless against bureaucratic hurdles or administrative mistakes.

5.3.3 Factors contributing to the exclusion of people with multiple identities (intersectionality)

The BBBJ program has traditionally used a standardized, centralized approach to implementation, focusing on operational efficiency and wide coverage. While this model has allowed the program to reach millions of families, it has also created systemic barriers—especially for those facing multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities. Field research consistently shows that the program’s uniform procedures do not sufficiently consider Mexico’s significant geographic, economic, and social diversity, leading to notable exclusion errors for those at the intersection of poverty, indigeneity, gender, age, and family structure.

These errors typically impact populations experiencing multiple vulnerabilities at the same time. Factors related to the design and implementation of the program that led to exclusion include:

Transfer of Administrative Burden

A key characteristic of the BBBJ model is its focus on direct interaction between the program and beneficiaries, reducing the role of middlemen. While meant to limit discretion and corruption, this strategy has unintentionally shifted much of the administrative and financial burden onto families. Vulnerable households often cover costs such as travel to distant program offices, fees for updating or obtaining official documents, internet access charges, and payments to third parties for help with digital registration.

As one participant explained, *“I had to pay to update my children’s birth certificates; I have four.”* This testimony shows how the costs involved in compliance can become overwhelming obstacles for families already struggling to make ends meet.

Digital and Linguistic Barriers

The program’s reliance on digital platforms and Spanish-language communication has increased exclusion for several groups: speakers of indigenous languages, elderly caregivers with limited digital skills, families in areas with poor internet access, and those without digital devices. These requirements are especially challenging during the initial registration process, which falls to parents or guardians. Fieldwork shows that these barriers are especially severe in rural and indigenous communities, where digital infrastructure is limited and Spanish is not always the primary language.

Documentation and Guardianship Requirements

Although the program’s rules theoretically allow for different family types, in reality, the need for formal guardianship papers is both expensive and complicated. This mainly impacts extended families, informal guardians, single-parent households, same-sex parent families, families affected by migration, and children in foster care or adoption proceedings.

An elderly caregiver explained her situation: *“I take care of my granddaughter. My son left, and so did her mother. I have my son’s birth certificate, but I don’t know anything about her mother, not even where to look for her.”* Such cases show how strict documentation rules can exclude children living in non-traditional or unstable family setups.

Geographic and Institutional Barriers

The centralized structure of program offices, combined with limited institutional capacity, creates additional challenges: long distances to offices, a shortage of staff who speak indigenous languages, a lack of culturally appropriate support, and materials that are inaccessible to those with disabilities or limited literacy. For many, the time needed to travel or wait for assistance conflicts with work and caregiving duties.

It is essential to recognize that the cumulative impact of these barriers—financial, technological, linguistic, and institutional—often results in discouragement and self-exclusion. Ongoing challenges, the costs individuals incur to register, and discriminatory treatment serve as obstacles to access for people with various characteristics that make them more vulnerable.

5.4 Interventions to Address Exclusion Errors

Mexico’s move toward inclusive educational cash transfers has entered a new stage with the shift from the BBBJ program to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship. This change signifies a clear transition from targeted, selective assistance to a universal, equity-focused model aimed at reducing exclusion errors and increasing opportunities.

The BBBJ program, established in 2019, focused on supporting marginalized and low-income families by using school location and socioeconomic indicators to determine eligibility. While this method helped many indigenous and rural communities, it also excluded some families outside the priority zones, those with complex family structures, or those with limited digital access. In response to ongoing gaps, 2025 saw the launch of the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship. This reform significantly changes the program in several key ways:

- **Universal Coverage:** All students enrolled in public basic education are now eligible, regardless of geographic location or household income. This removes the arbitrary boundaries and localized exclusions that previously defined BBBJ.
- **Increased Support:** The scholarship amount has been raised to 1,900 pesos every two months per family, with an additional 700 pesos for each child beyond the first. This increase is significant for larger families, who previously found the “one scholarship per family” rule inadequate.
- **Expanded Inclusion:** The new model explicitly acknowledges children in non-traditional family arrangements, orphans, and students with disabilities. Administrative procedures have been simplified to lower barriers for these groups.

To support the universal approach, Rita Cetina has implemented several operational enhancements.

- **Simplified Registration:** The program now provides both digital and in-person enrollment options, bridging the digital divide that previously excluded elderly caregivers, indigenous families, and those without internet access.
- **Multilingual and Accessible Communication:** Information about eligibility and application procedures is being shared in various indigenous languages and through schools, making access easier for non-Spanish speakers.
- **Enhanced School Role:** Schools are more actively involved in outreach, assisting families with documentation and clarifying eligibility, which boosts trust and transparency within communities.

These changes are designed to lessen the difficulty of navigating the system and guarantee that support reaches families who were previously overlooked.

The shift from BBBJ to Rita Cetina signifies a significant policy change—one that continues the program’s commitment to educational equity while directly tackling previous barriers to inclusion. By expanding eligibility, increasing support, and streamlining processes, the Rita Cetina scholarship is expected to serve a larger, more diverse group, creating a more inclusive environment where every child in public basic education can access the support they need to stay in school.

5.4.1 Implementation interventions: data quality, data manipulation, enrollment barriers, and others

In recent years, Mexico has made significant changes to its educational cash transfer programs, shifting from the BBBJ to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship. This change is a direct response to long-standing barriers—primarily digital, administrative, and documentation challenges—that have excluded many of the country’s most vulnerable families.

Hybrid Registration and Expanded Support

Since 2025, the Rita Cetina program has introduced a hybrid registration model, supplementing the previously exclusive digital system of BBBJ. Families can now register both online and in person at schools, local community centers, and temporary field offices. This change was driven by widespread reports of the burdens placed on families by digital-only access, especially among those lacking internet access, digital skills, or proximity to urban centers.

As one parent shared: *“I don't have internet or a computer, and I don't know how to submit the paperwork. When they came to the school with the paperwork, that's when I was able to sign up.”* Families say that being able to register at the school with help from teachers or staff has lessened their reliance on expensive outside help and made the process easier.

