



Summary of the **first regional dialogue** in **Latin America** and **the Caribbean**
“On the road to **equality**”:
30 years of the **Convention**
on the **Rights of the Child**

Daniela Huneus / Editor



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**Summary of the first regional dialogue in Latin America
and the Caribbean “On the road to equality”:
30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

Daniela Huneus
Editor



This document summarizes the main contents of the statements and comments by experts participating in the first regional dialogue "On the road to equality": 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, held from 27 to 29 November 2018 at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in Santiago. The meeting was organized by ECLAC and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The publication was prepared with the collaboration of UNICEF and the final document was compiled and edited by Daniela Huneus, Social Sciences Assistant in the Social Development Division of ECLAC, under the supervision of Daniela Trucco, Social Affairs Officer of the Social Development Division, and Claudio Santibáñez Servat, Senior Adviser on Public Partnerships of the UNICEF Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. Gratitude is extended to Eva Hopenhayn and Andrés Espejo for their collaboration on the project.

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Contents

Introduction	5
I. Opening of the event	7
II. Inaugural dialogue "Equality and children": the situation of children and adolescents in the region	9
III. Description of the four main sessions	13
A. Social protection systems for children and adolescents.....	13
1. Summary of the panel discussion	17
B. Early childhood development.....	17
1. Summary of the panel discussion	20
C. Prevention and response to all forms of violence against children and adolescents	21
1. Summary of the panel discussion	23
D. Development and participation of adolescents	24
1. Summary of the panel discussion	26
IV. Closing remarks	27
A. General elements	27
B. The voice of adolescents and the perspective on them.....	28
C. Concerning forms of violence against children and adolescents	28
D. Building a culture of peace	29
E. The uptake of new technologies.....	29
F. The role of the private sector.....	30
G. Some little-mentioned population groups.....	30
H. Work and partnerships with UNICEF and appreciation of the ECLAC-UNICEF regional dialogue	30
Annex	31

Introduction

In November 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Convention seeks to guarantee, protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents and was ratified by all the Latin American and Caribbean countries. It is the first nationally and internationally binding treaty that refers to fulfilment of the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of children and adolescents.

Almost 30 years later, between 27 and 29 November 2018, in Santiago (Chile), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean organized the first regional dialogue “On the road to equality”: 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This event was attended by senior authorities from the governments of the region, international institutions, representatives of the United Nations system, the private sector, academia, civil society and young people from the different countries. In the framework of fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this was an occasion to review the progress and challenges still outstanding in the region with regard to the rights of children and adolescents, and to discuss the importance of ensuring the full exercise of these rights on the road to equality. The central themes revolved around social protection systems for children and adolescents, early childhood development, prevention of and response to all forms of violence against children and adolescents, and adolescent participation.

This summary document brings together the key messages and issues raised by the panellists and country representatives and highlights some aspects that could be explored in greater depth on a future occasion.

I. Opening of the event

On 28 November, the event was opened by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC; Marita Perceval, Regional Director of UNICEF; Pau Marie-Klose, High Commissioner for the Fight Against Child Poverty of the Government of Spain; Gilda Menchú, a Guatemalan adolescent; Jafeth Cabrera Franco, Vice President of Guatemala; Paula Mae-Weeks, President of Trinidad and Tobago; Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); and Hernán Larraín, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Chile.¹

Alicia Bárcena gave a general introduction to the event and commended the commitment of the governments and countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to achieving the fulfilment of children's and adolescents' rights. She welcomed the attendees and drew attention to the opportunity to hear what young people had to say and to demand.

Marita Perceval highlighted the fact that the progress achieved had been the fruit of decisions made by States driven by the urgency of overcoming child poverty and by the demands of society. She stressed the need for adequate information systems for obtaining evidence and tailoring responses, and reiterated the importance of leaving behind the adult-centric view and involving children and adolescents in all spheres that affected them.

Pau Marie Klose, High Commissioner for the Fight Against Child Poverty of the Government of Spain, spoke of the existence of a discourse that acknowledged childhood as a stage of the life cycle requiring specific protection. He referred to the need for economic resources, political and social leadership, government innovation and will, coordination among the various departments of the public administration, social commitment by businesses and initiative on the part of social bodies. Lastly, he commended the commitment of the current Government of Spain to this topic.

¹ The introduction to the event, on 27 November 2018, was attended by Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC; Marita Perceval, Regional Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); Benito Baranda, Executive Chairman of América Solidaria and Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Gilda Menchú, a Guatemalan adolescent, said that although progress had been made, much remained to be achieved in terms of access to a safe environment free of violence, discrimination and racism, in which policies and laws included the voices of adolescents.

Jafeth Cabrera Franco, Vice-President of Guatemala, drew attention to some advances made in his country, including strategies for preventing adolescent pregnancy, reform of the Civil Code to prohibit marriage under age 18, and the construction of a child-oriented national policy involving all the institutions of the State.

Paula-Mae Weeks, President of Trinidad and Tobago, mentioned that her country had abolished corporal punishment for institutionalized children and marriage under age 18. However, a normative framework was still needed on access to education for migrant children and on proper attention to children with disabilities and special educational needs.

Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), mentioned a number of challenges, including poverty and inequality, violence, climate change and health emergencies, prejudices and discrimination, migratory crises and the persistence of child marriage. She argued that it was important to strengthen social protection policies and investment, scale up good experiences, such as the multi-agency global programme "Gen U"² and, lastly, provide health, education and protection to children and women in the region.

Hernán Larraín, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Chile, referred to the progress made by his government in the protection of children and adolescents. This included the modification of the Civil Code with regard to filiation, the creation of the Office for Child Protection and the Undersecretariat of Children, as well as a plan to change the National Children's Service.

² Generation Unlimited (Gen U) is a global initiative that seeks to prepare adolescents and youth to be productive and committed citizens, linking secondary education with training and preparation for the world of work. For further information, see [online] <https://www.generationunlimited.org/>.

II. Inaugural dialogue “Equality and children”: the situation of children and adolescents in the region

Providing an overall framework for the topic of equality and childhood, participating in this session were Marta Santos, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children; Luis Pedermera, member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child; Maud de Boer-Buquiccio, Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material; Gladys Acosta, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Felipe González, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Alejo Ramírez, Director of the Subregional office in South America of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB); Gastão Alves de Toledo, Secretary for Access to Rights and Equity of the Organization of American States (OAS); and Verónica Magario, Co-President of the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Government Associations.

