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Top 5 Questions About the Barriers to Access and Completion of Higher Education in Honduras

1. Who can access higher education in Honduras?

Honduras is home to more than 2.2 million young people between the ages of 17 and 30. Approximately 350,000 of these young people (or 16%) have completed secondary school. The majority of youth who have completed secondary education live in urban areas and 58% of them are women. This gender breakdown is evident in both urban and rural areas, and across age groups.

2. What is unique about the Advance Program's Study of Barriers to Access and Completion in Honduras?

The Advance Program's Study of Barriers to Access and Completion (SBAC) explores the pervasive obstacles that disadvantaged Honduran youth face in accessing and completing post-secondary education. The study is unique in that it probes beyond the basic quantitative question of *how many* students are enrolled in higher education, to explore exactly *who* has access to, and the ability to successfully complete, higher education. Identifying the qualitative composition of students studying higher education is important for ensuring that the Advance Program's capacity building and scholarship strategies with local partner institutions are targeted and sensitive to the composition of students that each institution serves.

This study builds on FHI 360's expertise in youth-centered research and identifying practical solutions to bridge the gap between students, educators and employers in the Latin America and the Caribbean region.

3. How did we organize our analysis?

For this study, we organized the barriers students face into four categories—situational barriers, institutional barriers, attitudinal barriers, and barriers related to academic trajectories—and analyzed these barriers from three interconnected perspectives—student, community and gender.

To deepen our analysis, we employed a mixed-methods research approach, which involved an extensive literature review and the analysis of complementary quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative part, we interviewed or surveyed 1,151 young people. For the qualitative part, we conducted 12 focus groups with professors, university administrators, students and other key stakeholders to augment and strengthen the quantitative results.

4. What are the study's key findings?

The students, teachers and key actors who participated in this study highlight a substantial overlap between the factors identified as barriers to access and those identified as barriers to completion.

Regarding *situational barriers*, we identified geographic factors such as distance between home and university to be a barrier for students from rural and peri-urban areas. We also identified socioeconomic barriers such as household income and poverty, a young person's ability to find stable employment, burdensome family responsibilities, and traditional cultural roles and gender stereotypes. The high prevalence of violence and insecurity also present formidable situational barriers to both accessing and completing higher education.

Among *institutional barriers* and barriers related to *academic trajectories*, we found that admissions practices such as standardized tests, entrance exams, and reference requirements present barriers to access. We also identified financial barriers such as insufficient access to scholarships, high tuition and materials costs, and academic barriers such as the low quality of learning at the secondary school level and the lack of teachers with practical experience and effective pedagogical strategies. Limited student services for academic, second language, and technology support, and lack of career guidance were key barriers to completion.

Regarding *attitudinal barriers*, we identified the prevalence of discrimination at school, home and work, which affected students' attitudes toward accessing and completing technical training programs.

5. What are the implications of this study?

Breaking down the barriers to access and completion identified in this study requires a strong commitment to introspection, reflection, compassion and change. The Advance Program and its partner institutions are well-positioned to address many of the barriers identified—

particularly the institutional barriers and those related to academic trajectories. However, helping disadvantaged youth overcome these barriers will require close collaboration and partnership between universities, the private sector, government, and non-governmental organizations.

The same is true for the barriers that fall further outside the scope of what the Advance Program and its partner institutions can control—many of the situational barriers, for example. Here, strong political will and public-sector leadership, the commitment of key stakeholders at all levels of the education system and workforce, and the meaningful and inclusive participation of Honduran youth will lay a strong to promote access and completion of higher education and quality employment opportunities for young Honduran men and women.