Mobile Registration Units: Reaching Remote Communities

The deployment of mobile registration units is another important initiative. These teams go to remote or underserved areas, offering direct support in indigenous languages and helping with paperwork. This effort aims to make sure that physical distance and lack of infrastructure no longer create insurmountable barriers. A grandmother from Chiapas shared her experience: *“Now they came all the way to the community and helped us with all the paperwork. It was much easier for everyone.”*

This approach has been especially appreciated in regions with large indigenous populations and poor connectivity, as it addresses both linguistic and geographic barriers.

Easing Documentation Requirements

Rita Cetina has also eased documentation requirements. Under BBBJ, strict demands for official documents—such as recent birth certificates or proof of residence—often excluded families who couldn't obtain or afford them. The program now accepts alternative verification forms, like school enrollment certificates or attestations from local authorities. A school principal noted: *“Some grandparents don't have their papers up to date.”* This modification has allowed non-traditional guardians and elderly caregivers—often unable to provide formal legal documentation—to enroll children more easily.

A mother's experience from Puebla shows how these changes make a difference. After two years of dealing with paperwork and visits to government offices for her oldest daughter, she was able to register her younger child more easily under the new system. *“Before, it was one trip after another, and there was always a missing document. Now, with help at the school, it was much faster.”*

Early feedback from families and school staff across pilot regions indicates that these changes have made the program feel more accessible and less intimidating, especially for those in rural, indigenous, or elderly-headed households. There is a growing sense that the scholarship system is finally adjusting to the realities of the most marginalized.

The shift from BBBJ to Rita Cetina represents a significant change in how educational cash transfers are provided in Mexico. By expanding registration options, lowering bureaucratic barriers, and reaching out to remote and underserved communities, the program is making real progress toward fairer access. Although challenges still exist, these efforts are tangible steps toward addressing the exclusionary errors seen in previous years—and, according to those impacted, they are already making a noticeable difference in their daily lives.

Specific interventions to address the exclusion of people with multiple identities (intersectionality)

Effectively addressing intersectionality in social transfer programs requires moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and recognizing how overlapping identities and vulnerabilities—such as indigeneity, gender, age, disability, and family structure—interact to create complex barriers to access. In the case of the BBBJ program and its transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship, recent efforts have begun to confront these layered challenges directly.

Multilingual and Culturally Relevant Outreach

One of the most significant advancements has been the development of multilingual communication materials and culturally sensitive outreach initiatives. Acknowledging that language presents a considerable obstacle for many indigenous families, program officials have worked with local educators and community leaders to translate registration guidelines, informational posters, and application instructions into various indigenous languages. This change has allowed families who previously felt excluded by materials available only in Spanish to understand their rights and manage the scholarship process.

A parent in Chiapas shared the change: *“Now we understand what we had to do, because the information came in our language. Before, everything was in Spanish, and we didn’t even know where to start.”*

Mobile Registration Units: Bridging Geographical and Social Distance

Perhaps the most transformative intervention has been the deployment of mobile registration units. These teams—made up of bilingual staff and community liaisons—visit remote and marginalized communities, bringing the registration process directly to families who would otherwise face significant barriers due to distance, lack of transportation, or unfamiliarity with bureaucratic procedures. Importantly, these units provide on-site interpretation in indigenous languages, help with completing digital forms, and offer flexible solutions for families without standard documentation.

A grandmother in Oaxaca shared her story: *“They came all the way to our village and helped me with the paperwork. I didn’t know which documents were needed or how to use them, but they explained everything and helped me register my grandchildren.”* Field reports confirm that mobile units have been especially effective in supporting elderly caregivers, indigenous families, and those living hours away from the nearest program office.

Flexible Documentation and Support for Non-Traditional Families

Recognizing the realities of different family structures—such as single-parent households, extended families, or informal guardianship arrangements—the program has started accepting alternative forms of identification and proof of relationship. For example, instead of requiring formal guardianship documents, a letter from a community leader or a school certificate can now often be accepted.

A school principal highlighted the impact of this change: *“Before, some grandparents couldn’t enroll their children because they didn’t have all the official documents. Now, with a letter from the school or the community authority, it’s possible.”* This change has proven essential for children whose parents have migrated or are absent, as well as for families whose circumstances do not fit traditional administrative categories.

Addressing the Digital Divide for Elderly and Low-Literacy Caregivers

The digitalization of registration, while efficient for some, has created a significant obstacle for elderly caregivers and adults with limited literacy or digital skills. To address this, the program has expanded in-person assistance options and simplified the digital interface. In many areas, school staff now offer direct support to guide caregivers step-by-step through the application process, either during dedicated school sessions or community registration events. As noted by a school principal: *“Some grandparents are afraid of technology and don’t even know how to turn on a computer. Now they can come to the school and we help them from start to finish.”*

Addressing Compounded Vulnerabilities

Fieldwork shows that families facing multiple, overlapping barriers—such as indigenous single mothers caring for children with disabilities—are among the least likely to access benefits without targeted support. The combination of language, documentation, digital, and logistical challenges often causes self-exclusion or abandonment of the process. As one mother shared: *“I am a single mother, and my son has a disability. I couldn’t miss work and didn’t know how to do the paperwork. After so many attempts, I thought it just wasn’t for us.”* By offering multilingual assistance, personalized support, and flexible verification, the program is beginning to reduce these complex barriers and reach families who have historically been overlooked.

Monitoring and Continuous Adaptation

The program has also started collecting detailed data on who is being excluded and why, using this information to improve interventions and make sure families with multiple vulnerabilities are prioritized in outreach and support. Regular community feedback sessions, often led by local schools or NGOs, are now held in several areas to gather the lived experiences of both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, identify obstacles, and modify strategies accordingly.