In her presentation, Marta Santos, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, referred to the naturalization of the use of violence and said that 10 countries in the region had comprehensive legislation against all forms of violence against children and adolescents, including punishment within the family. In her opinion, the other countries should develop a strategic national agenda for violence prevention and response, adopting a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach and coordinating different levels of administration, with regular evaluation, accountability and budgeting. This should allow for the participation of civil society and take into account the voice and expectations of children, adolescents and youth. This step should be pursued through institutions such as child protection offices. In this regard, it was key to share experiences that had yielded good results and draw upon existing research on the matter.

Luis Pedermera, member of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, acknowledged the progress made in the past 30 years and emphasized pending issues such as the prevalence of detention as a punishment for adolescents who break the law. He suggested stronger inclusion of indigenous and Afrodescendent children to recognize the plurality which was a feature of the region. He invited the entities

of the United Nations system to work together on issues such as child migration and the Venezuelan migration crisis. Lastly, he urged the inclusion of child human rights defenders in these efforts.

Maud de Boer-Buquiccio, Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material, emphasized the progress made over these past decades, but drew attention to the persistence of the sale and exploitation of children in the global market, where the most vulnerable were the poor, those from remote and rural areas, children with disabilities, LGBTI children, migrants and those without identification. She mentioned the lack of child-friendly and accessible reception systems; the need to review adoption processes and the use of digital media to facilitate and increase the possibilities for distribution and sale of materials that could include child abuse. From this perspective, she emphasized the importance of adjusting strategies and policies to the new times, engaging the private sector and service suppliers. Lastly, she said that it was fundamental to involve children and adolescents and carry out national consultations.

Gladys Acosta, member of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, emphasized the harmonization of treaties, the overlap of mandates and the shared commitment to tackle harmful practices against children and adolescents, in order to prevent and eradicate them. The shared elements included the right to a life free of all forms of violence, such as femicide and forms of control of women and girls; sexual and reproductive rights in relation to adolescent pregnancy and maternal mortality; access to justice, and gender stereotypes in education and work (for example, wage gaps). She emphasized the importance of listening to organized women and youth, and conveying that information to the State.

Felipe González, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, remarked that migrant children suffered grave discrimination in the form of lack of protection, visibility and responsibility on the part of institutions. This was because security policies carried more weight than human rights (with a bias towards detention practices); the causes of child migration (such as extreme poverty, violence and disasters) were not sufficiently addressed; children had only limited consular assistance, legal representation and access to a judge; there were few barriers protecting them from being turned over to migration authorities; voluntary return was misused; deportations were carried out without taking humanitarian considerations into account and without ascertaining refugee status. In his opinion, although international human rights systems had made progress, there was insufficient monitoring of the situation of migrant children; this could be done by ombudsman's offices or child protection departments or by civil society organizations. Such a step would tighten up the interaction between international human rights agencies at the level of the inter-American system and the governments of the region.

Alejo Ramírez, Director of the Subregional office in South America of the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been successful in the region in supporting the construction of policies, frameworks for action, local legislations and institutional clusters, as well as the generation of shadow reports by civil society. He remarked that although children were the future, youth were the present and they suffered from certain paradoxes: higher levels of education but more difficulty in finding employment; better health but more deaths from external causes; they were in education or employment, but those in neither were known by a pejorative nickname, "NEETs" (not in education, employment or training), that needed to be eradicated. Lastly, he stressed that there was no single "youth", and access to positions of political representation was essential.

Gastão Alves de Toledo, Secretary for Access to Rights and Equity of the Organization of American States (OAS), began by addressing the issue of how to make the institutions created to protect children and adolescents effectively reach those groups. Two of every five children in the region

lacked the guarantee of at least one right, including as a result of educational inequality, chronic malnutrition, disability, poverty and the precarious conditions of indigenous, Afrodescendent and rural children. The goals recently set forth by OAS in the sphere of education, equity and awareness included promoting the inclusion of the history of Africa and the Afrodescendent population and its contribution to the building of nations in classroom teaching; the fight against racism and racial discrimination and intolerance and the creation of education and training programmes for the Afrodescendent population jointly with the private sector. He believed that the key was to promote policies to reduce poverty and achieve quality education, and suggested the establishment of a common programme to help countries overcome difficulties of inequality.

Verónica Magario, Co-President of the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Government Associations, referred to decentralization of municipalities in Latin America and especially in Argentina, whereby local governments were responsible for implementing public policy. She remarked that one of the key issues had always been the availability of resources. As well as advances in terms of educational coverage and redistribution of wealth in the region, local governments should undertake the task of realizing rights on the ground, as they were the closest to people, with long-term policies capable of transcending changes of government.

In sum, respect for the rights of children and adolescents were aided by commitments at the political level and in decision-making, as well as normative frameworks for their protection. However, attention was drawn to the need to strengthen the participation of children and adolescents, along with better information systems to support evidence-based decision-making and secure sufficient resources. In addition, social organizations needed to be engaged, good experiences scaled up, and a non-violent environment achieved.

III. Description of the four main sessions

A. Social protection systems for children and adolescents

The purposes of this session included analysing the overall situation in the region in terms of social protection policies, legislation and strategies, and discussing how the development and strengthening of social protection systems contributed to the fulfilment of the rights of children and adolescents, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also aimed to analyse how social protection policies in the region had incorporated the life cycle perspective as part of a systemic and comprehensive approach in order to make social protection a central pillar of social policy. Emphasis was also placed on institutional, financial and technical challenges associated with the development of social protection systems which are sensitive and relevant to children and adolescents in the region.

Federico Arnillas, Chair of the Round Table for Poverty Reduction (MCLCP) of Peru, emphasized the importance of building a social protection floor supported by public policies. The Roundtable, established in 2001, aimed at achieving collaboration and agreements based on consensus-building around shared aims and engaging all stakeholders. Its mandates were supported by legislation, and it was chaired by the executive branch and had an executive committee comprising the main ministries and the subnational governments. The Roundtable acted in the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions, resources were allocated and action—for example, the National Plan on Childhood—was aligned on the basis of shared diagnostics on which consensus had been reached.

