

Call for children

Lessons and
recommendations
to face the post-pandemic

The entire world is going through a crisis without precedent. The pandemic and the necessary measures that the governments have taken for its control generate many effects, among them, social distancing, suspension of usual work, school and leisure activities and a depression of the economic activity that, with the passage of weeks is deepening. We find ourselves in a global crisis. A crisis that affects the life of everyone, in quarantine, which often reveals the structural problems within families and consequent family violence.

The global crisis and its effects cannot make invisible the particularities that it has in the Americas region. Region characterized by its inequities, high levels of violence and fragile protection that has expressed in this context.

Children's are not the most vulnerable population to the impact of the virus, so they are not deemed to be a priority group. However, the collateral effects of the pandemic (social distancing, school closures, unemployment, and socioeconomic crisis, among others) are seriously impacting on children, who still invisible in their affectations: psychological, educative, mental health, social and economic sequels.

All the post-pandemic analyses show that in the region, poverty and unemployment will grow and surely this will impact directly on the capacity of the states, societies and families to effectively guarantee the rights of children and adolescents. This threatens to compromise the levels of promotion and protection of rights laboriously reached, worsening the situation and the vulnerabilities already existing.

In addition, this crisis has revealed the growing importance of the Internet in the effective promotion and protection of the rights of children and adolescents. In those countries, which offered better access to and use of the internet, had more recourse to guarantee the rights to education, health, leisure, social contact, work, etc. We cannot ignore that a major use requires better teacher training and the possibility of major risks. This pandemic has left us lessons in relation to the importance of democratizing the access to the Internet, to promote a better educational use of it and to deepen the self-care measures and the actions to promote the access and use of a safe Internet for children and adolescents.

It has been reported that in some instances, only 6 out of 30 children in a class log on for digital learning. This reflects connectivity difficulties, the access and the use. Some parents do not pay due attention, but, we must recognize that many of them do not have enough digital alphabetization as to accompany the children and adolescents or to secure that they are being benefited from on-line learning.

As some astute teachers pointed out, being able to log on to social media, as most of us can do, does not spell computer literacy nor competence in the use of digital technology. As a result, many children have been managing to outsmart their parents.

There needs to be comprehensive parent education in these areas to solve both the short and long-term needs. When we return to the physical classroom, we cannot totally reverse the trend towards e-learning, nor ignore the impact of

technology in education. We will need to create a 21st century classroom using both spaces in the best interest of children.

As well, it is necessary to promote a better educational use and get deeper in the self-care measures associated to a better use of adults, parents or teachers, to be able to promote an intergenerational dialogue that breaks the solitude and allows the safe use of Internet. Children and adolescents have the same right to be safe online as to be safe offline, and the guarantors has the same responsibilities of protecting them.

The global aspect of the crisis and its effects cannot hide the specific conditions in the Americas. The Principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are our main reference points on which to take a position in this trying time. The Best Interest of the child, along with the principles of co-responsibility, that of non-discrimination, the right to participation and the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and comprehensiveness, of the rights and principles emanating from it, must be our frame of reference in decision-making and the definition of priorities.

The IIN as the childhood and adolescence specialized body of the Organization of American States (OAS), jointly with the members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child coming from the region, acting in their capacity as independent experts namely Luis Pedernera, Jose Angel Rodriguez Reyes and Faith Marshall-Harris, call on and invite States, civil society and multilateral regional and sub-regional bodies to work together to advance basic measures to promote the rights of children and avoid the loss of the achieved levels.

Within this framework, we propose the following in an effort towards achieving these basic measures:

- ✓ Protect 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 countries; defining clear direction and providing them with the necessary institutional strengthening to accomplish this function. In this sense, the job of promotion, protection and restitution of rights will require strong alliances and multi-sectoral cooperation, strengthening the cross-institutional, cross-generational and cross-discipline work.

The analysis of the various ways of handling the pandemic by the states in the region, realizes the rigor in the planning based on standing information and quality of the technical input as one of the keys for successful management of the crisis. Based on this learning we propose the need to define policies of promotion and protection of the rights of children and adolescents with: quality information duly systematized; counseling from the more qualified specialists available in the country, monitoring the effects of each decision taken for an appropriate correction or deepening, and inclusion of the inputs from the international bodies.

- ✓ Promote the organization of intergenerational community networks that operate as promoters of rights and carry out specific awareness-raising and active solidarity actions with the support of the States as final guarantors, but developing the necessary autonomous levels in accordance with social and cultural norms.
- ✓ Exhort States to, in their role of guarantors of rights, activate immediate measures to guarantee children and adolescents the minimum necessary for a life that does not compromise their development or their dignity, among them receiving proper nourishment during the period in which they do not have access to the attention and education services, basic for their “food safety”.
- ✓ Rethink the experience during the crisis, the weaknesses and strengths of the educational systems promoting the necessary transformation to achieve a friendly, efficient, promotion of responsible citizenship education. This includes advancing the democratization of the access to internet, along with the necessary formation of the teaching body, as well as providing children and adolescents with additional “digital alphabetization”, criteria and tools for a safe use of the new technologies and adequate handling of situations that because of their vulnerability threaten their on and off line rights.
- ✓ Advocate with international credit organizations and donors to prioritize investments in childhood based on proposals and projects that have a clear perspective of rights and citizenship promotion.
- ✓ Promote the participation of children's and adolescent's organizations including their opinions in all phases of the public policy cycle and in the various levels of decision making. In the words of the children and adolescents themselves, “The best solutions will only be found when we give our opinions, our views and our thoughts”.

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