The experience of the Benito Juárez and Rita Cetina scholarship programs shows that effective inclusion can't rely on one-size-fits-all solutions. Addressing intersectionality in practice needs a multifaceted approach with interventions designed for the complex realities of Mexico’s most vulnerable families. Deploying mobile registration units, using multilingual and culturally relevant communication, and accepting flexible documentation are more than just technical changes—they are a deeper acknowledgment of the dignity and diversity of those the program aims to serve.

Ongoing investment in community feedback, staff training in cultural and linguistic sensitivity, and active involvement of schools as trusted intermediaries are essential to ensuring social transfer programs fulfill their promise of universal, equitable support. As the program progresses, its success will rely on its ability to adapt, listen, and innovate—so that no child is left behind, regardless of the barriers they face.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Key Insights and Their Significance

The study reveals that while Mexico’s educational cash transfer programs have made significant strides in reaching marginalized populations, persistent and evolving exclusion errors—both “old” and “modern”—continue to undermine their promise of equity. Addressing these errors is crucial for developing effective and inclusive public policy.

This case set out to understand the nature and magnitude of exclusion errors in Mexico’s flagship educational cash transfer program, the BBBJ, and to assess how its transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship might address these persistent gaps. The research combined rigorous quantitative analysis with rich qualitative fieldwork, revealing a landscape marked by both progress and persistent barriers.

The quantitative evidence paints a stark picture: despite the program’s ambition, exclusion errors remain alarmingly high. Nationally, only about one in five eligible households with children in primary and secondary education receives the scholarship. The program’s reach is highly uneven—while coverage in states like Guerrero approaches 57%, in Mexico City it falls below 4%. These disparities are not random; they are the direct result of a targeting system that privileges specific geographies and school types, often at the expense of equally vulnerable families in urban or peri-urban areas. The program’s design, which relies on school-based and territorial criteria, has succeeded in reaching many indigenous and rural households—coverage among indigenous families stands at 66%—but has simultaneously left behind large numbers of urban poor, woman-headed households, and families with disabilities.

Qualitative findings bring these statistics to life. Families describe the experience of being excluded not because of a lack of need, but because their children attend the “wrong” school or live just outside a designated priority area. This sense of arbitrariness is compounded by confusion over eligibility criteria and a lack of clear communication from program authorities. Many families, especially in urban areas, perceive the process as a lottery rather than a rights-based entitlement.

The study also documents the emergence of what can be called “modern exclusion errors.” While older forms of exclusion were rooted in geographic isolation or bureaucratic inertia, today’s barriers are increasingly technological and administrative. The shift to digital registration platforms, intended to streamline access, has instead created new obstacles for those without internet access or digital literacy. Elderly caregivers, indigenous families, and residents of remote areas often find themselves unable to navigate the online system, forced to pay intermediaries or give up. These stories reveal a critical contradiction: the very mechanisms designed to modernize and expand the program are, in practice, excluding some of the most vulnerable.

Intersectionality emerges as a central theme. The program’s standardized approach does not adequately account for the compounded barriers faced by those with overlapping vulnerabilities—such as indigenous single mothers, families with disabled members, or elderly guardians. These individuals often encounter a web of linguistic, technological, and bureaucratic hurdles that the current system is ill-equipped to address. The result is a pattern of exclusion that is both deep and persistent, undermining the program’s equity goals.

Yet, the research also finds that where local institutions—especially schools—are actively involved, exclusion errors can be mitigated. In communities where school staff help families navigate the registration process, provide information in indigenous languages, or advocate for flexible documentation, more children can access the scholarship. These local successes highlight the importance of community-based support and the limitations of a purely centralized, digital approach.

The transition to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship in 2025 represents a significant policy shift. By moving toward universal coverage and increasing the benefit amount, the new program aims to eliminate many of the arbitrary barriers that have plagued BBBJ. Initial indications suggest that hybrid registration models and more flexible documentation requirements are being piloted, with positive feedback from families who previously struggled with enrollment. However, the study cautions that universality alone is not a panacea. Without careful attention to the design and implementation of registration, communication, and support systems, even a universal program can perpetuate exclusion errors—especially those rooted in digital divides and intersectional disadvantage.

6.2 Knowledge gaps and future research

Despite these insights, essential questions still exist. The long-term effects of the transition to Rita Cetina on exclusion patterns remain uncertain. Will universal coverage genuinely reach those who have been excluded, or will new forms of exclusion arise? Long-term studies are necessary to monitor changes in access and outcomes over time, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

The digital divide remains a crucial area for further research. While this study has identified barriers caused by digital-only registration, more work is needed to measure the impact of hybrid systems and identify the most effective support mechanisms for families with limited digital skills or connectivity. Understanding how different groups engage with digital platforms—and what types of assistance are most helpful—will be vital for creating inclusive systems.

Another gap involves the long-term educational and social outcomes for beneficiaries compared to non-beneficiaries. While the program’s immediate goal is to keep children in school, its ultimate success will be measured by improvements in retention, academic achievement, and life opportunities. Comparative studies that track students over time, broken down by gender, ethnicity, disability, and other relevant factors, are needed to accurately evaluate the impact of cash transfers on educational equity.

Finally, the role of local institutions and community networks warrants closer attention. The study indicates that schools and local organizations can play a key part in reducing exclusion errors; however, the most effective models of local support still need to be identified and scaled.

6.3 Public Policy Implications

The continued presence of historical and contemporary exclusion errors in Mexico’s cash transfer programs underscores the need for flexible, evidence-based public policies.

- **Targeting mechanisms** —geographic and school-based strategies —while effective in some cases, should be supplemented with flexible, intersectional approaches to prevent arbitrary exclusions.
- **Digital Inclusion:** As digitalization becomes key to benefit delivery, strong support systems—like hybrid registration options and community-based help—are vital to prevent the widening of digital gaps.

- **Intersectional Design:** Social policy should go beyond one-size-fits-all approaches by implementing nuanced eligibility criteria and flexible documentation requirements to better address the layered vulnerabilities of individuals with intersecting identities.
- **Local Partnerships:** Enhancing local institutions and community networks can help address access gaps and minimize exclusion errors.