Mariella de Aurrecoechea, Social Responsibility Officer of Deloitte Uruguay, drew attention to the importance of engaging the private sector, deepening its knowledge and strengthening its role in child and adolescent protection. She referred to regular studies carried out jointly with UNICEF, which had served to profile and improve the perception of the role of business in Uruguay, with progress towards the creation of labour strategies that promoted breastfeeding, flextime and parental leaves. In 2016 the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had been incorporated and comparative studies had been carried out involving Peru, Colombia and Paraguay. These had revealed gaps and opportunities to identify actions and best practices for the protection of children and adolescents.

Fernando Filgueira, Senior Researcher on Social Protection of the Centre for the Implementation of Public Policies for Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) of Argentina, said that young families with children had to be protected in order to avoid the infantilization of poverty becoming a hallmark of the region. Social protection, more than a policy sector, was a function comprising the elements of: contributory insurance of families with children and adolescents (minors in national legislation), non-conditional cash transfers to families with children; adequate universal access to care, education and health systems; adequate infrastructure and basic services; and protection of children against neglect, violence and exploitation. This required robust involvement of the State and investment in childhood, not only from a perspective of rights, citizenship-building and social integration, but because it represented an efficient investment in terms of present and future productivity. He offered data that showed how higher investment as a percentage of GDP led to lower levels of poverty. In addition, he proposed that progress should be made in remedying the fragmentation of the existing scenario of policies and programmes; increasing the interstate power of social institutions to protect the fiscal funding of policies and programmes; generating integrated designs in terms of access, financing, quality and amounts of benefits, including interinstitutional, intersectoral and territorial coordination; and integrated information systems to support monitoring of gaps, progress and efforts. Finally, he argued that it would be ideal to progress towards universal non-conditional transfers for families or universal child allowances, to be financed by increasing the tax burden, redistributing public spending (between social and non-social functions) and ending subsidies for special privilege pensions.

Sofía Fernández, of the network *Movimiento Estamos Todos en Acción (META)*, set out her view of social movements and focused on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. META was a network of young people with and without disabilities that operated in Uruguay, Argentina, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, focusing on the right to access to education, culture and sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities. Its work acted on inclusion in those countries. Examples were *Decímelo a mí* ("Tell me about it"),³ which worked on rights to access to sexual and reproductive health in sign language, and the *Mandela Network*, a project on inclusive education in primary schools, raising awareness in the educational community overall.

Pablo Vinocur, Director of the Postgraduate Program in Human Development of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) of Argentina, began his presentation by remarking that there was no hierarchy among civil, economic and social rights⁴ as they were interdependent, and the lack of their effective fulfilment constituted poverty. Accordingly, and given that problems were diverse and changed over time, an integrated and multidimensional policy approach was required, reviewing value definitions concerning levels of degrees of impacts. Facing the challenges required policymakers to take a vertically and horizontally comprehensive approach to rights; economic resources to make programmes effective; institutional designs to achieve progress and overcome obstacles and recessionary crises; social protection policies joined up with the life cycle and avoidance of tensions between universality and targeting; reduction of quality gaps in education taking into account diversity; and overcoming deficits in planning, management and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects. In addition, information systems were needed for monitoring and evaluation, civil society and private sector participation needed to be made more transparent; and children and adolescents needed to be engaged in formulating, managing and evaluating these policies. In addition, consideration should be given to the effects of globalization on employment, innovation, wealth concentration, migration and climate change.

³ See "Decímelo a mí" [online] <http://decimeloami.com/web/uruguay/>; "Jovenes por la Educacion Inclusiva: Red Mandela" [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hU1mF2Wb-4o>.

⁴ Among these, he mentioned he rights to an identity, health, adequate housing, water and sanitation, education, sufficient income, employment, participation, culture and recreation.

The panellists' statements were followed by comments by representatives of member States.

Representative of Mexico: on the basis that peace should be a human right for everyone, the statement focused on the achievement of peace, in terms not only of the absence of war, but also of using the tools of a culture of peace to resolve conflicts and live without fear. It was important that this be incorporated into school textbooks.

Representatives of Argentina: the statement focused on having political commitment, budget allocations, data and a comprehensive and intersectoral effort to make rights effective, moving from paper to facts. They mentioned the coordinated work with registration and the social security system in Buenos Aires to ascertain how children and adolescents access existing public policies. Similarly, they proposed that steps should be taken to facilitate the fulfilment of conditionalities. They drew attention to legislation under which young people leaving home could apply for support in the form of 80% of the minimum wage, to assist their transition to adulthood, and the National Plan for the Prevention of Unintentional Pregnancy in Adolescence,⁵ which had been the outcome of a consensus-building effort between civil society, the State, the legislative power and interministerial plans at the national, provincial and municipal levels.⁶

Representative of Haiti: social policy in Haiti was implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs, was intersectoral in approach and sought to combat poverty throughout the life cycle. Particular attention was drawn to programmes for universal access to primary schooling and the provision of one hot meal a day; for the establishment of microenterprises headed by women; and for immunization and anti-malnutrition. With respect to violence, progress had been made in Haiti with the enactment of a law that treated violence as a crime and not an attack upon honour. In addition, Haiti had a Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities that pursued education and labour inclusion of this population group.

Representative of Panama: this statement focused on the need for reliable data for decision-making. In Panama, a multidimensional child and adolescent poverty index had been built drawing on the experiences of Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Costa Rica, which measured the incidence and intensity of the main deprivations affecting the 0–17 age group, every two years. This initiative was coordinated by the Social Affairs Office and involved all those portfolios relating to childhood. It was chaired by the Vice President and supported by UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), and had enabled progress in the implementation of policies to ensure the well-being and full development of children and adolescents. The index measured the dimensions of: housing, water and sanitation, health and nourishment, education and early childhood education, protection and recreation (10 indicators); and the results indicated that one of every three children and adolescents was poor in Panama, with the worst indicator relating to lack of care and nurturing in early childhood. The representative requested South-South cooperation with Chile and its programme Chile Crece Contigo ("Chile grows with you")⁷.

