

# ECUADOR

Children and Adolescents in 360°



Situational Analysis of the Rights  
of Children and Adolescents in Ecuador

Executive Summary



## **Ecuador: Children and Adolescents in 360° Situational Analysis of the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Ecuador**

ChildFund International USA  
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# Introduction

## A purposeful and timely study

Ecuador is going through a very complex moment at all levels, but especially challenging in terms of the human rights of children and adolescents. In the midst of the context of violence and the measures that must be taken to address it, the Government has the challenge of ensuring the implementation of public policies for this population group, as well as updating the “National Development Plan” regarding the country’s policies and goals, and identifying the institutions for their effective fulfillment. Likewise, the Decentralized Autonomous Governments should implement their Development and Territorial Plans in which policies for priority attention groups should be highlighted, as well as the local institutional framework with respect to the protection of rights.

On the other hand, the National Assembly, prior to its dissolution, was in the process of debating reforms to the Code for Children and Adolescents. However, the elected Assembly, due to the aforementioned context of violence, has prioritized in its legislative agenda the processing of urgent economic norms and reforms in the criminal field, despite the fact that there are Constitutional Court rulings that demand compliance with deadlines and the development of content regarding the human rights of children and adolescents in legislative work.

This scenario poses challenges that require, among other things, the availability of information and key data to make the real situation visible and to promote public policies that ensure the full exercise of rights. Unfortunately, the lack of information and knowledge on these issues creates negative stereotypes and prejudices. Therefore, the need for exhaustive analyses to identify inequalities and the capacities of relevant actors in order to ensure the rights of children and adolescents is both necessary and timely.

The analysis of the situation of children and adolescents shows that inequality gaps persist, along with situations of discrimination and institutional inaction. The following are some of the alarming data: 21,046 cases of sexual violence in the National Education System; a 40% increase in hospital admissions of children and adolescents for abuse syndrome; the fact that 16.94% of sexual crimes affect children or adolescents; the increase in the irregular transit of minors through the Darien jungle, which exceeds 71,000, with Ecuadorian nationality being the second most affected; the 230 thousand children and adolescents involved in child labor; the 7.6% of alcohol consumption among children and adolescents between 10 and 17 years of age; the 120 suicides registered in 2022, representing 5.5% of total deaths and being the fifth leading cause of death, including cases as young as 9 years old; and the fact that approximately 150 thousand children and adolescents drop out of the educational system or are not promoted to the next school year.

The aforementioned data reveal a worrisome ineffectiveness of public policies to address the multiple problems affecting children and adolescents. Despite the magnitude of the challenges, as evidenced by the high rates of sexual violence, abuse, child labor, alcohol consumption and suicides, this scenario provides an opportunity to address the urgent need to review and reform existing policies, as well as to allocate adequate resources and develop comprehensive programs with all actors involved in the daily development of children, addressing the underlying causes and protecting the rights and wellbeing of children and adolescents in the country.

In essence, this analysis has been the result of an entirely participatory process, since as co-guarantors we have the responsibility of promoting the right and the principle of child participation, especially by identifying groups of children who, on many occasions, are not taken into account in the study processes. Such is the case of adolescents with criminal responsibility, children recruited for organized crime, children excluded from the educational system, among others. This is a challenging but at the same time very enriching participation because the voices of the participating legal subjects shed light on what, as a society, we must ensure: that all children and adolescents are protected in a comprehensive manner.

Given the scenario described above, it is crucial to implement urgent measures to address the serious problems affecting children and adolescents in Ecuador. Therefore, we recommend and strongly urge to strengthen the prevention and attention to sexual violence and child abuse by improving preventive and reporting systems, improving the education and health system, and strengthening the mechanisms for the protection of children’s rights, as well as developing comprehensive social protection policies to combat - among others - child labor, promote educational inclusion and provide psychosocial support to families in vulnerable situations.

ChildFund, KNH and World Vision, in a joint and responsible effort to address the current situation of the country, are presenting this study: “Ecuador: Children and Adolescents in 360°: State of Situation of Children and Adolescents in Ecuador”, with the aim of collaborating with the State in the development of public policies to make effective the rights of children and adolescents in Ecuador.

Thank you very much.

# Analysis of Secondary Indicators

We are witnessing an inter- and intra-generational reproduction of poverty, vulnerability and inequality. Several studies have shown that developmental differences caused by socioeconomic factors not only appear from a very early age, but tend to persist and even increase over time.

Children who grow up in families living in poverty, and where several other inequality gaps may be present, are not only at greater risk of not fully developing their skills or showing delays in their cognitive development, but also of being profoundly affected in their educational trajectory, achievement and completion in adolescence.

The effects, especially socio-economic, together with the new phenomenon of insecurity, directly affect not only subjective aspects of development such as self-esteem or mental health, but also objective aspects: for example, a child who drops out of school for various reasons, compromises his or her future economic performance in exchange for immediate income, or what could be worse, by joining or being forced to do so, with criminal groups.

The study on the multiple deprivations in childhood and adolescence (INEC, 2022), indicates that more than half of the children and adolescents are moderately and severely deprived of their right to housing, information or sanitation.

The deprivation of the right to health affects 42.1% of children and adolescents; the deprivation of the right to recreation, nutrition or water affects between 25% and 30% of children and adolescents. In terms of education, moderate and severe deprivations reach 15.3%, and in terms of identity, it reaches 4.7% of children and adolescents.

If such deprivations are combined, nine out of ten children and adolescents (90.9%) present deprivations in at least one of the nine rights evaluated, and among them, deprivations in up to six or more rights are registered simultaneously. On average, each child faces severe deprivation of 1.1 rights.

This study also shows that as the number of children and adolescents in a household increases, the probability of suffering deprivation grows. If there is only one child or adolescent living in a household, he or she faces 2.6 deprivations, but for those who belong to a household with four or more children and adolescents, the number of deprivations is almost four.

The coverage of services, together with the social programs that complement them, constitute a fundamental strategy for the fulfillment of rights; universal measures, in addition to special and/or specific protection measures, should be

aimed at reducing gaps. However, inequality in several of the social indicators has remained unchanged in these last years and has even deepened. Here are some data that we should take into account about the situation of children and adolescents in Ecuador, in the light of official statistics:

## Population dynamics

- One third of Ecuador's population are children and adolescents under 18 years of age. The population of children is decreasing, while that of adolescents is growing.

- Half of the country's children and adolescents live in three provinces: Guayas, Pichincha and Manabí.

- 6 out of 10 families in the country have children and adolescents.

- Around 100,000 children and adolescents are married, in union or have been so in the past.

100,957 children, adolescents and young people between 12 and 19 years of age are living in some type of de facto or de jure union. 5,217 of these cases occur in the population between 12 and 14 years of age.

Territorially, four provinces account for 6 out of every 10 cases: Guayas (26,079), Manabí (14,847), Los Ríos (8,899) and Pichincha (8,059). In these provinces, between 70 and 80% of the cases correspond to women.

- There is an upward trend in the number of girls and adolescents who are heads of household. Similarly, the number of those who belong to single-parent households is also growing.

## Living conditions

- The household income is lower when there are children and adolescents; likewise, poverty has a greater impact on families with minors.

- Access to services has not changed profoundly in recent years; the most affected populations are rural and self-identified indigenous.

- 25 out of every 100 children under 5 years of age drink water with feces (E. coli); in rural areas the percentage is twice as high, i.e. 50 out of every 100; and three times as high, i.e. 70 out of every 100 in the Amazon region.

## Health, Nutrition and Causes of death

- There is a progressive decrease in immunization coverage; dropout rates are increasing for those who do not complete the appropriate doses.
- There is an increase in cases of low birth weight; there is also an increase in overweight and obesity of children and adolescents.
- Despite having the most significant reduction between 2018 and 2022, Chronic Child Malnutrition affects 1 in 5 children under 5 years of age; a percentage similar to that observed at the beginning of the century (2004).
- Of the total number of live births, 18,830 correspond to children born to underage mothers; this means that in Ecuador a girl or adolescent gives birth every 28 minutes. Every week of the year there are 37 births to child mothers under 14 years of age.
- The main cause of morbidity in children under 1 year of age are conditions that originate in the perinatal period. A similar number of consultations were recorded in pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium of women between 15 and 19 years of age. Respiratory system diseases and infectious and parasitic diseases are the main cause of hospital admissions for children under 5 years of age. Between 10 and 14 years of age, as well as between 15 and 19 years of age, hospital care is focused on trauma, poisoning and some other consequences of an external cause, and digestive system diseases.
- Four out of 10 children and adolescents between 10 and 17 years of age are exposed to tobacco smoke, and 4.3% use cigarettes, cigars, Arab pipes, or snuff or chewing tobacco. Alcohol consumption among children and adolescents between 10 and 17 years of age stands at 7.6%.