Table 13. Summary Table: Exclusion Errors in BBBJ and Rita Cetina

Type of Exclusion Error	Manifestation in BBBJ	Addressed in Rita Cetina?	Evidence/Example
Old (Geographic/Documentation)	Urban poor, lack of documents	Partially	Urban families excluded due to non-priority schools; lack of birth certificates
Modern (Digital)	Digital-only registration	Yes (hybrid model)	Caregivers unable to register online; internet café reliance
Intersectional	Overlapping vulnerabilities	In progress	Indigenous single mothers, families with disabilities face multiple barriers
Institutional/Community	Weak local support	Strengthened	Schools as intermediaries improve access where present

This study shows that exclusion errors—both traditional and modern—remain a key challenge for Mexico’s educational cash transfer programs. Quantitative data highlight ongoing coverage gaps, while qualitative evidence illustrates the real experiences of those left out. The shift to the Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Grant offers a hopeful way forward. However, its success will depend on the program’s ability to tackle the structural and intersectional barriers that have historically limited access. Continued research, flexible policy-making, and strong local partnerships are crucial to turn the goal of educational equity into reality for everyone.

7. Actionable recommendations

The evolution of Mexico’s educational cash transfer program—from the targeted BBBJ to the universal Rita Cetina Universal Basic Education Scholarship—reflects a national commitment to equity and the right to education. However, persistent exclusion errors, especially among households with overlapping vulnerabilities, threaten the program’s promise of universality and social justice. The following recommendations, based on empirical findings and international best practices, outline a path toward a more inclusive, transparent, and effective social protection system.

1. Strengthen community-level data collection and registration

A key step in reducing exclusion errors is the reestablishment of regular, community-based census operations. The lack of updated, detailed data on eligible families—especially in rural, semi-urban, and informal settlements—has led to the systematic exclusion of those most in need. Public policy should require periodic, proactive outreach and data collection, focusing on areas with low school connectivity, high migration, and marginalized populations. This approach not only ensures that the program’s database accurately reflects current realities but also builds trust and visibility within local communities. Drawing on successful models from Brazil, community-based targeting and registration can significantly improve the accuracy and reach of social protection programs.

2. Simplify and diversify registration channels

The shift to digital registration, while convenient for some, has unintentionally excluded families without internet access, digital literacy, or flexible schedules. To fix this, policy should establish a hybrid registration system that offers both online and in-person options at schools, community centers, and through mobile registration units. These mobile brigades, already tested in some areas, have shown success in reaching remote and indigenous communities. By incorporating registration support within trusted local institutions, the program can ensure fair access for all families, regardless of their technological or geographic limitations.

3. Enhance communication and information dissemination

Information gaps and unclear eligibility criteria often lead to exclusion. Public policy should mandate the use of multiple, accessible communication channels—including SMS, radio, posters, and school assemblies—to share timely and accurate information about registration periods, eligibility, and payment schedules. Materials must be adapted for low-literacy audiences and translated into indigenous languages. Transparent communication not only empowers families to exercise their rights but also helps reduce perceptions of arbitrariness and favoritism in program delivery.

4. Establish formal, transparent appeals and grievance mechanisms

The lack of a visible, user-friendly process for challenging exclusions or correcting errors weakens both accountability and public trust. Policy should establish a formal appeals system that is accessible through both online and in-person methods, with clear timelines and documentation standards. This system must be well-publicized and incorporated into the registration process, ensuring families understand their right to appeal and the steps they need to follow. Regular reviews of exclusion errors, along with public reports and oversight by civil society, will further improve transparency and responsiveness.

5. Clarify and publicize eligibility criteria

Ambiguity in eligibility rules causes confusion and mistrust. Policies should clearly state and share the selection criteria, including definitions of vulnerability and the role of school characteristics. This information should be shared during school meetings, enrollment events, and in all official communications. By clarifying the selection process, the program can build a sense of fairness and trust among beneficiaries.

6. Promote interoperability and data integration across social programs

Administrative exclusion often results from the use of fragmented databases and inconsistent records. Public policy should focus on integrating social protection, education, and health databases, overseen by a dedicated task force responsible for ensuring interoperability. This integration will prevent families from losing benefits due to data discrepancies and ensure that eligibility for one program does not prevent access to others, such as disability support. Drawing on Brazil's Cadastro Único and international best practices, a unified data system is essential for efficient and inclusive delivery.

7. Explicitly target households with overlapping vulnerabilities

Intersectionality must be integrated into program design and implementation. Policies should mandate that households facing multiple disadvantages—such as single-parent status, indigenous or migrant backgrounds, disabilities, or care by elderly guardians—receive extra consideration during registration and selection. Simplified procedures and proactive outreach should be prioritized for these groups to ensure that the most vulnerable families are not left behind. Using proxies, as seen in Palestine and Ethiopia, can improve the accuracy and fairness of targeting through tests and community validation.

8. Strengthen school and community partnerships

Schools and community centers are essential hubs for registration, information sharing, and payment logistics. Policies should formalize their role as support centers by providing training and resources to staff and community leaders. Coordinators or focal points within schools can help manage communication, assist with appeals, and ensure that payment processes meet the needs of families with limited time or mobility. This approach utilizes existing infrastructure and social resources to improve program delivery.

9. Upgrade digital platform usability and accessibility

The digital registration platform needs to be redesigned with a user-focused approach, based on usability testing with users who have low literacy and limited digital skills. Important updates include making navigation more straightforward, allowing users to save and resume applications, expanding system capacity to manage peak times, and offering real-time status updates. The platform should be fully compatible with basic devices and include accessibility features for people with disabilities. An offline option—such as downloadable forms for later upload—will help reduce barriers in areas with poor connectivity.

10. Institutionalize continuous monitoring, feedback, and adaptation

Finally, policies should include mechanisms for ongoing monitoring, beneficiary feedback, and adaptive management. Regular exclusion audits, participatory evaluations, and the integration of user feedback into program design will ensure the system stays responsive to emerging challenges and changing needs. This evidence-based, adaptive approach is essential in modern social protection frameworks and is vital for maintaining progress toward universality and inclusion.