Representative of Paraguay: Paraguay had a programme for combating child labour and its worst forms, consisting of a grant to mothers. However, data were needed to assess how effective this policy was, if possible, with support from the Panamanian experience in measuring childhood quality-of-life indicators. The representative also mentioned that an observatory of fulfillment of children's rights was being set up in order to have a baseline for measurement.

Ana Olivera, Deputy Minister of Social Development and President of the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents, said that the country's Childhood and Adolescence Code, established in 2004, brought all the political positions together on a definition of children as subjects of rights.

⁵ For further information, see [online] <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/planenia>.

⁶ Both initiatives were supported by UNICEF.

⁷ For further information, see [online] <http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/>.

The Council established on the basis of this code, comprising the executive power, organized civil society and the judiciary, together with UNICEF and the Inter-American Children's Institute, had been broadened to include the health ministry and the public prosecutor's office, in an effort to enter more forcefully into issues of violence and adolescent criminal justice. The idea was to break away from sectoral structures, by adopting a National Strategy for Children and Adolescents 2010–2030, which was the umbrella for the five-year plans being implemented. Public spending on childhood had also been increased by 7.4%. The Deputy Minister also raised the issue of information systems to build sectoral policies, which would enable better capture of the target population and provide information about the type of effort needed at the local level. The Ministry's National Directorate of Information, Evaluation and Monitoring was to present a childhood portal together with the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents.

Representative of Jamaica: the statement drew attention to the importance of engaging the private sector and encouraging it to take a more active role in policies on childhood and adolescence. Jamaica needed to improve the quality of education for youth, strengthen early childhood strategies in relation to nutrition issues, and provide support to enable mothers and fathers to take their children to public establishments providing the right stimulation. Another point was the education provided to vulnerable boys, beginning with preventing them from dropping out of school.

Representative of Cuba: despite the economic embargo, Cuba had enacted a series of legislative, administrative and judicial provisions establishing mechanisms for coordination and oversight and to strengthen processes of data collection, policy formulation and diffusion, and effective and comprehensive services and programmes aimed at the protection of rights in childhood. With support from UNICEF, Cuba had launched the National Action Plan for Children, Adolescents and Families, 2015–2020, intended to coordinate the protection and supervision of children's rights. Substantial human, technical and financial resources had been allocated to the comprehensive protection of children and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols (universal free access to education and health, social security and assistance, housing and employment, sexual and reproductive rights, parental leaves, among others). The country also had mechanisms for the participation of children and adolescents.

Representative of Costa Rica: Costa Rica placed the technical knowledge it had acquired at the disposal of the other countries and noted that the strategic and operational actions of the national systems for the protection of minors had been organized at the national, regional and local levels, ensuring the participation of minors (participatory councils of adolescents that worked with local protection systems). The budget for the National Children's Foundation was in accordance with its needs and had increased its human resource endowment over the past three years. The President of the National Children's Foundation held ministerial rank, links had been tightened with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), coordination forums had been set up with local government and various stakeholders had been engaged. However, coordination difficulties remained between institutions and sectors. It was necessary to dismantle entrenched practices such as corporal punishment and improper relations and there was a need for joined-up, systematic and continuous promotion and prevention processes.

Representative of Trinidad and Tobago: pending challenges remained in relation to children with disabilities; a study carried out in Barbados, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had identified this group, especially girls, as the most vulnerable to abuse and to infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Trinidad and Tobago was implementing a programme to combat child abuse, seeking to educate children themselves about their rights within school communities (child ambassadors). Lastly, it was essential to listen to the voices of children themselves.

Representative of the Dominican Republic: the best interests of the child was a principle enshrined in the country's Constitution, but putting this into practice required normative frameworks, effective public policies and resource allocation. To avoid a disjointed approach, the sectoral approach should be replaced by the life cycle approach. The speaker drew attention to the programme *Quisqueya Empieza Contigo*,⁸ which provided comprehensive early childhood care, as part of the broader *Quisqueya Strategy*.⁹ This had increased the number of children receiving comprehensive, good-quality free care. Public investment in children and adolescents had risen from 1.9% of GDP in 2011 to 5.1% in 2016. It was proposed that UNICEF and ECLAC establish a regional observatory on investment in childhood and adolescence and that support be provided for capacity-building at the State level to implement public policies with a life cycle approach.

Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: the speaker drew attention to the value of social investment in children and adolescents, which in Venezuela reached 54%. The country had a computer system to simplify the process of transfer allocation.

1. Summary of the panel discussion

The summary of this first panel discussion emphasized the need for a more active role by the State in generating rights-based social policies for the social protection of children and adolescents. Poverty and inequality among these groups were the expression of multidimensional phenomena that must be addressed from an intersectoral, comprehensive, collaborative and evidence-based perspective. They also required financial and economic resources to fund them adequately, with progress towards vertical and horizontal integration between the actors involved, underpinned by normative frameworks, comprehensive information systems and transparent accountability and evaluation mechanisms. The active participation of all sectors was essential: the various levels of government, the private sector, trade unions, NGOs, international agencies and, last but not least, children and adolescents.

The issues raised requiring most attention were the need to emphasize the child and adolescent population with disabilities; end the naturalization of the use of physical punishment; support families by developing appropriate parenting strategies; strengthen the culture of peace and South-South cooperation; establish observatories of rights fulfilment; and engage the private sector.

B. Early childhood development

This session sought to analyse the overall situation in the region in terms of policies, legislation, programmes, strategies and efforts made by the Latin American and Caribbean States to guarantee the rights of girls and boys in early childhood, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The discussions examined the situation regarding early childhood in the region, as well as the main challenges and examples of good practices for strengthening public policies and programmes for this age group. They reflected on the importance of strengthening coordination between different sectors and stakeholders and of public and private investment, in order to scale up comprehensive programmes for early childhood. Programmatic innovations to promote caring and sensitive caregiving were also discussed (taking into account health and nutrition, education, protection and stimulation) with an approach grounded in rights, inclusion and cultural relevance.