### Prevalence of chronic child malnutrition in children under 5 years of age, by age



Sources: Endemain 2004. ECV 2006 and 2014. Ensanut 2012 y 2018\* adjustment made in 2023. ENDI 2022. (INEC). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: Various.

## Main causes of morbidity and hospital care for children and adolescents

Causes of morbidity	Age groups				
	Less than 1 year	1-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-19 years
Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period	46.767	-	-	-	1
Pregnancy, childbirth and puerperium	-	-	-	2.551	40.778
Respiratory system diseases	8.538	20.409	7.988	2.215	3.013
Trauma, poisoning and some other consequences of external causes	743	5.345	6.409	7.098	8.338
Diseases of the digestive system	825	2.719	5.949	8.090	9.542
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases	3.097	8.345	4.369	2.730	1.673
Congenital malformations, deformities and chromosomal abnormalities	2.671	2.863	1.497	963	564
<b>National</b>	<b>68.264</b>	<b>53.933</b>	<b>38.300</b>	<b>36.068</b>	<b>77.883</b>

Sources: Statistical Register of Hospital Discharges (INEC). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2022

- Of the 2,191 deaths of children and adolescents between 1 and 17 years of age registered in 2022, 10.8% were due to traffic accidents, which was the leading cause of death. Eight percent were due to assaults and homicides. This is followed by problems caused by influenza and pneumonia, as well as malignant neoplasm of the lymphatic tissue. If we were to add up all types of malignant neoplasms, this could become the leading cause of death, with 242 cases.
- In 2022, the percentage of deaths due to assaults and homicides among children and adolescents was 4 times higher than in 2021.



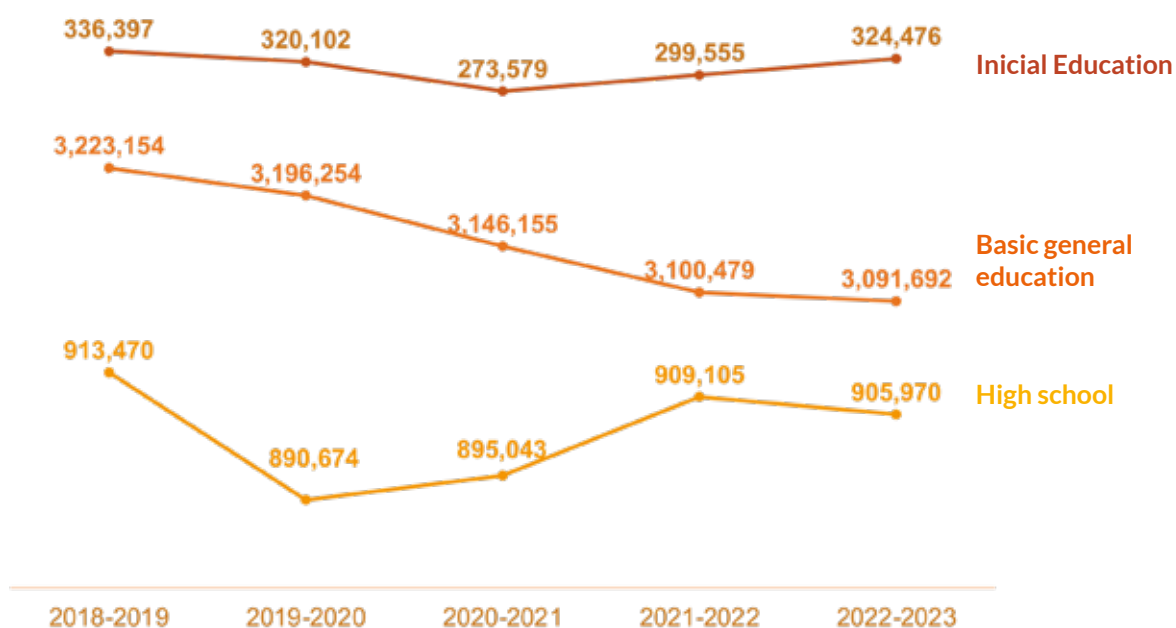
## Education

Access to education and its associated social programs such as uniforms, textbooks and school meals, show that there is a slight improvement compared to the previous year, but their coverage or budgets remain at lower levels compared to half a decade ago (2018).

Families and the State invest more in higher education than in other educational levels; the State invests 2.5 times less in children and adolescents than in university education for young people.

2 out of 3 children and adolescents do not have a computer with internet connection.

Number of children and adolescents in the school system, per school year



Sources: Master File of Educational Institutions - AMIE (Ministry of Education). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: Various.

The school non-promotion rate doubled with respect to the previous year. The promotion rate decreased, and the dropout rate remained at the same percentages of 2018, in fact, it increased with respect to 2021.

Approximately 150 thousand children and adolescents drop out of the education system or are not promoted to the next grade each year, figures that are increasing the numbers of educational backwardness and unfinished education.

At least 1 million children and adolescents have various exclusion and backwardness problems regarding care, child development and education services.

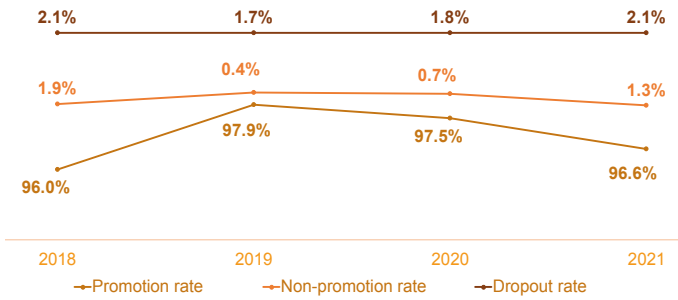
Between 600 and 900 thousand children under 5 years of age are outside child care, child development and early education services.

230 thousand children between 3 and 5 years of age would be out of early education.

At least 350 thousand children and adolescents are effectively outside the educational system and others are attending levels that are not appropriate for their age.

About 400 thousand children, adolescents and young people are over-aged; that is, they are behind the educational level that corresponds to their age.

## Promotion, non-promotion and dropout rates in education



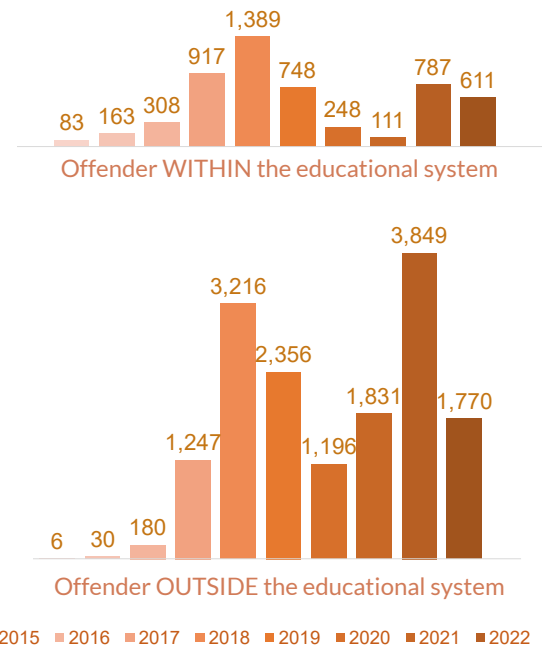
Sources: Education Satellite Accounts (INEC). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: Various.

## Human mobility and special protection

- 1 out of every 3 Ecuadorians who in 2022 did not return to the country are children, adolescents or young people under 19 years of age. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of children and adolescents crossing the northern border increased 5 times.
- In 2022, 1 out of every 6 Ecuadorians who did not return to Ecuador after entering Colombia through the regular channels was a child or adolescent. 12,431 minors under 19 years of age who traveled to Nicaragua in 2022 have not returned to Ecuador by that route.
- In 2022 and 2023, Ecuadorians were the second largest registered nationality of persons in irregular transit through the Colombian-Panamanian border, known as the Darien jungle.
- Between January and August 2023, 11,159 Ecuadorian children and adolescents were in an irregular migratory situation in Mexico; it is the second nationality in this situation, only after Venezuelan children and adolescents.
- Between October 2022 and June 2023, 3,455 unaccompanied minors of Ecuadorian nationality are reported to have been found in U.S. territory. Ecuador is the first nationality in South America and the fifth nationality with respect to the number of minors found unaccompanied.
- One third of households with children and adolescents receive a conditional or unconditional cash transfer.
- Between 230 and 330 thousand children and adolescents are reportedly in child labor, a number that increases with age, while the percentage of children and adolescents under 14 years of age who are engaged in child labor reaches 3.21% and among adolescents between 15 and 17 years of age the percentage reaches 13.87%, i.e. 4.3 times more.