Implementing these recommendations can help Mexico’s educational cash transfer program move closer to its goals of being universal and inclusive. Combining community-based data collection, diverse registration methods, transparent communication, strong appeals, and focused support for households with multiple vulnerabilities will not only lessen exclusion errors but also boost the credibility and effectiveness of the social protection system overall. These changes, based on local evidence and global best practices, are essential for safeguarding the right to education and social assistance for all children in Mexico.

7. Annex.

8.1 Estimations based on the ENIGH 2022

Table 14. Total coverage and exclusion errors

Educational level	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Primary	17.66%	82.34%	0.52%
Secondary	20.59%	79.41%	0.63%
Primary and secondary	19.99%	80.01%	0.50%

Table 15. Coverage and exclusion errors by poverty status

Educational level	Poverty status								
	Under national poverty line			Under national extreme poverty line			Under World Bank's extreme poverty line		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Primary	22.82%	77.18%	0.83%	34.27%	65.73%	1.95%	51.08%	48.92%	7.05%
Secondary	27.00%	73.00%	1.05%	36.25%	63.75%	2.33%	47.59%	52.41%	7.55%
Primary and secondary	26.48%	73.52%	0.85%	38.59%	61.41%	2.08%	59.07%	40.93%	8.41%

Table 16. Coverage and exclusion errors by households' income deciles

Household decile	income	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
		Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
1		37.84%	62.16%	2.10%	39.45%	60.55%	2.44%	42.51%	57.49%	2.20%
2		22.28%	77.72%	1.26%	25.38%	74.62%	1.80%	25.84%	74.16%	1.27%
3		17.24%	82.76%	1.12%	23.28%	76.72%	1.70%	21.06%	78.94%	1.14%
4		16.05%	83.95%	1.02%	22.40%	77.60%	1.95%	19.89%	80.11%	1.13%
5		13.50%	86.50%	0.99%	17.92%	82.08%	1.63%	15.69%	84.31%	0.94%
6		11.24%	88.76%	1.07%	13.01%	86.99%	1.34%	12.99%	87.01%	0.98%
7		9.74%	90.26%	1.05%	11.37%	88.63%	1.32%	10.72%	89.28%	0.90%
8		6.89%	93.11%	0.89%	10.04%	89.96%	1.51%	8.51%	91.49%	0.89%
9		4.53%	95.47%	0.71%	6.86%	93.14%	1.44%	5.71%	94.29%	0.79%
10		2.49%	97.51%	0.58%	4.11%	95.89%	0.88%	3.33%	96.67%	0.55%

Table 17. Coverage and exclusion errors of indigenous households

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	59.56%	40.44%	4.38%	60.18%	39.82%	5.14%	66.01%	33.99%	4.83%
Under national extreme poverty line	68.48%	31.52%	6.39%	69.43%	30.57%	7.68%	76.88%	23.12%	7.69%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	71.36%	28.64%	13.52%	55.85%	44.15%	12.51%	79.93%	20.07%	19.70%

Table 18. Coverage and exclusion errors of women-headed households

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	18.73%	81.27%	1.07%	23.53%	76.47%	1.78%	22.26%	77.74%	1.12%
Under national extreme poverty line	26.90%	73.10%	2.52%	29.75%	70.25%	3.97%	30.85%	69.15%	2.63%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	42.44%	57.56%	11.77%	42.89%	57.11%	17.57%	47.74%	52.26%	12.47%

Table 19. Coverage and exclusion errors of households with persons with disabilities

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	23.02%	76.98%	1.63%	27.24%	72.76%	2.27%	26.57%	73.43%	1.59%
Under national extreme poverty line	32.47%	67.53%	3.54%	32.23%	67.77%	4.35%	36.28%	63.72%	3.39%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	55.60%	44.40%	16.17%	43.40%	56.60%	15.40%	63.00%	37.00%	17.43%

Table 20. Coverage and exclusion errors of rural

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	43.60%	56.40%	2.17%	45.51%	54.49%	2.40%	48.86%	51.14%	2.30%
Under national extreme poverty line	54.11%	45.89%	3.76%	54.82%	45.18%	4.36%	60.49%	39.51%	4.27%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	59.92%	40.08%	8.68%	57.63%	42.37%	9.59%	68.86%	31.14%	10.83%

Table 21. Coverage and exclusion errors of the very-high degree of social backwardness group

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	44.56%	55.44%	2.89%	50.08%	49.92%	3.43%	50.53%	49.47%	3.10%
Under national extreme poverty line	55.96%	44.04%	4.60%	58.63%	41.37%	5.94%	62.46%	37.54%	5.51%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	64.34%	35.66%	12.13%	63.63%	36.37%	14.49%	74.23%	25.77%	15.99%

Table 22. Coverage and exclusion errors of the high degree of social backwardness group

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	28.01%	71.99%	2.40%	31.06%	68.94%	2.96%	30.55%	69.45%	2.41%
Under national extreme poverty line	37.38%	62.62%	4.83%	38.77%	61.23%	6.13%	41.39%	58.61%	5.11%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	46.83%	53.17%	17.32%	19.30%	80.70%	12.13%	45.21%	54.79%	16.00%

Table 23. Coverage and exclusion errors of the medium degree of social backwardness group

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	26.31%	73.69%	1.56%	31.09%	68.91%	2.13%	31.65%	68.35%	1.66%
Under national extreme poverty line	30.42%	69.58%	2.97%	34.68%	65.32%	4.27%	36.76%	63.24%	3.31%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	52.75%	47.25%	13.21%	44.46%	55.54%	13.94%	62.27%	37.73%	17.09%

* Results with CV higher than 25% are considered of low precision, so they should be used with caution.