Néstor López, Coordinator of Education and Equity Projects of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Coordinator of the Information System on Educational Trends in Latin America (SITEAL), mentioned that monitoring of policies on early childhood and education by the Information System on Early Childhood in Latin America (SIPI) indicated that almost all the

⁸ For further information, see [online] <http://www.digepep.gob.do/institucional/quisqueya-sin-miseria/quisqueya-empieza-contigo/>.

⁹ For further information, see [online] <https://digepep.gob.do/quisqueya-sin-miseria/la-estrategia>.

countries in the region had renewed normative frameworks and legislation on comprehensive protection that broadened State obligations regarding children's rights and empowered society to demand enforcement of these rights. Existing programmes had been incorporating a comprehensive perspective and mechanisms to implement that perspective, but difficulties were seen in the sphere of financing. He drew attention to coordination entities such as formal government dialogue committees and linkages of benefits across different circuits of government (e.g. a public service receiving a child refers him or her to the other services, the sequential chain based on the life cycle and linking at different levels of government). Three programmes stood out in this regard: Chile Crece Contigo ("Chile grows with you"),¹⁰ De Cero a Siempre ("From zero to always")¹¹ in Colombia, and Educa a tu Hijo ("Educate your child")¹² in Cuba. With respect to public investment in early childhood, the speaker emphasized the findings of a study with UNICEF that encompassed Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru, which placed this investment at no more than 1.5% of GDP (including, for example immunization programmes, early childhood education, care programmes, and others such as water and sanitation services. In terms of amounts, the annual per capita range went from US\$ 300 and US\$ 2000, depending on the respective country's level of economic development.

Maureen Samms-Vaughan, Professor of Medical Sciences at the University of the West Indies, remarked that policies or projects on early childhood had existed in the Caribbean countries for 5 or 10 years, but not aimed specifically at early childhood development. There were advances in the area of health: reduction in mortality and malnutrition and increase in the proportion of children immunized, but this was not the case with maternal health or high levels of obesity. Programmes were in place to increase the amount of physical activity by children of all ages and lessen the consumption of sugary drinks. In the sphere of education, levels of access to pre-school education were high, but children between the ages of 0 and 2 years were not receiving enough stimulation. Early childhood development required a multisectoral approach: in this regard, Jamaica had established an early childhood agenda with a multisectoral committee, and a normative and evaluation framework based on legislation that guaranteed continued financing. The Professor also mentioned the Brain Builders programme,¹³ which sought to support parents in this area, and the establishment of the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC), which enabled progress in this direction. Joint learning and ongoing work in the framework of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) had been fundamental. Challenges included the inadequate protection for children with disabilities, given that early detection and intervention was scarce; and the inexistence of laws against corporal punishment of children, even though such legislation existed in the case of women, prisoners and adults.

Sergio Rademacher, Chief Executive Officer of Microsoft Chile, spoke of how the company, from within the information and communications technology (ICT) industry, made available tools that narrowed gender access gaps in education. In this regard, he mentioned some specific programmes¹⁴ implemented in collaboration with UNICEF, such as Learning Passport (aimed at displaced or refugee children), YouthSpark (a digital skills programme) and other resources to facilitate access to technology for children with different capacities and/or functionalities. He also drew attention to the work being done with the NGO Solidaridad Don Bosco to create information systems to facilitate data capture in the framework of rehabilitation programmes for children living on the street, emphasizing the importance of working in collaboration with private institutions, governments and NGOs to generate a positive impact on children's lives.

¹⁰ For further information, see [online] <http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/>.

¹¹ For further information, see [online] <http://www.deceroasiempre.gov.co/Paginas/deCeroaSiempre.aspx>.

¹² For further information, see [online] https://www.ecured.cu/Educa_a_tu_Hijo.

¹³ For further information, see [online] <https://jis.gov.jm/brain-builders-programme-launched/>.

¹⁴ For further information, see United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "UNICEF announces new partnership with Microsoft to address education crisis affecting displaced and refugee children and young people" [online] <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-announces-new-partnership-microsoft-address-education-crisis-affecting>; Microsoft, "Microsoft YouthSpark: sé la chispa del cambio" [online] <https://www.microsoft.com/es-xl/MicrosoftFilantropia/youthspark/default.aspx>.

Kim Simplis Barrow, the First Lady of Belize, said that early childhood development was a priority for the country and work was ongoing on strengthening five areas: access to services, service delivery capacity, political will and support at the community level, information and evaluation and the available of financial resources. Belize had a national strategy that had ensured that children were born healthy and remained healthy in nurturing, safe, inclusive and culturally appropriate environments, to give them skills and opportunities for success in early learning. Intersectoral collaboration (health, education and human development) was fundamental and, with the support of UNICEF, three key approaches had been adopted: a programme for stimulation in the child's home; a learning support programme for families; and a parenting guide. Among the challenges identified, she mentioned the need to reach the poorest of the poor, ensure the quality of services and standardize them across the whole country and afford continuity to actions implemented. It was important to publicize the results achieved and work in partnership with civil society and business to raise the necessary resources.

Dania López, representative of the Ministry of Education of Cuba, mentioned that over 65% of Cuba's budget was allocated to health and education and early childhood development programmes were implemented from an intersectoral perspective: health care, education, nutrition and protection from the pre-natal period onwards via both institutional and non-institutional modalities, providing coverage for all Cuban children. She drew attention to the programme *Educa a tu Hijo*¹⁵ and educational programmes for hospitalized children, as well as children with special educational needs.

Veronica Charles, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development of Grenada, said that 10% of the country's budget was allocated to education and that Grenada had universal education from the pre-school to the secondary level. She also referred to the Break the Silence campaign¹⁶ (against child sexual abuse) which made available to victims and their families a special unit to investigate, prevent and provide support. She mentioned that, thanks to support from UNICEF, there were child development centres throughout the country that offered stimulation and parenting support programmes for poor and vulnerable families. All children in Grenada had access to health care programmes (such as immunization programmes) and there were public standards concerning children in institutions.

The panellists' statements were followed by comments by representatives of member States.