According to the Administrative Records of the Ministry of Education reported in the Violence Registration System (Redevi) on cases of sexual violence detected or committed in the National Education System between January 2014 and September 2023, they amount to 21,046 cases.

## Reported cases of sexual violence inside and outside the education system by years



Source: Redevi (MinEduc). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Varios.

3 out of every 4 cases (15,681) have been committed by persons outside the educational system and the remaining 5,365 are cases related to alleged sexual violence committed by persons within the educational system; 2,790 were committed predominantly by teachers and in smaller numbers by authorities, 221 by administrative and cleaning personnel, and 2,354 cases were committed by other students, with a very similar number of school students and classmates.

- 5.1% of children and adolescents do not have their birth registration. This percentage is higher among children under five years of age (10.1%) than among adolescents between 15 and 17 years of age (2.9%).
- Among children under five, 13.9% of indigenous children do not have an identity card; 14.5% of those living in income poverty; 11% in rural areas, and 12% in households with four or more children and adolescents.

# Analysis of Primary Indicators

The primary collection of information gathers and acknowledges the voices of children and adolescents about their environments, their relationships, dreams, aspirations and imaginary; it also gathers information about their socioeconomic conditions, education, health, wellbeing and coexistence, and conveys them with statistical representativeness.

As a general balance of the findings, we can affirm that these are a reflection, a photograph of the situation of the country's children and adolescents at the present time, especially marked by the superimposition of crises and impacts on their rights: the pandemic, the economic crisis, insecurity and migration; these are some of the main phenomena that are affecting the rights, normal development and wellbeing of children and adolescents.

Among the main findings that involve the fulfillment of rights or factors that undermine the development of children and adolescents in the country, the following can be pointed out:

- Barely a third of children and adolescents have enough money to cover the expenses of the entire family.

- Although 69% of children and adolescents live with their parents, the separation of families increases as age increases; this is confirmed by the doubling of children and adolescents who report that they live only with their mother, if we compare the age group between 5 and 7 years old (13%) with those between 15 and 17 years old (25%).

- One third of the universe does not have a room where they can sleep alone in the home, and the evidence that this deficit is more serious in the lower socioeconomic level (49%).

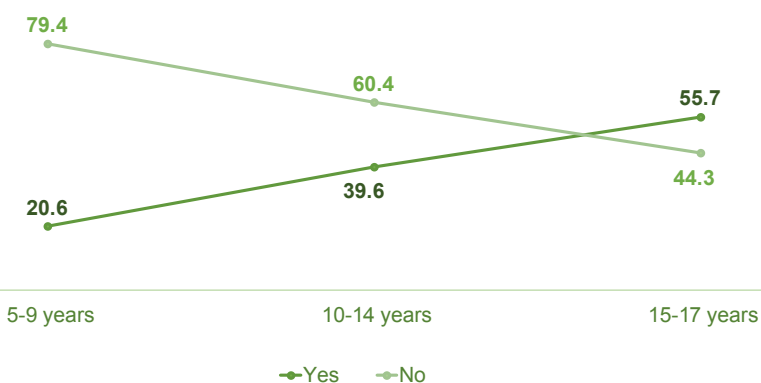
- 20% of children over 10 years of age do not have a good relationship with their parents or caregivers; this percentage is higher in rural areas and among women.

- Having relationship problems with friends is a situation that should matter. Approximately 15% do not have a good relationship with their friends. The highest levels of conflict are reported between the fifth and eighth years of general basic education, as well as among lower-income households.

- Out of every 8 children, 3 report some type of food deficiency (moderate or severe) in their breakfast, which is why they arrive at school hungry.

38.7% of the total, that is, 7 out of every 20 children over 10 years of age (35.1%) report that they do not always have sufficient and good food; of this percentage, 30% report moderate food shortages, i.e., sometimes, and 5.1% report severe food shortages, as they almost never or never have sufficient and good food when they get home. This situation is more prevalent among children and adolescents in rural areas, among those who self-identify as indigenous, and among those with lower income levels.

## Children and adolescents who attend school hungry because they have not had breakfast



Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH).  
Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023





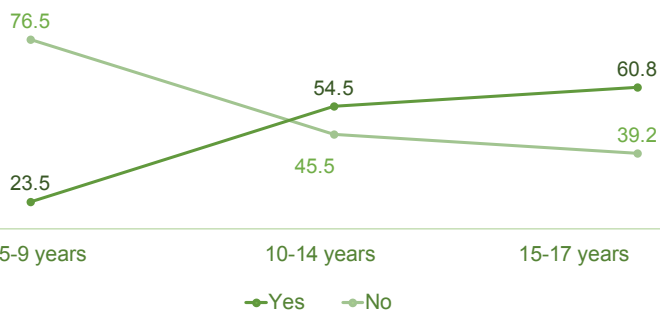
4 out of 9 children and adolescents over 10 years of age (44.7%) admit that they would like to move to another country or city, and this is much more pronounced among adolescents between 15 and 17 years of age (56.2%), and among students in the third year of high school, 72% of them say they would like to move to another country or city.

Two thirds of the children and adolescents said that they were healthy and free of diseases at the time of being interviewed. 24% of children under 9 years of age and 30% of those between 10 and 17 years of age reported experiencing occasional or continuous health problems, while 7% of children over 10 years of age reported that they were suffering from some illness or pain at the time of the interview.

One out of every two children and adolescents between 5 and 17 years of age has received, in the last month prior to the interview, some type of health care, medical consultation, attended the infirmary or received some type of treatment. In the 5 to 9 age group, 76.5% did receive some type of care, although this percentage decreases as their age increases; 45.5% of those between 10 and 14 years of age were attended, and 39.2% of those between 15 and 17 years of age.

Non-attendance for various reasons is within the 20% range. The main factors associated with non-attendance have to do with illness and economic reasons. Some 42% of those over 10 years of age said that their health condition was one of the reasons for non-attendance.

### Incidence of healthcare services for children and adolescents by age subgroups



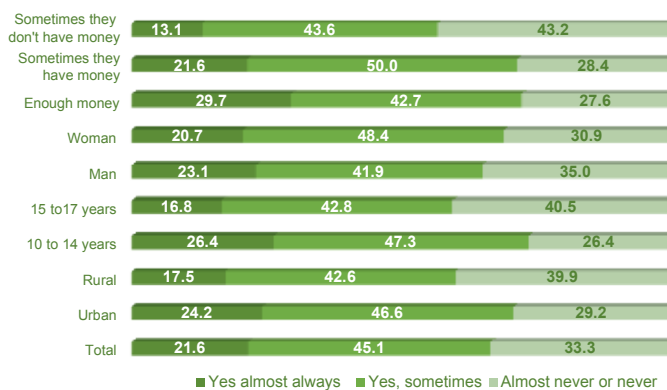
Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023



One third of children and adolescents between 10 and 17 years of age (33.3%) almost never or never receive support from an adult or a brother or sister with their schoolwork when they need it. This situation is even worse in rural areas (39.9%), or among people with lower incomes.

One third of children and adolescents do not have access to a mobile phone. For those who are connected through information and communication technologies, the information they access are jokes, funny things, news about famous people or video games. When children and adolescents are connected to the Internet, it is mainly to play video games.

### Homework support for children and adolescents



Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023

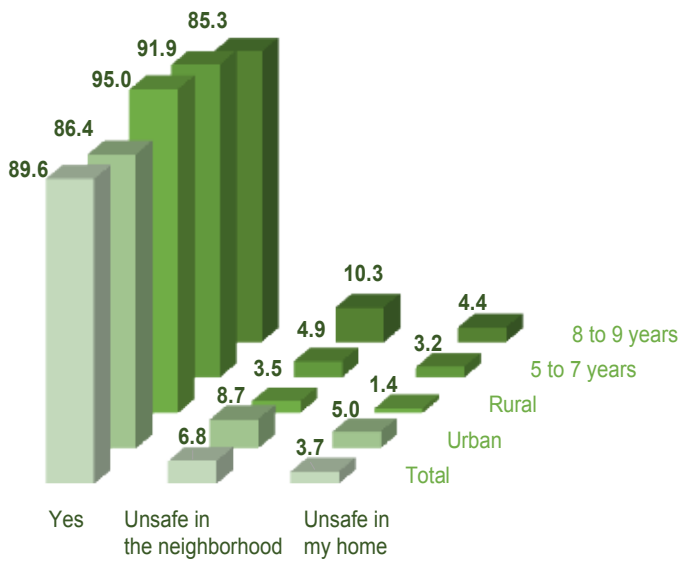
20% of children and adolescents consider that they use social networks all the time; although they are an important element for socializing (friends, parties, partners) or for studying, research and cultural expressions, 3 out of 10 children and adolescents over 10 years of age have experienced forms of intimidation, threats or aggression through social networks.