Table 24. Coverage and exclusion errors of the low degree of social backwardness group

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	9.31%	90.69%	0.76%	11.69%	88.31%	1.14%	11.32%	88.68%	0.72%
Under national extreme poverty line	11.89%	88.11%	1.46%	14.56%	85.44%	2.37%	14.51%	85.49%	1.41%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	17.19%	82.81%	4.64%	25.96%	74.04%	8.85%	23.70%	76.30%	5.99%

Table 25. Coverage and exclusion errors of the very-low high degree of social backwardness group

Poverty status	Primary			Secondary			Primary and secondary		
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coefficient of variation
Under national poverty line	12.58%	87.42%	1.77%	23.84%	76.16%	3.42%	17.75%	82.25%	2.16%
Under national extreme poverty line	10.08%	89.92%	3.30%	21.08%	78.92%	7.29%	15.67%	84.33%	4.11%
Under World Bank's extreme poverty line	2.53%	97.47%	2.05%	20.05%	79.95%	19.36%	15.51%	84.49%	12.89%

Table 26. Exclusion errors by state for primary schools

State code	State	Exclusion error for households under the national poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Exclusion error for households under the national extreme poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Exclusion error for households under the World Banks' extreme poverty Line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Method used
07	Chiapas	47.18	6.03	36.29	8.36	36.96	18.72	Direct
15	México	92.15	1.6	89.3	2.79	91.65	8.7	Direct
19	Nuevo León	96.49	0.76	95.37	1.72	96.76	3.65	Direct
21	Puebla	68.46	4.63	59.67	8.51	50.14	26.46*	SAE with classical Fay- Herriot

* Results with CV higher than 25% are considered of low precision, so they should be used with caution.

Table 27. Exclusion errors by state for secondary schools

State code	State	Exclusion error for households under the national poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Exclusion error for households under the national extreme poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Exclusion error for households under the World Banks' extreme poverty line(%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Method used
07	Chiapas	37.71	8.97	33.84	12.16	46.61	19.02	Direct
15	México	91.47	2.3	87.92	4.13	94.11	2.69	SAE with robust Fay-Herriot
19	Nuevo León	93.67	1.81	93.8	2.38	96.85	3.64	Direct
21	Puebla	65.34	5.33	57.6	10.59	94.99	6.3	SAE with classical Fay-Herriot

* Results with CV higher than 25% are considered of low precision, so they should be used with caution.

Table 28. Exclusion errors by state for primary and secondary schools

State code	State	Exclusion error for households under the national poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Exclusion error for households under the national extreme poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Exclusion error for households under the World Banks' extreme poverty line (%)	Coefficient of variation (%)	Method used
07	Chiapas	39.75	7.07	28.86	10.62	27.27	28.51*	Direct
15	México	90.84	1.45	86.96	2.53	91.65	8.7	Direct
19	Nuevo León	95.16	0.98	94.02	1.75	96.26	3.01	Direct
21	Puebla	65.17	4.67	54.6	9.23	52.95	12.66	SAE with Bayesian INLA

8.2 Estimations based on official data provided by the Coordinación Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez

Table 29. Total coverage and exclusion errors of households

Educational level	Coverage	Exclusion Error
Primary	26.61%	73.39%
Secondary	20.64%	79.36%
Primary and secondary	24.68%	75.32%

Table 30. Coverage and exclusion errors of households by social backwardness degree region

Social Backwardness Degree Region	Primary		Secondary		Primary and secondary	
	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coverage	Exclusion Error	Coverage	Exclusion Error
Very High	70.28%	29.72%	58.54%	41.46%	67.27%	32.73%
High	71.74%	28.26%	58.13%	41.87%	67.86%	32.14%
Medium	65.97%	34.03%	50.57%	49.43%	61.24%	38.76%
Low	46.57%	53.43%	34.88%	65.12%	42.84%	57.16%
Very Low	11.47%	88.53%	10.58%	89.42%	11.17%	88.83%

Table 31. Coverage and exclusion errors of households by state

State code	State	Primary		Secondary		Primary and secondary	
		Coverage	Exclusion error	Coverage	Exclusion error	Coverage	Exclusion error
01	Aguascalientes	0.09437113	0.905628873	0.10189862	0.898101379	0.08654998	0.913450019
02	Baja California	0.12792655	0.87207345	0.11641145	0.883588551	0.10706868	0.892931316
03	Baja California Sur	0.20469195	0.795308055	0.18523261	0.814767392	0.17581595	0.824184048
04	Campeche	0.4943635	0.505636504	0.36760671	0.632393287	0.41489676	0.585103239
05	Coahuila	0.06544094	0.934559057	0.0589059	0.941094097	0.05448805	0.945511951
06	Colima	0.22821075	0.771789253	0.17921888	0.820781121	0.18746592	0.812534076
07	Chiapas	0.60079347	0.399206531	0.50163975	0.498360246	0.55703821	0.442961795
08	Chihuahua	0.14355656	0.856443441	0.13039785	0.86960215	0.1255933	0.874406705
09	Ciudad de México	0.04059976	0.959400245	0.04150638	0.958493622	0.03373419	0.966265807
10	Durango	0.2341413	0.765858698	0.22526746	0.77473254	0.21536916	0.78463084
11	Guanajuato	0.24281482	0.757185185	0.20397224	0.796027757	0.20771113	0.792288868
12	Guerrero	0.6382466	0.361753404	0.4905428	0.509457195	0.56898438	0.43101562
13	Hidalgo	0.40937697	0.59062303	0.30855196	0.691448042	0.3410075	0.658992498
14	Jalisco	0.14331636	0.856683639	0.13060382	0.869396183	0.12124423	0.878755768
15	México	0.2335885	0.766411496	0.18694674	0.813053264	0.19703268	0.802967321
16	Michoacán	0.33708822	0.662911783	0.17883607	0.821163933	0.25642863	0.743571372
17	Morelos	0.28081563	0.719184373	0.22276862	0.777231384	0.22483025	0.775169754
18	Nayarit	0.24386915	0.756130846	0.17383453	0.826165468	0.20519849	0.794801509
19	Nuevo León	0.06301618	0.936983819	0.05889933	0.941100667	0.05349155	0.946508453
20	Oaxaca	0.55556093	0.444439074	0.46018649	0.539813512	0.50340425	0.496595752
21	Puebla	0.48092145	0.519078546	0.37140222	0.628597782	0.40835491	0.591645085
22	Querétaro	0.24780977	0.752190226	0.19176976	0.808230244	0.18997061	0.810029385
23	Quintana Roo	0.24313427	0.756865731	0.19550038	0.804499622	0.19788091	0.802119087

