

April 03, 2020

## In times of pandemic “don’t let the essential be invisible to the eyes”

The entire world is going through an unprecedented crisis. The pandemic and the measures that governments have taken to control a series of effects, including: social isolation, suspension of habitual activities, both work, school and recreation, and a depression of economic activity that, with the passage of weeks, tends to deepen. We are in a global crisis situation. Crisis that impacts everyone’s life.

From different spaces it is reaffirmed that the priority today is health, that we must join all efforts to defeat the pandemic, that we must be united around that. Message that seems evident and that does not leave too much space for questioning. However, from the perspective of children’s rights, this statement contains some risks that we must bear in mind.

The definitions of priorities are not independent of the views that one has on reality. **Today it is established as a priority to prevent or limit the spread of the virus, however, from the organizations that work for and with children we cannot forget the specificity of children’s rights.**

**The Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are our main references to position ourselves in this difficult time.** The best interests of the child, together with the principle of co-responsibility, of non-discrimination, the right to participate and the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and comprehensiveness of these rights and principles should be our frame of reference in the decision, elaboration and definition of priorities.

Children and adolescents are not the most exposed population to the action of the virus, therefore, it does not seem to be a priority group. Although in some cases symptoms are reported in children, **the main threat that falls on childhood is not centered on the medical-sanitary aspects, but on the psychological, social and economic consequences of this situation and its possible invisibility.**

Beyond the apparent break in temporal continuity and the experience of a before and after of COVID 19, **each country, each society, each family reaches this unexpected situation with its previous resources, tools, strengths and weaknesses and it is with them they face it as well.**

We are part of a region characterized by inequality, with a high number of people who carry out informal work, with very little ability to save within the paralysis of the economy. The crisis will have differential effects according to the levels of social vulnerability.

As it is said, boys and girls are overrepresented in the most vulnerable social groups. **Part of co-responsibility is the implementation of solidarity mechanisms at the community level to ensure support and supplies to those who have difficulties obtaining them, to disseminate quality information and collaborate with compliance with the measures imposed by the health authorities to come to concrete actions concerning everyone and for everyone.**

**Parents and reference adults have a great responsibility to support, hold, and provide information, giving it to the little ones in a friendly way providing the tranquility they need without hiding the real dangers.**

We cannot ignore that social isolation is for everyone, but not everyone has the same conditions to spend the entire day inside their homes. There are precarious houses, with overcrowding, without connectivity or basic services. **It is not real that the crisis hits and affects equally.**

When speaking of family responsibilities, we cannot ignore the inequities in relation to the conditions of exercise of fatherhood and motherhood. **What support do adults have in order to support children? What attention, time and energy should they dedicate to solve survival? What family and community support do they have? How do States respond to these situations? How are we caring for those who care? (and it transcends health personnel).**

In families with a predisposition to violence, the situation of children and adolescents during isolation is particularly worrying. **We know that homes are a space of safety and protection, but that they can also be the most dangerous place.** Violence, abuse and accidents often have the home as the setting. Confinement and isolation intensify relationships and with them conflicts and violence. In situations of abuse or mistreatment, access to justice is given through the intervention of third parties: teachers, health personnel, peers, neighbors. Quarantine cuts or hinders these links; it increases the wall between public and private and blocks both requests for help and possible timely interventions.

**In this context, the role of States is essential to guarantee the minimum necessary for a decent life. There is no room for backtracking.** A first decision is to define how the costs of this crisis will be distributed in society.

Let's think about health in an integral way. This implies ensuring food, access to drinking water, continuity of education, guaranteeing isolation in a friendly environment free of violence, ensuring the minimum conditions necessary for full development.

The States must articulate special and effective measures and safeguard actions to guarantee all their rights; that is, survival, development, protection and exercise of citizenship, prioritizing those children and adolescents who have double or triple vulnerability conditions. But emergencies cannot make invisible the continuity and deepening of structural aspects of our societies that determine the violation of rights for broad sectors of the child population. **We should think about «the morning after.»**

The most basic prognosis suggests that the post-pandemic economic situation will be especially hard. In the reality of the region this implies the worsening of the situations of inequity, exclusion and deprivation already endemic in the Americas.

The analysis of socioeconomic indicators shows that children and adolescents' access to their rights is strongly associated with the cycles of the economy and the models that the States implement to face them.

**We must prevent the economic crisis from being associated with setbacks in access to rights. This depends on the political will of the decision-makers, but also on the impact that children's organizations make within their own States, the mobilization of civil society and the understanding and action of social movements as a whole.**

We are aware that the financing of these measures requires decisions in the economic sphere, childhood policies are always redistributive policies and this is no exception. The operation of a protection system requires permanent funds. It is necessary to transfer resources from the sectors with the highest incomes to cover the basic needs of the most vulnerable, but also to consolidate an institutional framework that guarantees rights.

From the IIN we initially propose the following measures:

- Shield the budgets for children and adolescents and try to increase them according to the circumstances.
- Strengthen the systems for the promotion and protection of rights, improve comprehensiveness, their management, coordination and efficiency, prioritizing their presence in the territories.
- Promote the organization of intergenerational community networks that operate as promoters of rights and carry out specific awareness-raising and active solidarity actions.
- Promote the participation of children's and adolescents' organizations including their opinions in all phases of the public policy cycle.
- Advocate with international credit organizations and donors to prioritize investments in childhood.

**Given the gravity of the situation, let us reaffirm our principles: best interests of the child, co-responsibility, non-discrimination, participation, so that, as with the coronavirus, don't let the essential be invisible to the eyes.**