9 out of 10 children and adolescents between 5 and 9 years of age consider that the place where they live is safe.

3 out of 10 children and adolescents over 10 years of age acknowledge having experienced intimidation, threats or aggression in the various settings evaluated: public transportation, social networks, peers, home and educational institution.

Situations of intimidation, threat or aggression, in the case of women, is much higher both in public spaces and in transportation. For men, it is more prevalent in educational institutions.

## Perception of children and adolescents about safety in the place where they live



Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH).  
Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023

## Situations of intimidation, threat or aggression against children and adolescents in different environments

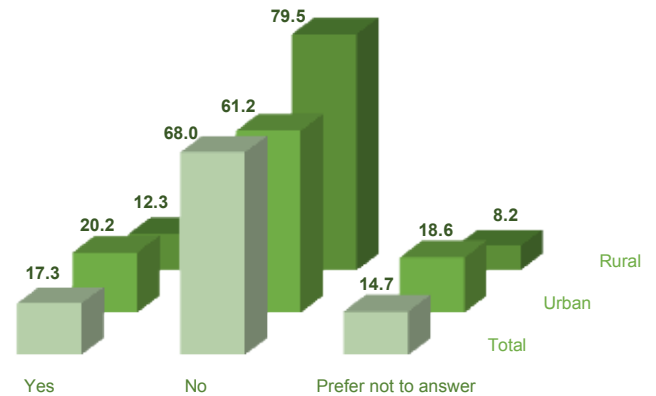
	Yes, many times	Some times	At least once	Never
By other children or adolescents	2,7	12,9	19,9	64,6
On social networks	3,3	10,6	16,5	69,6
At basic/high school	1,8	11,0	15,6	71,6
On public transportation	3,5	10,3	14,2	72,0
At home	2,4	10,4	10,6	76,6

Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH).  
Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023

1 out of every 5 urban adolescents surveyed between 15 and 17 years of age claims to know peers who are involved with gangs; an almost similar percentage prefers not to answer, although some of these responses reflect lack of knowledge, in other cases, based on the related open-ended responses, there is a perception of risk in disclosing this information, or threats which add to the silence on the subject.

With respect to the diverse daily activities of children and adolescents who answered the multiple-choice question, 34% carry out activities to help around the house; 15% take care of siblings or relatives, and 11% help in the family business with some activity that contributes to the household economy.

## Knowledge about children and adolescents who are involved with gangs



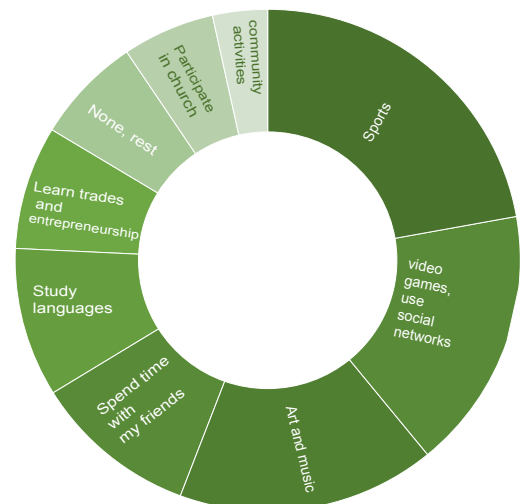
Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH).  
Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023

Studying, reading, playing sports and spending time with the family are the activities that children most like to do.

Spending time alone at home increases with age.

Among children and adolescents between 10 and 17 years of age, sports remain the favorite activity (22.2%); however, a growing number prefer to play video games and use social networks (17%), as well as activities related to music and art (16.5%). If there existed an offer, they would aspire to do other activities such as studying languages (9.7%), learning trades and about entrepreneurship (7.9%); or activities of social organization and community participation.

## Activities that children and adolescents would like to carry out



Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH).  
Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023

Professions related to health sciences are the most preferred among children and adolescents' aspirations: doctors, veterinarians, psychologists, nurses. Sports as a professional activity (soccer and basketball) are also among their preferences. As age increases, other professions appear, such as lawyers, engineers, and business administrators.

Joining one of the branches of the public forces is also a very important choice for all ages, although the older they get, the less they aspire to be police officers, but the more they aspire to be in the military.

52% of children and adolescents consider that it is possible to achieve their aspiration. However, 4.7% consider it unlikely to achieve it, with a higher proportion among children and adolescents who identify themselves as indigenous (7.7%) and among those who say that their families do not have enough money to cover their expenses (7.2%).

Having a room in which the child or adolescent can sleep alone is not only an indicator of a household's economic capacity, but also influences factors such as intimacy or personality development; it is even a risk factor in terms of harassment, abuse and sexual violence.

Conflicts in relationships at home and with peers increase with age and are accentuated in lower-income groups. The presence of different forms of violence such as aggression, intimidation or threats occurs in the different environments in which children and adolescents develop.

Social networks play an increasingly important role in socialization; their daily use increases with age. Proper channeling of this tool could promote opportunities for organization, participation, identity and personality development, among other aspects. It is necessary to be aware of them, to take care of oneself and to follow protection routes, since we cannot ignore that they can be used to commit acts of violation.

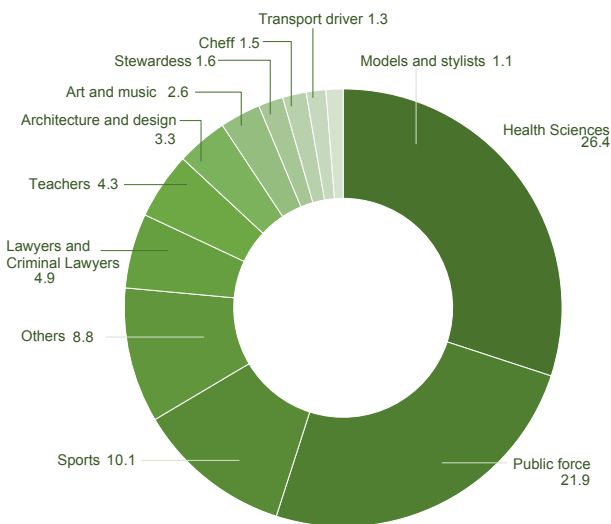
In this regard, if many children and adolescents spend too much time on electronic devices, with all their advantages and potential, we cannot rule out the fact that this increased use, especially among the youngest children, also indicates a degree of permissiveness or even encouragement of this activity, not always in a positive way, but rather that many parents use them as substitutes to care for their children, and shows their lack of time, means and tools to spend time with their children, where home, school or care centers do not have alternative sources of entertainment, recreation or personality development.

Sport is a daily practice among children and adolescents; it is an activity that exercises the body and their capacity for socialization, strengthens their relationship with their peers, motivates aspirations and provides a sense of future, as an activity for professional practice. Among men, sports seem to be a much more practiced activity; among women, there is a greater inclination towards activities within the home.

When we compare the activities they like and would like to do with the activities they actually do, we find a big difference; while they aspire to do sports activities, spend time with friends, play video games, learn trades or languages, engage in artistic activities or study, girls and adolescents are doing domestic chores such as cleaning the house, taking care of siblings or other family members, or helping in the family business or with productive work.

Their sense of the future is deeply and mostly linked to a scenario of emigration. Professionally, their aspirations for the future are related to helping and contributing to society, people and animals; hence they aspire to have professions that heal people, care for animals; protect the defenseless; fight injustice; protect people and the country; and of course, take care of their family, in return for what they have done for them.

### Aspirations and expectations of children and adolescents when they become adults, aggregated by professional fields



Source: ENNNA (SC-CS - Childfund, World Vision, KNH). Prepared by: Somos Consultores (FCT). Year: 2023

We are witnessing a new social composition, not only marked by the gradually decreasing presence of children and adolescents, which will deepen over time, but also by a family composition marked by the separation of parents, which increases as their age increases.

# Qualitative analysis

## The faces behind the statistics

The primary qualitative component of this study aimed to get closer to the reality of children and adolescents, using various instruments and information gathering techniques such as direct interviews, focus groups, in-depth interviews with key informants, life histories, consultations with experts on various topics and direct observation by our field team. These techniques not only complement the statistical information, but also give it a face. In this way, we have analyzed their opinions, demands and expectations, completing this 360-degree turn around children and adolescents in Ecuador.

Topics related to early childhood, through dialogue with children between 3 and 5 years old, and with parents and caregivers of children from 0 to 3 years old, are included in the complete report; likewise, an analysis of the forms of care, the development of children and adolescents in different fields, their expectations and sense of future, their links with criminal gangs and the multiple dimensions of insecurity, as well as a set of life stories have been collected in the complete study. However, in this Executive Summary, we have only extracted some of these stories and given the current situation in the country, we will discuss the multiple dimensions of insecurity from their own voices.