24	San Luis Potosí	0.31612881	0.683871188	0.2459502	0.754049801	0.26455694	0.735443058
25	Sinaloa	0.17860312	0.821396881	0.15212989	0.847870108	0.14962107	0.850378929
26	Sonora	0.13752529	0.862474707	0.11167749	0.888322513	0.1111401	0.888859898
27	Tabasco	0.44125504	0.558744962	0.32482722	0.675172776	0.37851032	0.621489679
28	Tamaulipas	0.15128656	0.848713436	0.15027832	0.849721682	0.13469608	0.865303923
29	Tlaxcala	0.23084573	0.769154266	0.17959734	0.820402657	0.19418565	0.805814348
30	Veracruz	0.48109145	0.518908551	0.3583388	0.641661198	0.41194848	0.588051522
31	Yucatán	0.59086074	0.40913926	0.41709639	0.58290361	0.46482808	0.535171918
32	Zacatecas	0.24254856	0.75745144	0.20599508	0.794004921	0.21796267	0.782037326

Figure 12. Coverage by state at primary level

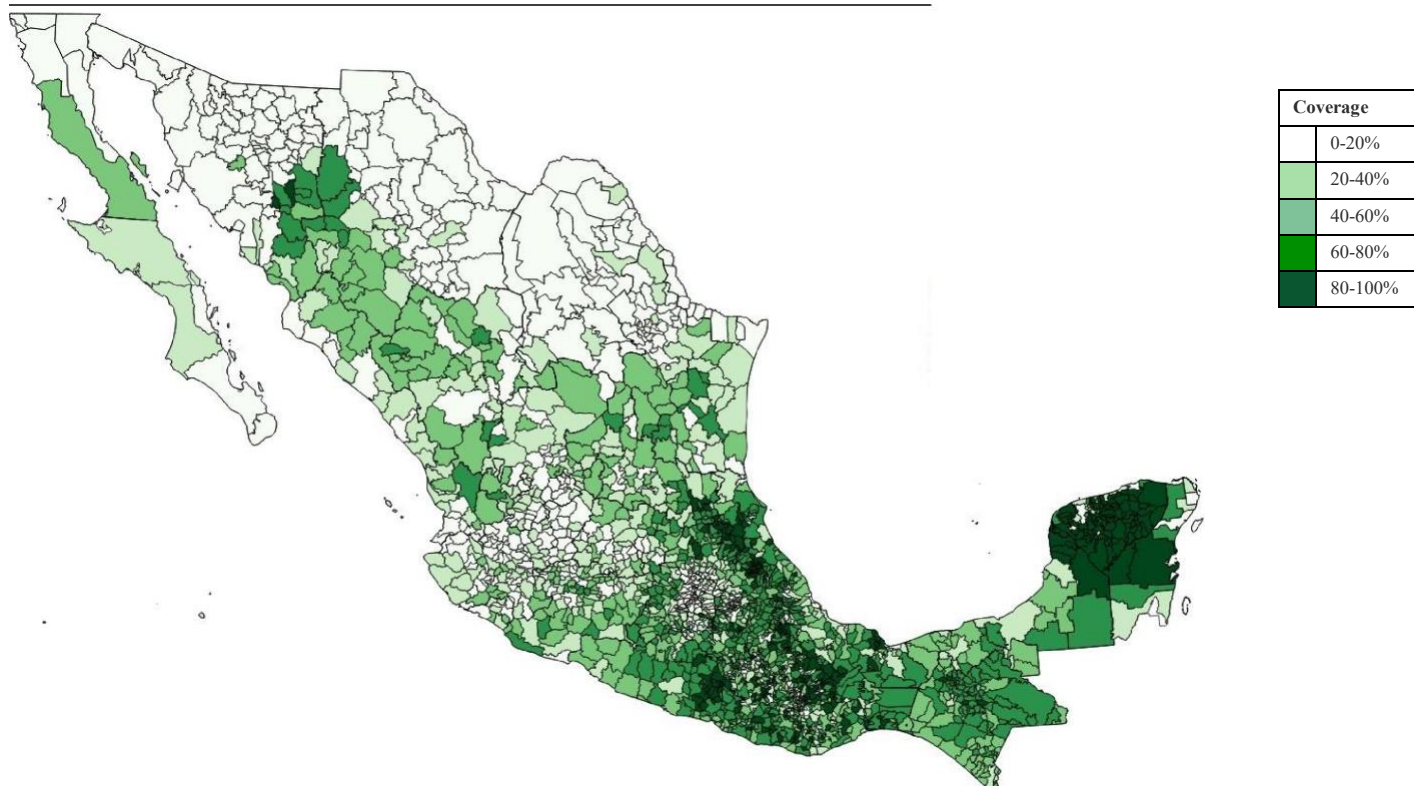
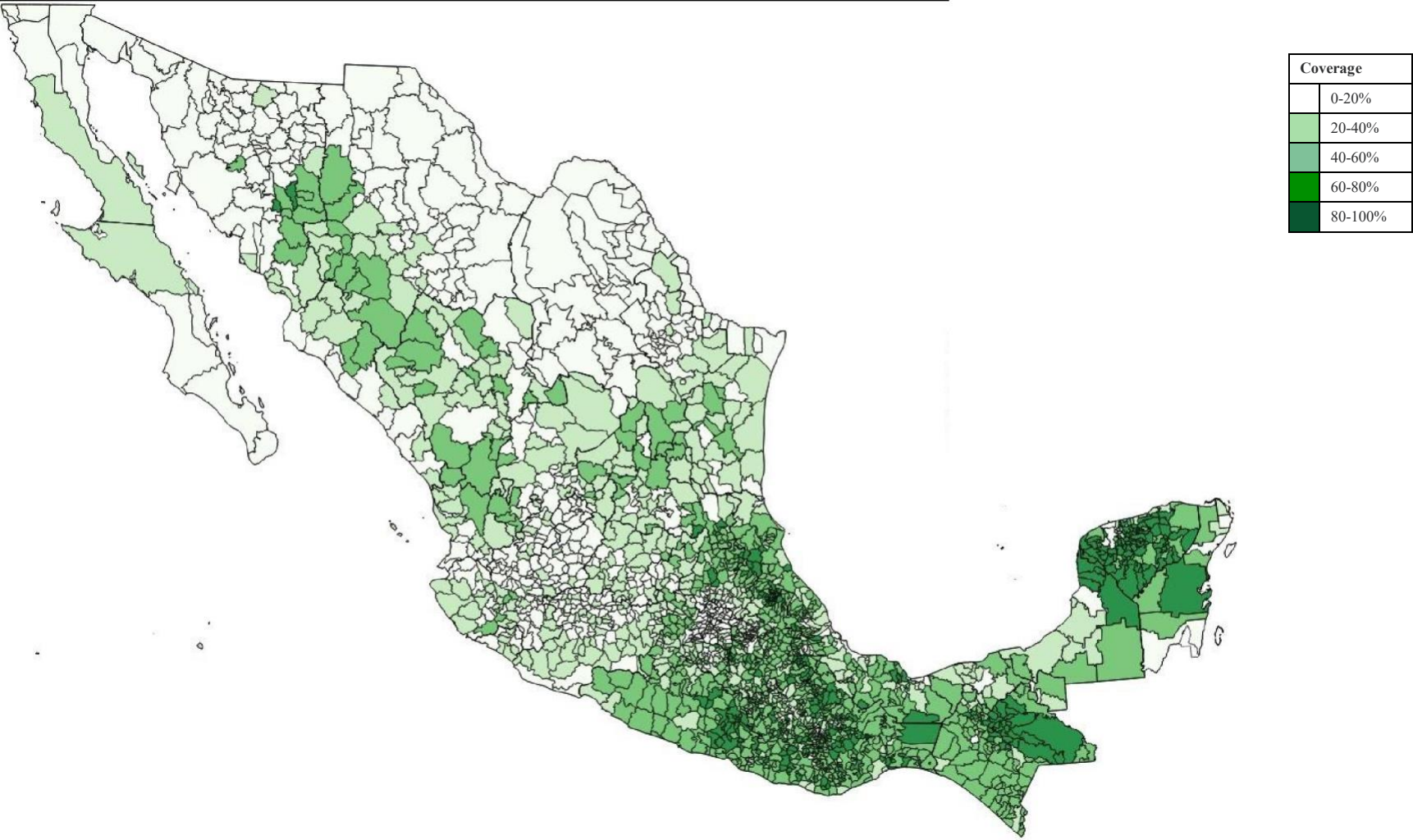