Representatives of Argentina: the speakers proposed that the family and the State were responsible for early childhood. In this framework, they referred to the design of the National Strategy "Early Childhood First", which was aimed at all children between the ages of 0 and 4 in Argentina, with a particular focus on the 2–3 age group. They emphasized territorial and social gaps in the chains of benefits for children and the need for systems of oversight, registration and knowledge management to provide up-to-date information for decision-making independently of changes in government. With the support of UNICEF, a new round of multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) was to be conducted to provide a baseline for children's development. It was crucial to support parenting by strengthening families, but above all by training educators and caregivers in childcare centres, for which toolkits and a range of audiovisual materials would be very valuable. Lastly, it was important to have a normative framework to lock in specific budgets for early childhood in Argentina.

Representative of Uruguay: the speaker drew attention to the adoption of the National Plan for Early Childhood, Childhood and Adolescence 2016–2020, based on the National Strategy for Children and Adolescents 2010–2030 adopted in 2008. Its six strategic axes were: health (promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, sexual and reproductive health, prematurity and nutrition); educational pathways for comprehensive development and social inclusion (related in particular to the National Integrated Care System, which aims to achieve coverage of 66% for children in the 0–3 age group, with

¹⁵ For further information, see [online] https://www.ecured.cu/Educa_a_tu_Hijo.

¹⁶ For further information, see [online] <https://sta.uwi.edu/igds/breakthesilence/campaign.asp>.

universal coverage soon to be attained for 3-year-olds, and substantive progress made in the age group 0–2); gender- and generation-based violence (need for proper data capture and early detection); the right to live as a family (relating to processes of institutionalization in early childhood and adoption); participation and access to social and cultural goods (science clubs) and access to justice.

Representative of Mexico: the presentation centred on the importance of having a system of indicators that included grandparents taking care of small children and to design, accordingly, support systems aimed at that population. Attention was drawn to the importance of the issue of early childhood and its tendency to be relegated to a lesser category of importance in the political sphere.

Representative of Honduras: the representative emphasized the need for interinstitutional coordination policies, with monitoring and evaluation systems and civil society participation. Initiatives devoted to early childhood in Honduras included the platform *Vida Mejor* ("Better life"),¹⁷ which set up a network of social protection in the spheres of housing, education and food security, among others, and the presidential strategy *Criando con Amor* ("Parenting with love")¹⁸. Together with UNICEF, Honduras had designed the campaign *Care and Affection for Child Welfare*¹⁹ with a comprehensive approach from the pre-natal stage up to age 6. The representative also emphasized that progress was being made with the construction of a comprehensive guarantee system for childhood and adolescence, to ensure the same floor of rights for all children. This included a public policy on children, an observatory on childhood and the measurement of public investment at the local level.

Representative of the Dominican Republic: the programme *Quisqueya Empieza Contigo*,²⁰ in existence since 2013, aimed to resolve issues of coverage (comprehensive policies covered 18,000 children); quality (standardization of models across multiple providers); financing for public investment in comprehensive care (in 2010 this was US\$ 398 per child); and a fragmented legal and normative framework (conflict of interests in institutions that were both service providers and regulators). Coverage had multiplied by 10: now there were 187,000 children covered, of whom over 20% were aged between 0 and 5 and over half of the poorest children had free comprehensive care. Financing had also increased, to US\$ 1,700 per child annually, from US\$ 398 in 2010. One of the challenges was to reach children at risk of slipping into poverty.

1. Summary of the panel discussion

According to studies by SIPI, almost all the countries in the region had renewed normative frameworks and legislation on comprehensive protection that broadened State obligations regarding children's rights and made them enforceable. Examination of early childhood policies showed the development of strategies aimed at building comprehensive care systems specifically for that stage of the life cycle (which implied budget, integration and linking of benefits). Three benchmark programmes were identified: *Chile Crece Contigo*,²¹ *De Cero a Siempre*²² in Colombia and *Educa a tu Hijo*²³ in Cuba. Several delegations mentioned councils, commissions or other bodies devoted specifically to early childhood.

Along with these advances, mention was made of the need to afford more emphasis to child development from a comprehensive perspective, increase direct and indirect investment in the early childhood population and strengthen interinstitutional coordination, as well as improve oversight and evaluation systems, including the need to cost programme packages for early childhood and their budgeting.

¹⁷ For further information, see [online] <https://www.presidencia.gob.hn/index.php/sites/vida-mejor>.

¹⁸ For further information, see [online] <http://ceniss.gob.hn/renpi/criandoconamor.html>.

¹⁹ For further information, see [online] <https://www.proceso.hn/aldia/15-al-d%C3%ADa/presentan-estrategia-de-comunicacion-cuidado-y-carino-para-el-bienestar-del-nino.html>.

²⁰ For further information, see [online] <https://minpre.gob.do/transparencia/proyectos-y-programas/atencion-integral-a-la-primera-infancia-quisqueya-empieza-contigo/>.

²¹ For further information, see [online] <http://www.crececontigo.gob.cl/>.

²² For further information, see [online] <http://www.deceroasiempre.gov.co/Paginas/deCeroaSiempre.aspx>.

²³ For further information, see [online] https://www.ecured.cu/Educa_a_tu_Hijo.

C. Prevention and response to all forms of violence against children and adolescents

The purpose of this session was to analyse the regional situation with regard to policies, legislation, programmes, strategies and efforts made by the Latin American and Caribbean States to reduce the high levels of violence against children and adolescents and to ensure fulfilment of their rights, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also addressed two issues related to the expressions and consequences of violence in the region: the migration of children and adolescents and the challenges facing systems of adolescent criminal responsibility.

Patrick Figueiredo, from Brazil, said that it was everyone's duty to act and join forces to denaturalize violence; he also said that it was essential to prevent children and adolescents from coming into contact with or accessing weapons. To overcome the inequalities that exacerbated violence (poor-quality education, public policies that failed to reach the poorest territories, such as rural or indigenous areas), action must be taken across sectors (education, health and social assistance). He referred to a committee in Brazil coordinated by UNICEF on which 22 institutions were represented (from academia, the police, the justice system, NGOs and adolescent groupings, among others), which had signed a resolution guaranteeing that murders of adolescents would be investigated as absolute priorities.