## The multiple dimensions of insecurity

### *"I don't like to talk about that..."*

In view of the situation that the country is going through and the stories that the media tell us every day, we wanted to find out how common and close these acts of insecurity are for children and adolescents. The truth is that they are; however, there are multiple dimensions of insecurity.

Insecurity is an issue that affects children and adolescents, but it goes beyond crime; it also has to do with their self-confidence. The active listening to their feelings and expectations is an important issue, as well as the way they are seen by their peers, their families and adults, which puts at risk the affirmation of their identity and marks their imaginary, their relationships and their daily life.

Their image, their body, and family relationships are also reasons for insecurity; the neighborhood, public transportation, school, their own family are environments where insecurity is externalized; insults, blows, and weapons are instruments that give them a sense of insecurity; and rumors, bullying, threats, intimidation, harassment, robbery, abuse, kidnapping, are their concrete facts.

## The family protects them, but also...

Children and adolescents know that their families are the best protective shelter; being under their care gives them a sense of security: "nothing has happened, my parents always take care of me"; "recently I was with my family (...) two people came in and started to steal, these people came to our table, but my dad defended us; thanks to him we are fine".

In fact, they do not need to have gone through a violent event; with their presence alone, they feel safe: "I have a good family", that protection gives them confidence: "I have almost never felt unsafe at home, my parents always give me that confidence". They even mention that "I have felt sad when I have not been at home".

Curiously, two participants between 5 and 9 years of age said that they had not felt afraid because they were accompanied, one by a cat and the other by a dog, and that such company gave them security.

We could understand children and adolescents using the analogy of a trapeze artist, for them family is the net that will protect them from falling: "Well, in my home I have never felt insecure, I have always had the help of my parents; sometimes I have wanted to go down the wrong path, but thanks to my parents I have left everything behind and I am happy; I am going to continue with my education and I will move forward to achieve my dreams".

And not only their parents, but also family members: "I like to play sports and one night I went out to play soccer and some older men of 25-30 years of age began to insult me, until now I do not know why they did it, but I called my brother who arrived and so I felt safer".

The fact that their environment is free of violence and abuse also gives them security: "Well, I have not felt unsafe in the street or at home; on the contrary, I feel very good about the fact that my family is always together, although sometimes my parents have problems, but they solve them by talking and not by hitting..."

They recognize family care even when they have lacked it: "When I was around 9 or 10 I wanted to visit my mother, but she never answered the phone, but my father had already left me at her work, which led me to spend a whole week with two of my aunts, but I felt insecure because they were not my parents and they did not take care of me the same way".

Children and adolescents respond reciprocally and say that they will try to protect their family. Their aspirations for the future hold this certainty of caring for their family; they fear letting them down or that they will be thought to be bad children: "It was so hard to lose my father and there were times when I felt very insecure that I could not

be a good daughter and give so many disappointments to my mother”.

Their problems are also the family problems that affect them: “I am very sad about my home”. They witness family fights “when my parents fight I feel bad, so do my siblings”; “when my mom fights with my stepfather I feel sad”. This often leads them to run away from them: “sometimes my parents fight and I don’t like that my siblings see how my parents fight, that’s why sometimes I don’t want to be at home”. They avoid family problems, and go out in the street, spending time in the street and with friends are ways to avoid problems at home.

## Between belonging and neglect

It is important to feel that you belong to something. One of the greatest motivators with respect to the family is precisely the bond and belonging to it. Not being or not feeling part of the family affects them deeply, “when my brother, the eldest, tells me that I am adopted, it makes me feel insecure and makes me worry a lot”. This type of ‘jokes’, which are so common, affects them, and questions their very being.

Family losses obviously mark their lives and lead to feelings of loneliness, sadness and depression: “since my father passed away I have felt lonely and empty... depressed...”, not only because of the affection for that person, but also because they lose the people who gave them confidence, protected them, taught them, and accompanied them: “I felt insecure when my grandfather passed away because I felt I could no longer go on, I felt weak because the person I trusted the most was no longer there. I got depressed and I can’t get over it...”; ‘when my father died I felt lonely, since I was his favorite daughter (...) when I saw him die it also affected my school performance because he taught me a lot of things’.

Although this loss may be due to the absence of affection: “I felt bad because I didn’t have my mother’s affection”; “I felt bad because I didn’t have my mother’s hug”. Or feelings of rejection and contempt: “My father knows how to make me feel bad by threatening me; I do not have a good relationship with my family because they prefer my two siblings and leave me aside, I am the only one they make feel bad”.

Or a loss in the form of abandonment: “My father left when I was 8 years old”; “My story is that I miss my family”; “When I argued with my father, before starting school, he made the decision to take me out of his house and I had to go live with my mother. He didn’t care about me from that moment on, and even before that, he wasn’t fulfilling his role as a father properly, I don’t have a relationship with him now”.

Continuing with this sense of belonging, insecurity is associated with loneliness; children feel insecure when

we leave them alone, even temporarily or occasionally: “one day I felt insecure at home because there was no one there”; “when my parents go away for work, I feel insecure because I am alone”. And even more so when it is a regular occurrence: “when my mother goes to work I stay home alone for 15 days... and I feel bad because I need my mother”.

When they return home alone: “When I go out to go to the soccer games I feel insecure because I go alone to the games I have to play on Saturdays and Sundays; I also feel insecure because I return home alone”.

## Bad relationships, mistreatment and abuse

They are spectators of violence, but also its protagonists, and when they have problems they do not know where to go: “once I had a fight with my father and left the house without knowing where to go”. Bad relationships exist in the home, they can be occasional, but also permanent: “I never had a good relationship with my grandparents, I always argued with them”; “I don’t feel sad like I used to and I don’t suffer anymore”.

There is also mistreatment at home: “Once they wanted to hit me for having failed an exam and I ran like never before and they hit me harder”. Their forms of discipline associated with violence have a profound impact on the lives of children and adolescents: “when my parents don’t understand me or don’t pay attention to me; what I do, whatever I help, doesn’t seem enough to them... and sometimes they treat me badly, I feel bad with the words my parents say to me”.

Abuse also occurs in the protective environment that the family should be: “I was abused by my own father; he threatened me that if I told my mother, he was going to do something to my mother, and I could never mention it, because I was afraid that something would happen to my mom”.

## Listening to them, understanding them, believing them

Empathy could be one of the most important values in our relationship with children and adolescents; we must not only listen to them, but also understand what bothers them; be sensitive to their circumstances; give importance to them and their problems; believe them.

Maria told her parents that she had been a victim of bullying: “I have told my parents, but they are usually tired from work and I don’t want to bother them... I prefer not to bother my parents. If we don’t listen to them, we don’t understand them and we get angry, they lose confidence in



us: “well, when I told my parents how I felt, they didn’t care; they even got angry because I felt that way, so I don’t tell them anymore how I feel”.

If they don’t tell them about their problems, it can lead to serious consequences. Faced with a case of harassment by her cousin’s husband, this adolescent girl says: “...I was able to tell my parents about this after 2 years, and because I was afraid he would come back, I even tried to commit suicide”.

Children and adolescents feel that they do not meet adult expectations, that we compare them, that we get angry: “some days when I talk to my father, I do not say anything because he gets angry, or if I ask permission he never lets me go out, and when I do not meet his expectations he always compares me to my sister or my brother when it is something bad; so, I always try to do my best...”.

## Situations and conditions of insecurity

Insecurity is not only linked to life situations, but also to the conditions in which children and adolescents live, which increases insecurity.

From events such as the pandemic: “...it happened during the pandemic that I didn’t feel like studying and leaving home was complicated because, if I got infected, my life would be in danger. Also, when I walk alone in places where I have not been before, I have been afraid of getting lost or being robbed...”

Another situation is the risk of disasters: “when the earthquake hit, I was in shock when the mountain fell in the city and I was wondering if people were able to get out alive from the fall of the mountain”. “Recently there was a landslide and I was scared about what could happen, and I am a little insecure”; “about the collapse of the mountain... it was a Sunday and I was at home doing homework; first the TV went off and then the lights went out, we left the house and there was no electricity, it was all dark, me and my sisters ran out of the house because they said that the mountain was coming where we were, I was very scared”.

These are facts that expose children and adolescents to fear and anguish. The conditions of the cities’ infrastructure and the dangers in their neighborhoods and homes make them feel insecure: “in my house, on the road, there are holes where most of the time there are accidents; there are cars that overturn outside my house”; “I feel insecure in my city because there is so much robbery”.

To the problems caused by the lack of control of urban fauna: “I have many dog bites”.