Figure 13. Coverage by municipality at secondary level



8. References

- CONEVAL (2020). Evaluación de Diseño con Trabajo de Campo del Programa Becas de Educación Básica para el Bienestar Benito Juárez 2019-2020. Ciudad de México: CONEVAL.
- CONEVAL (2022). Indicadores de Cohesión Social nacional y entidad federativa 2016-2022.
- CONEVAL (2024). Evaluación de impacto del Programa de Becas de Educación Básica para el Bienestar Benito Juárez. Ciudad de México
- CONEVAL (2025a). Informe de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social 2024.
- CONEVAL (2025b). Informe de monitoreo de programas prioritarios 2024: principales hallazgos de la Administración Pública Federal 2018- 2024.
- Gobierno de México (2019). Decreto por el que se crea la Coordinación Nacional de Becas para el Bienestar Benito Juárez. Diario Oficial de la Federación 31 de mayo.
- INEGI (2021). Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020. Presentación de resultados.
- INEGI (2025a). Pobreza Multidimensional. Comunicado de Prensa núm 118/25. 13 de agosto de 2025.
- INEGI (2025b). Estadísticas a propósito del Día Internacional de los Pueblos Indígenas. Comunicado de prensa núm.115/25. 6 de agosto de 2025.
- INEGI (2025c). Estadísticas a propósito del Día Internacional de las personas con Discapacidad. Comunicado de prensa núm. 684/24. 28 de noviembre de 2024. COMUNICADO DE PRENSA 115/25.
- INEGI(n/d). Conociendo a la población LGBTI+ en México. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/tablerosestadisticos/lgbti/>
- Jaramillo, M (2023). Sin Prospera, menos dinero a los más pobres en Letras Libres. <https://letraslibres.com/revista/sin-prospera-menos-dinero-a-los-mas-pobres/>
- Lindert, Kathy, Tina George Karippacheril, Inés Rodríguez Caillava, and Kenichi Nishikawa Chávez, eds. 2020. Sourcebook on the Foundations of Social Protection Delivery Systems. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- México Cómo Vamos (2024). Crecimiento nacional y estatal de la economía mexicana.
- Secretaría de Educación Pública (2023). Acuerdo por el que se emiten las Reglas de Operación del Programa Beca Benito Juárez para el ejercicio fiscal 2024
- Secretaría de Educación Pública (2023). Procedimiento de Atención a Personas Víctimas de Delitos de Alto Impacto y/o Violaciones Graves a Derechos Humanos, Coordinación Nacional de Becas Benito Juárez,
- Secretaría de Educación Pública (2025). Acuerdo por el que se emiten las Reglas de Operación del Programa Beca Universal de Educación Básica Rita Cetina para el ejercicio fiscal 2025.
- Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (2021). Criterios Generales de Política Económica 2022.
- Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (2024). Criterios Generales de Política Económica 2024 para la iniciativa de Ley de Ingresos
- UNDP (2024). Human Development Report 2023-24: Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world. New York.