Katherine Aguirre Tobón, Researcher with the Igarapé Institute of Brazil, seconded the comments of the previous speaker and added that to reduce violence it was necessary to adapt interventions that had proven successful. The Igarapé Institute systematized information from diverse contexts, and the initiatives that had shown good results included impulse control from an early age, which had been shown to prevent antisocial conduct at later stages in Jamaica and Rio de Janeiro. More years of schooling and engaging in extracurricular activities in school were also factors in reducing violence. She mentioned some anger management and self-control initiatives for youth: for example, the Youth Development Program²⁴ in Jamaica, which had shown that the longer young people remained in the scheme, the more aggressive conducts decreased; or the Cure Violence programme²⁵ in Trinidad and Tobago, in which well-known former gang members who had become public figures used their credibility to intervene in violent groups and stop conflicts. The speaker also referred to initiatives that did not work, such as boot camps, Scared Straight²⁶ or taking children to prisons to show them where they could end up. The hardline approach taken in Mexico, Central America, Colombia and Brazil had not worked either, because vulnerable youth were the most affected. Preventing violence required balancing reactive and preventive approaches, being aware of risk and prevention factors and tackling the structural causes of violence: lack of labour and education opportunities, gender inequality and urban sprawl.

José Guadalupe Ruelas, Director of Casa Alianza of Honduras, said that in his country violence was associated with the *maras* and gangs made up of young people and children. He disagreed with the discourse that suggested that gang members joined the *maras* because of family break-up, low self-esteem, the need to belong to a group or because they were forced into it. He believed that such explanations diluted the responsibility of the State and public policy failings and blamed young people, children and families themselves, thereby stigmatizing them. The policy pursued in Honduras focused on a prevention programme that militarized children (Guardianes de la Patria²⁷) and had tried to lower the age of criminal responsibility. This programme had been criticized by the Committee on the Rights

²⁴ For further information, see [online] <https://blogs.iadb.org/efectividad-desarrollo/en/positive-youth-development-in-jamaica-a-national-project/>.

²⁵ For further information, see [online] <https://publications.iadb.org/en/evaluating-cure-violence-trinidad-and-tobago>.

²⁶ For further information, see [online] <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/PracticeDetails.aspx?ID=4>.

²⁷ For further information, see [online] <http://www.ffaa.mil.hn/?p=2558>.

of the Child, which urged the government to abandon it. With respect to the way forward, he proposed carrying out new, multidimensional diagnostics of violence based on evidence and not on moral, criminalistic and police-oriented stances and considering the ingrained chauvinist and patriarchal underpinnings of the violence today, as well as the loss of capacities for positive conflict resolution at the domestic, community and public levels. He proposed that to overcome the violence generated by common crime and organized crime institutions needed to be strengthened and gain credibility; the triggers of violence needed to be identified by means of early warning mechanisms and communication with authorities; capacities had to be recouped for positive conflict resolution at the domestic, community and public levels; the social fabric had to be rebuilt by means of cultural, sporting and social activities; and the public space had to be taken back with cultural and sporting activities of common interest; crime needed to be prosecuted on the basis of evidence to reduce impunity; and lastly, it was necessary to generate locally adapted opportunities.

Milena Grillo, Director of Strategy and Innovation of Paniamor Foundation of Costa Rica referred to the use of violence within the family by parents and primary caregivers. She said that physical punishment weakened bonds of trust, delayed emotional development and contributed no learning whatsoever, but generated only fear. It was common for Latin American families to resort to smacking and humiliating treatment as a form of education and to minimize this violence, treating it as pertaining to the private sphere. However, the State, as guarantor of the rights of children, should intervene and act to protect children, supporting families with an institutional structure capable of acting preventively. Costa Rica had enacted a legal reform ratifying the right of children to non-violent discipline, as well as policies geared towards socially disadvantaged families, which was where this conduct prevailed, offering tools to improve parenting skills.

Daniel Lozano, Director General of Paradisus by Meliá, Dominican Republic, described some of the ways in which the company had engaged with the global responsibility model fostered by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of these had involved partnering with UNICEF to develop the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism.²⁸ Talks had been held to implement and disseminate this code, creating prevention brigades and channels for reporting in hotels.

The panellists' statements were followed by comments by representatives of member States.

Representative of Nicaragua: the government was promoting strategies to foment values for preventing situations that threatened family harmony, by means of a joined-up system of welfare in the family, school and community. This was coordinated with an early warning system for violence prevention (SATPREVI) which identified risk signals in the various spheres violence could occur, and activated specialized support and care mechanisms, in order to prevent exposure to risk or reduce harm after violence had occurred.

Representative of Panama: proposed the need to consider the creation of educational programmes for adolescents deprived of liberty.

Representative of the Dominican Republic: referred to psychological and/or physical punishment suffered by 62% of the population between the ages of 1 and 14 in the country. The Dominican Republic had a road map for preventing and eradicating violence against children and adolescents, and actions and activities were undertaken in the framework of community activities, sectoral plans, and a bill to prohibit physical punishment and end child marriage. The programme Positive Parenting²⁹ consisted of a training strategy aimed at parents and caregivers.

²⁸ See [online] <https://www.unicef.or.jp/code-p/news/pdf/CCNewsletter-29.pdf>.

²⁹ For further information, see [online] <http://conani.gob.do/tag/crianza-positiva/>.

Representative of Uruguay: remarked that the Comprehensive System to Protect Children and Adolescents against Violence (SIPIAV) had been set up in 2008. It comprised the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development and was chaired by the Institute for Children and Adolescents. The lines of work this envisaged were: progress in normative aspects, promotion and prevention, care and redress, and education and training for operators of the various systems. There were also cross-cutting issues: gender, social co-existence, prevalence of adult-centric notions and social class. A normative framework³⁰ was in place to underpin the actions taken and there was a proposal to amend the chapter of the Childhood and Adolescence Code that dealt with ill-treatment and abuse, including by strengthening access to justice and protection, the principle of revictimization avoidance, a stronger role for public defenders, avoiding placing victims back with their aggressors, the value of proof and technical reports. This had to do with the right to be heard, and the right of institutionalized children to live in a family.

Norberto Liwski of Defence for Children International of Argentina said that the construction of the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflected realities of the region (for example, articles 7, 37, 39 and 40) and, in the case of Argentina, engaged civil society quite broadly. It was essential to eradicate practices of violence on the part of State bodies, with or without official orders, to end hardline policies and initiatives seeking to reduce the age of legal responsibility. He concluded by remarking that community security should not be based on violation of the rights of its youngest members.