The conditions of their homes make them feel insecure: “in my house; at night, I am a little afraid because we don’t have a safe door to go out to the street; we only have a zinc door that we close with a chain and a padlock, and sometimes I have to close it at night”.

Or the fear of having their homes broken into, regardless of whether they live in places they consider safe: “I cannot go out into the street without feeling insecurities or fears; I know I live in a fairly safe place, but I am still afraid of being robbed or something like that...”; “inside my house, the insecurity that someone might break in and harm me or my loved ones...”.

Children and adolescents are aware of and reflect on reality, they are not oblivious to what is happening in the country: “I feel unsafe outside my home because of everything that is happening in the country”; “I have felt fear because in our country we are going through a lot of crime, killings, robberies, kidnappings...”.

## A macro environment of violence and crime

Their most immediate environments: their neighborhoods, the outskirts of the school, on the way home, on public transportation, are settings where children and adolescents are witnesses of violent events: “when I am on my way home there are people and students fighting around the school”; “the outskirts of the school and the way to the bus stop are dangerous because there are fights and harassment in the streets, currently there are a lot of murders and rapes. Fortunately for me, I don’t live very far from my school so nothing has happened to me, but for other people it might be too dangerous to go there and back. They have also witnessed criminal activity: “when I got home from school I sat down to do homework at the desk and heard people shouting and even some shots...”; “I was doing homework when I heard shots; when I left the house I went to see with my cousin what was happening and we saw a lady crying while they were taking a teenager or a man into a car, as he had a bullet wound in his arm and leg”.

While doing homework or taking a walk, violence is a daily occurrence: “when some boys on a motorcycle with guns passed by, I was outside my house and we were very scared...”; “when we went out for a walk there was a shooting and it was a very ugly moment, very unsafe”.

Children and adolescents witness violence with deadly consequences: “once right in front of my house, early in the morning, they killed a person, and I did not know what to do, I was very unsafe and I woke my dad to tell him what happened and he told me to stay calm and not to look out the window...”; “when a man was killed near my house my mom had to take me to a room so that stray bullets would not reach me”; “once they killed a person almost near me, when I was outside with my family”.

But they are not only witnesses, they have often been victims of this criminal violence and these risks are becoming more and more common: “I was robbed, something that has already happened to me many times”.

and in different sectors of the city". This risk limits their full development: "I can't go out to spend time in the street with some peace of mind for fear of being assaulted or kidnapped".

Robbery on buses: "mainly what terrifies me is robbery on buses..."; "when we went on the bus and it was robbed, they robbed everyone except those who gave them money; when they were selling chocolates; my family was one of those who were not robbed".

## Alcohol as a trigger

Whether at home, "when my father comes home drunk I feel insecure", "when my brother comes home drunk he is aggressive and I don't like it, I feel insecure being in that situation because something bad could happen", or on the street, "some drunk men followed me and I tried to run away...", or on the bus, "yesterday some men on the bus were drunk and cornered me...", alcohol is a factor of insecurity.

## Children and adolescents experience harassment and abuse

Children and adolescents have experienced stories not only of interpersonal violence and delinquency, but also of harassment and abuse directly against them; these situations occur in their homes, even by family members: "once at Christmas my cousin came to my house and took off my pants and I felt very insecure (...) today we do not talk to my cousins because he keeps doing it with other girls"; "when I was little I was about 7 years old, an uncle abused me sexually". "When I was little I was sexually abused, almost 3 years ago I told my parents and now I am much better, I receive psychological therapies".

By acquaintances in their environment: "when we moved to another house, the son of the landlady used to behave strangely with me and my sister; he insinuated himself in a strange way and when we were playing he would come from behind and out of nowhere he would touch our private parts or force us to do things we didn't want to do; that happened for years, but we did not say anything. That made me feel unsafe in my own home." Or by strangers: "this happened to me a long time ago, I was going out of school with my sister, we were both walking to the house, she was about 11 years old and I was 9, I don't remember very well, and a man approached us and showed us his private parts... we ran home as fast as we could for fear that something would happen to us".

Insecurity in transportation, especially among women, is a scenario of harassment: "I was on the streetcar and a man told me some off-color things"; "one day I left my house and went on a motorcycle cab and I felt a little uncomfortable with the driver"; "there was a man on a bus who kept

staring at me, and I was wearing my school uniform that day, so since the bus was full, I felt that the man was trying to lift my skirt and I felt very intimidated that day on the bus".

After school: "when I was a little girl and I was going home alone after school, an adult man chased me home saying incoherent things and proposing to me to go with him". Or in the street: "once I was going with my cousin to do some shopping for the house and a man in a cab started to harass us and then followed us, so we had to run three times around the block and then hide in a kind of ravine that we found there".

The way women dress is one of the reasons why they are victims of intimidation and harassment: "Outside my home I feel intimidated because men do not respect women, either because of the way we dress or the way we look. Because of situations like these I prefer to stay at home with my family"; "when I go out in my uniform (wearing a skirt), many men look at me in a bad way"; "when I went out one morning wearing a dress that was not short, I felt insecure because of the men who were watching me"; "when I wear shorts or a somewhat short dress I have been whistled at or I have been looked at strangely, and that makes me feel insecure or sort of afraid"; "outside my home I was on the bus dressed comfortably and from my point of view it was appropriate, but an adult man was saying ugly things to me about my body and I felt super uncomfortable".

The ways in which potential perpetrators try to deceive or convince consist of offering money, or trying to gain the trust of children and adolescents by offering them candy or things they like: "when I was once on the bus a man wanted to touch me and he proposed that he would pay me to hang out with him, and it happened about 2 times"; "once I went to a park near my house and a strange man asked me what my name was and how old I was, he also asked me if I wanted a candy and I ignored him and went home"; "my mom was working like every day and one day a man who used to go to see her every day told me let's go see some puppies, and I said ok, and the man started



touching me, and the only thing I did was to run to my mom, and I didn't tell her at that moment out of fear".

These forms of harassment and abuse are not only related to sexual abuse, but can also be related to other types of crimes. Children and adolescents have experienced the possibility of being kidnapped: "once I was almost kidnapped by a lady, that happened when I was in sixth grade; what happened was that outside the school a lady wanted to give me candy and take me away, but thanks to my brother I did not accept and we left that place, which was outside the school"; "it happened to me that when I was walking in the street I saw a car, a person asked me if I wanted some candy and I said no and they wanted to take me in the car... I was scared and ran home"; "It happened to me one Monday at 6:39 a.m. I was on my way home and a car almost took me away, but my mom saw what was happening and grabbed a stick with a stone".

In many cases, we see that many children and adolescents do not talk about these events out of fear, shame, or threat. Silence is a very important factor, since adults do not always believe these stories or downplay their importance.

## Disaster risk, another scenario of insecurity

The children and adolescents of Alausí are very aware of the recent landslide that occurred in their territory: "I was in shock when the mountain fell in the town, and I kept thinking about whether people could get out alive from the fall of the mountain"; some of their feelings are fear and insecurity: "when in my town the mountain fell I was very afraid..."; "when the Alausí landslide happened, I felt very scared and I cried"; "recently there was a landslide and I feel scared for what might happen; and now I am a little insecure". "About the mountain landslide, it was on a Sunday and I was at home doing homework; first the TV went off, then the lights went out; we left the house and there was no electricity; it was all dark, me and my sisters ran out of the house because they said that the mountain was coming where we were... I felt very scared".

This event happened to many children and adolescents when they were alone or while they were taking care of someone else, and beyond the insecurity that such an event may cause them, their own losses must be added. In addition, either because of their own feelings or because their families inculcate it in them, this scenario may contribute to the perception that the contribution of the children and adolescents is fruitless or useless: "after the landslide happened, I was alone, sometimes taking care of my grandmother, I always saw they were crying for my family members who were buried, I felt insecure for not being able to help them and that they thought I was useless".

## Imaginaries, discrimination and prejudices, other scenarios of insecurity

In addition to these multiple situations and environments where insecurity occurs, a new dimension of this insecurity is associated with discrimination and social prejudice. The imaginaries surrounding personal image and social stereotypes make children and adolescents feel insecure and limit their proper development and socialization when they feel that they do not comply with these stereotypes. Many times, this is expressed through self-exclusion, but on other occasions it is manifested in bullying, offenses and nicknames from third parties.

They feel insecurity due to lack of money: "I had no money to be able to study"; due to family losses: "because I lost my parents when I was born"; or due to the illness of a person who is close to them: "my father has an illness"; but also due to their personal image and physical appearance: "outside I feel that everyone looks at me because of my obesity". For these reasons they have been offended, harassed and called names: "the first time I started wearing glasses I felt very insecure, at school they did call me names"; "when I entered kindergarten I felt insecure because I was very fat and a classmate bullied me, they called me "pig", "fat" or "pork".

With the passage of time, they have forgotten some of these events: "at school, when I was 4 or 5, I don't remember, I was bullied because of my physical appearance and my last name", but they have learned to overcome them through self-esteem: "I had insecurity about my body and physical appearance, but I learned to value my body"; they also changed their habits "...all that was in the past", or after a while "...I already got along very well with my classmates". However, these are situations that they remember with sadness: "sometimes I feel sad" and they do not always forget: "that happened to me when I was a child, but I have never been able to forget it".

The attitude of society influences their lives: "once a person outside my home made me feel insecure, I don't mean harassment or anything like that, I just mean that they made me feel bad about my body because at that time I was chubbier; they made a comment that made me feel insecure because of my physical appearance".

Being teased about themselves and their image: "one day when I was leaving the house to meet some friends, as soon as I came out I felt a little insecure about myself and my body; I was afraid that people would criticize me or make fun of me"; "I have been teased for that several times by being called 'tomboy', 'man' or 'lesbian'"; "they cut my hair and always look at me with a laughing face (...) I wear a cap, because I do not like them to see my hair".

That social gaze that judges: "the truth is that I have hardly ever felt insecure or even if (...) there are many times where



there are small conflicts between relatives that often make you feel bad, or at other times they speak negatively about me, perhaps about how I look and comment on my past, and when that reaches my ears it makes me feel insecure or doubtful, but I only know that everything must be left in God's hands".

When they cannot fulfill their expectations or when their parents do not agree with their actions, they feel insecurity and anguish: "that I cannot do what I like simply because my parents do not want me to, that makes me feel anguish"; or when we do not support their search for identity: "once I had a crazy idea with my cousins to shave our heads, the thing is that after that everyone in the street looked at us badly or made fun of us; that left a small mark on me and I am afraid of what people might think of me".

Insecurity is not only caused by criminal or violent acts, but it is also a psychological state, due to lack of affirmation: "I feel insecure about my home and myself"; "sometimes I feel insecure about myself"; these are situations or perceptions that undermine their confidence, exclude them, and isolate them: "I feel that everyone laughs at me"; "I feel alone"; "I feel that I am excluded"; "I feel that they talk bad about me".

Children and adolescents face insecurity scenarios even when they face what they do not know: "I felt insecure when I entered the first year of school"; "I also felt insecure when it was my first day at basketball practice", even if what is unknown is beyond human: "I am afraid of a ghost" or deeply human: "...I don't know... in love".

## Protective factors: self-care, family and community

In situations of insecurity, self-care is a protective mechanism that means seeking refuge, not going out, or avoiding certain situations: "the truth is that I have not felt insecure because I do not go out, I spend more time at home, well, with my parents, because I do not seek problems or cause them". Many children and adolescents not only feel good, but also feel that if they get along well with everyone, they are not exposed to or cause danger.

Family and home are definitely protective spaces that give them security "No, never, I have always felt good at home"; "well, once my parents and I had a lot of fun in a park and since the three of us were there, I felt very good and comfortable".

Beyond the family, friends are also their network of support, containment and protection. The relationship with their peers gives them security: "I don't usually feel insecure when I go out, since I spend time with friends who are always with me".

And even when there are unsafe scenarios, the community also provides protection: "when I am at home with my family, at the corner of the store there are guys with motorcycles who ask people for money to give them security, sometimes they have broken into houses to threaten people and sometimes I hear gunshots in my neighborhood. This is the insecurity that exists in my neighborhood, we help each other in the community to defend ourselves..."



# Recommendations

## Towards the construction of a framework for action for children and adolescents

The exercise and guarantee of the rights of children and adolescents requires the confluence of 4 frameworks for action. The first has to do with a civic framework of social recognition of children and adolescents that moves away from social prejudice, stigmatization and discrimination and recognizes their citizenship so that their quality as subjects of rights and priority attention group, their best interest and absolute priority prevails.

A second framework for action should be related to their legal framework; in recent years, the implementation of the Comprehensive Reform of the Code for Children and Adolescents, which is so necessary to respond to the new needs and circumstances, to incorporate the pending constitutional sentences, to coordinate legal reforms of other regulatory bodies that have affected them, to adapt the current institutional architecture, and to respond to the recommendations that international children's organizations require of the Ecuadorian State, has been delayed.

The development of children and adolescents in the country, in many situations, has been undermined by institutional action, by their absence or lack of coordination. Having an institutional framework is an ethical and legal appeal to comply with the constitutional mandate of having a decentralized and specialized national system to address and safeguard the rights of children and adolescents.

Finally, children and adolescents require a programmatic framework, which is simply the establishment of objectives, planning, policies, programs, and budgets; in other words, a course and direction to achieve goals in the short, medium and long term.

The simultaneous and coordinated action of these four fields of public policy will have a direct effect on the situations faced by children and adolescents and will create a framework of responsibility and guarantees for this population group.

## Policies: access and gaps

The access to assets, goods and services mentioned in the quantitative and qualitative indicators of this situational statement are concrete evidence that children and adolescents require direct attention to reverse this situation and reduce inequality gaps.

It is important to point out the lack of universal policies for the protection of children and adolescents, as evidenced by the indicators analyzed. However, in addition to this, special, differentiated and specialized protection policies

are needed to reverse inequality and facilitate the achievement of the global agenda so that no one is left behind; in other words, that we all get there together.

Ensuring that their priorities and demands are adequately addressed; ensuring the provision of budgets, adequate institutional framework, social recognition as priority subjects, updated regulations, as well as policies, plans and projects, requires decisions at the highest level of the State, but also at the closest level of decision-making power within the family and in their various settings.

It should not be an unattainable goal to have forums for dialogue and empowerment, opportunities to promote sports, art and culture, and mechanisms that ensure their participation in the spheres where policies and programs that affect their lives are discussed.

Local and national policies can strengthen new recreational, leisure and personality development activities. The range of extracurricular activities should be expanded and new alternatives for the development of children and adolescents should be offered.

Protecting them in their family, school, neighborhood and community environments, on public transportation, in the street, in public spaces and in virtual spaces should be a constant.

The ways of understanding, uses and construction of identities through the digital world are changing and diversifying; digital rights today become an area of debate. Social networks and the internet can be used as powerful agents not only for socialization, but also for social and formal learning. As a new hybrid space, public and private at the same time, it must be a healthy and safe space.

The multiple gaps and inequalities mentioned in this study cannot be ignored. The lack of access to services, from the most basic ones such as safe water, which provide decent living conditions and prevent future problems, must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. It is clear that households with fewer economic resources can be less effective in ensuring that children and adolescents enjoy a satisfactory environment. Poverty and inequality are intergenerationally transmitted factors.

Housing conditions affect the objective and subjective spheres of their development. Public habitat and housing policies can and should reinforce the need for social housing with adequate spaces for children and adolescents and access to services.

Between 600 and 900 thousand children under 5 years of age are outside child care, child development or early



education services. At least 350 thousand children and adolescents are outside the educational system; a similar number are over-aged, that is, they are behind the educational level that corresponds to their age.

150,000 children and adolescents drop out of the education system or are not promoted to the next school year each year, and these are not minor figures in terms of education, child development and care.

Many experts point out that education is the main gateway to ensure other rights, but this does not always happen, either because children and adolescents are outside the education system or because they are also involved in situations that violate their rights.

Educational institutions should be provided with feedback on their work with respect to education on the rights of children and adolescents, so that students, in addition to knowing them, also know how to exercise them and the responsibilities they have with respect to each one of them.

In this sense, teacher training needs to incorporate a better knowledge of rights, their scope and significance in their lives, in the lives of their students and in society, in order to effectively promote the rights of children and adolescents.

Educational institutions do not always build participatory environments or true and continuous processes that contribute to understanding the meaning of participation, increase the capacity of children and adolescents to form their own judgment and express it within the framework of mutual respect, acceptance of diversity and acceptance of responsibilities.

It is necessary to approach educational institutions in a comprehensive manner with the community and with the children and adolescents who spend hours and years in these places. We were able to conduct the survey because we could sit down with children and adolescents in their classrooms and ask them questions about their lives and dreams, which take place to a large extent within school.

The same happens with the health system, since some people say that this is the first contact of a child with the institutional system through prenatal and subsequent care. However, due to the system's shortcomings, specialized services for children are not provided, but also due to the neglect of their caregivers. Food and nutrition issues are affecting children and adolescents, in addition to the sedentary lifestyle of the new generations.

In this research, we have found that a significant percentage of children and adolescents have a moderate or severe deficit in terms of their food needs, they come to their schools without eating or when they get home they do not have enough food.

Statistics also highlight the presence of chronic child malnutrition among children under 5 years of age.

Therefore, food and nutrition policies are required, but it is also necessary to maintain breakfast and even lunch programs in primary and secondary schools.

We also found an increase in thinness among adolescents, as well as in obesity and overweight, especially in the wealthiest quintiles of the population, which shows that there are economic deficiencies, but also inadequate habits and practices.

Finally, children and adolescents become ill due to preventable causes, and some of the reasons are the condition of housing, their habits and practices, and deficient basic services, among others. Many of the causes of death among children and adolescents are preventable, therefore addressing sexual and reproductive rights, as well as mental health, is a priority.

## Lack of a care system

Although there are care services, the information gathered shows that most of the population still lacks them. In the case of early childhood, this care is mainly provided by the families themselves, rather than by the state, which in principle is not a bad thing.

Misrepresentation occurs when parents and caregivers lack adequate information on how to provide care or enhance it; that is, when children are cared for by parents who are unaware of skill development activities. This occurs when this task of providing care, so closely linked to a so-called 'gender role', is not valued (not only in terms of remuneration, but also as a social construct). In other words, not only is unpaid work devalued, but there is a low valuation of childcare as a fundamental activity for their future development.

This also occurs when children are responsible for the care of other children and family members, when there is a lack of affective care, and when it is not considered a priority but an expense, i.e., because of the devaluation of the profession of caregiving.

## Family and community

Given that it is the first and most valued environment for the development and protection of children and adolescents, the family requires effective actions for their care. Parents and caregivers require comprehensive programs that provide them with tools for upbringing and care; educational-communication and training strategies for skills development; family emotional support processes; actions that promote children's well-being and learning, and even focus on providing economic and work alternatives for caregivers, or on improving their social conditions.

These strategies are not only family-based, but also community-based, respectful of social and cultural contexts, where neighborhoods, urban and rural communities take ownership of the upbringing of children.

## Multiple dimensions of security

There is a need for policies for security, protection and non-violence in its different dimensions. It cannot be ignored that the problems of insecurity, violence, delinquency and crime affect children and adolescents; building protective environments is a task that involves society as a whole. This study shows that if the family and the community are involved, security increases.

Building a harmonious and peaceful coexistence is a premise for achieving wellbeing, since violence is present in a variety of environments, mostly among peers. This, together with care routes, protection criteria, tools for conflict resolution that enable them to overcome the various levels of conflict, as well as self-care and knowledge of rights, are indispensable.

It is necessary to go beyond considering insecurity as a factor that is only criminal, and look at it in its multiple dimensions to achieve higher levels of security. This will make children and adolescents increasingly autonomous, self-reliant, confident of themselves and their environment, protected, and therefore with greater guarantee of their rights.

## Love, understanding and tenderness

It is true that the development of early childhood, childhood and adolescence requires adequate structural conditions, as well as policies for access to goods and services that ensure their rights and revert inequalities and violations. These are effective tools that can enhance their highest aspirations and demands for development, but not only with objective actions, but also through subjective tools: affection. This is not a romanticized vision of children and adolescents, but one of their demands. Tenderness should not be a mere discursive symbol, but an effective practice.

## Building their sense of future

The imaginary of children and adolescents requires not only the construction of adequate conditions in the present, but also to enable them to project their future. It seems that this is a time deeply marked by uncertainty and insecurity, therefore urgent and massive initiatives are required to provide development alternatives for adolescents and youth, since it is necessary to change the idea that there is a lack of opportunities, which in turn strengthens the wish to migrate.

## Promote specialized studies

It is essential to view information and research not as an academic exercise (only), but as evidence that contributes to decision-making. A deeper knowledge of the situation of children and adolescents should be a permanent exercise to have a more effective impact on the exercise and fulfillment of their rights.

Descriptive studies such as this one, which start by gathering the voices of children and adolescents, putting them at the center as the main informants, is an appropriate strategy for recognizing them as subjects not only of study, but also of rights. As this is an exploratory study, it provides relevant information that should be explored in greater depth. Knowing and understanding the worlds of children and adolescents from their own perspective will lead to more assertive actions when making decisions to change and improve their lives.

In methodological terms, one of the lessons of this study has to do with respecting and integrating the rights of children and adolescents from the design phase; multiple days of analysis and discussion resulted in the instruments, manuals and protocols for action. The methodology applied is an interesting exercise for collecting direct information, taking into account the particularities of the target population and adapting the research instruments to the subjects themselves.

Hence, promoting, maintaining, replicating and scaling up studies on children and adolescents in a world that is so changing and demanding of information for decision-making is a methodological and also a political commitment with this population group, of which we often lack information and the recognition of their own voices for the development of policies for their development.

## An integrated indicators system

The country has very powerful information bases to develop cross-cutting and longitudinal studies on children and adolescents, as well as to embark on the path towards having its own instrument to report on the fulfillment of their rights.

The public institutions of the National Statistical System, as well as planning, rights guarantee, equality and non-discrimination bodies, public policy makers and executors, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, the academic community, university and research centers, and expert professionals can contribute to this task.

In this regard, this study can be replicated or even expanded to achieve greater territorial coverage, improve the instruments and refine the analysis of this first database, so that hopefully in the future we will have historical and

circumstantial information on the facts, situations and conditions of the development of children and adolescents in the country.

Several years ago, the country discontinued its integrated systems of social indicators for various social groups, including children and adolescents. Therefore, we need to recover a system that collects, processes and disseminates indicators related to the wellbeing, development and protection of children and adolescents in the country.

It is necessary to have a repository of scattered information from various public institutions; a system that processes the information available from censuses, national surveys and administrative records (and why not Big Data), which requires new research efforts from the national statistical system, but above all that is based on its own voices.

This system should make it possible to have updated national figures and indicators related to the degree of compliance of the country with respect to the protection and rights of children and adolescents; in fact, the country should periodically submit a status of compliance to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and this system could be the one to feed these National Reports.

Likewise, we must agree on key indicators, defined as long-term strategic goals that will allow establishing measures such as the index of wellbeing of children and adolescents with their environment, the coverage of protection services for children and adolescents, indicators on violence in all areas, the segmentation and specifications required by public policies for children and adolescents, considering aspects related to culture, territory, the social sphere and special attention groups; the score of compliance with quality and protection standards of educational institutions, child development and health centers; the regulations and efficiency of institutions to ensure compliance with the rights of children and adolescents.

## Information and participation go hand in hand

Among a set of information on the different fields of rights, information and participation are some of the major gaps. It is often the case that the lack of information reflects a lack of action, a lack of decision and priority in collecting data, an inability to size up a problem, or a lack of clarity or budget regarding sources.

Linked to the above, an information system and a participation system can go hand in hand; that is, a mechanism to listen to their voices and let these voices influence decision making in an informed manner. From there, the participation of civil society organizations and academic and university centers should also be strengthened to the extent that they have validated data and information and not only from common places, both

to feed the systems and to support participation, achieving greater awareness about children and adolescents as a field of study, but also of participation and advocacy.

In this regard, the State needs to strengthen participation opportunities that are linked to local and national bodies so that their voices, criteria, ways of dealing with problems, and their dreams are included in the formulation and evaluation of public policies.

## The institutional framework as the main culprit

The dismantling of certain institutions, the renouncement of others to their legal mandates, the lack of budgetary priority, and the scarce or null inter-agency coordination have been factors that have contributed to the absence of public actions for children and adolescents.

This does not mean that there are no programs and projects to provide care or services for the benefit of children and adolescents, but rather that the country has stopped investing strategically in this population group and its focus has been reduced not to public policy, but to limited and partial attention. Thus, budgets have also been reduced, when more than one study points out that the best investment for the progress and future development of nations is centered on investment in the early years, in childhood and adolescence.

Today it is impossible to talk only about education if part of the students does not attend due to health problems; it is more complex to develop universal nutrition strategies through the education system if not all children and adolescents are involved in it. It is difficult to tackle diarrheal and respiratory diseases if a large part of households receive water containing feces or if schools lack basic services.

A large part, if not all, of the problems of children and adolescents in Ecuador are multi-causal, and therefore their response must be multisectoral and multilevel. That is to say, it requires coordination between the different ministries and public and private institutions in charge of children and adolescents' issues, both from the central and local government, and from civil society.

Public policy cannot be a field of technocratic and administrative dispute over institutional competencies. Protection systems should place greater emphasis on mechanisms for the effective coordination of the obligations and responsibilities of the guarantors of the rights of children and adolescents.

It is necessary to overcome the ambition of a 'supra-institutionality' that is not viable in the constitutional and legal framework, and concentrate on the real problem of specialty and specialization, which is multilevel and multisectoral coordination.



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