Nora Pulido, also representing civil society in Argentina, focused on ill-treatment and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of girls; the lack of reliable data; the revictimization of children and adolescent pregnancy as a result of sexual violence.

The representative of the delegation of Belize mentioned that one of the most serious problems in the country was the normalization of violence and physical punishment against children, which was related to violence against women.

Maira Díaz of the Federation of Cuban Women said that Cuba was engaged in consultations on certain modifications to the Constitution to address the issue of stereotypes and the need to establish fair and democratic relationships within the family. She remarked that Cuba had been the first country to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the second to ratify it, and gave some examples of the importance of tackling not only legislation, but also the value judgments, customs and stereotypes within the culture that had legitimized gender-based discrimination. The protection of children's rights was a priority for the Cuban State and government.

The Representative of the Ombudsman's Office of Costa Rica said that the country had strengthened the mandate for the protection of children with a law that emphasized caring and responsible parenting and prohibited the use of physical punishment and humiliating treatment. In addition, marriage under the age of 17 was prohibited. Both laws had encountered implementation challenges owing to failures of coordination between actors and the need to define specific, measurable goals that could be evaluated.

1. Summary of the panel discussion

This region has the world's highest prevalence of violence against children and adolescents. Children and adolescents have the right to live free of violence, and the family and the State as guarantor have the duty to protect them against all forms of violence (physical or humiliating punishment, use of physical violence in parenting practices, and others). There were a number of prevention initiatives and

³⁰ These included Law 17.815 on commercial or non-commercial sexual violence against children, adolescents or incapacitated persons; Law 18.214 on the personal integrity of children and adolescents (2007) and the recent Law 19.580 on gender-based violence against women (2018).

legislations that represented progress towards the prohibition of various forms of violence (physical punishment, child marriage) and some good practices were presented that could contribute to reducing violent conducts by different actors (for example, parenting support strategies).

However, debts remained in the implementation of standards, data were lacking, and Latin America and the Caribbean had a cultural pattern, that needed to be ended, which permitted and legitimized the use of violence to manage conflict and in parenting practices.

D. Development and participation of adolescents

The purpose of this session was to analyse the regional picture in relation to policies, legislation, programmes, strategies and efforts made by the Latin American and Caribbean States to guarantee the rights of girls and boys in adolescence, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The progress of State practices towards recognition and respect for the dignity and agency of adolescents was discussed, along with the importance of investing in the second decade of life and of fostering intersectoral actions that promoted positive adolescent development and empowerment and promoted their participation.

Jeremy and Narima, from Guyana, referred to the need to improve the quality of education as it prepared children for the challenges of the future. They mentioned that Guyana needed a better curricular design and teacher training, as well as infrastructure to accommodate persons with disabilities. They also said that culturally relevant contents, as well as more extracurricular activities (sports) and support for pregnant adolescents would be positive steps. In addition, the use of corporal punishment should be ended.

Pablo Vommaro, Director of Working Groups and Research Promotion of the Latin American Social Sciences Council (CLACSO), proposed rethinking adolescent educational trajectories by recognizing their diversity, but without legitimizing inequalities and, as in the case of women and gender policies, consideration of policies for adolescents should include adolescents themselves. To understand why inequalities persisted despite the progress made, he proposed looking at the interrelation between variables such as income, life cycle, and gender, territorial, educational and labour differences, alongside the time and space perceptions and appreciations of adolescents themselves. It was important to examine the reasons for school dropout and what was happening in the school space, as well as to explore other ways of educational completion (in particular, by means of ICT). It was essential to have public policies for equality that included diversity and singularity, recognizing the associative capacities of adolescents, from a participatory, non-adult-centric nor State-centric, intercultural and participatory generational perspective.

Camila Crosso, Coordinator General of the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (CLADE), focused on article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the participation of children and adolescents in all spheres and decisions that affect them as the lead agents in their own lives. Among the advances that showed increasing recognition of the importance of this participation were the Youth 2030 initiative, participation in the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee coordinated by UNESCO, the Latin American and Caribbean Youth 2030 Forum³¹ and the Concausa initiative. There were general laws on education in the region that recognized students' right to participation and round tables on specific problems or issues (e.g. in Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Brazil). Pending challenges included the lack of institutionalized mechanisms, permanent spaces or procedures in which students could participate on an equal footing (for example, educational reforms adopted without inclusion of student protesters or demonstrators and the criminalization of student

³¹ For further information, see [online] <https://news.un.org/es/story/2018/09/1442212>.

protest). Particularly complex was the situation in Brazil, among other countries, where moves were under way to limit the discussion of gender issues and comprehensive sexuality education in schools (referring to the initiative *Con mis hijos no te metas* (“Don’t mess with my children”), since these ran counter to international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the SDGs.

Aparecida Lacerda, General Manager of Professional Education of the Roberto Marinho Foundation,³² described the characteristics of this foundation, which had been working for over 40 years on education and school reintegration in order to combat school dropout and lag. She mentioned that in the framework of the Learning Act, which provided that young apprentices should make up between 5% and 15% of firms’ total staff, the Foundation had developed the Legal Apprentice programme.³³ This programme, which prepared young people for work and enhanced participation skills, ability to speak in public and teamwork, had been well received.

Sandra Granger, First Lady of Guyana, referred to a number of programmes, such as STEM Guyana,³⁴ prevention of adolescent pregnancy and work training in areas such as caring for children and older persons. In terms of access to justice, she remarked that a rehabilitation approach was being pursued, whereby young people could reintegrate into their communities and complete their schooling. She also mentioned the work being done in the framework of CARICOM, and the efforts of a group of first ladies from Caribbean countries on issues such as prevention of adolescent pregnancy, cervical cancer, domestic violence and the prevention of HIV transmission. One of the challenges she raised was the need for joint work between national agencies and institutions, the private sector and international partners on the protection of children and adolescents from the risks and impacts of natural disasters.

The panellists’ statements were followed by comments by representatives of member States.

Representative of Mexico: the speaker emphasized the right to education and to grow up in a non-violent environment, and proposed forging an agreement on children and adolescents in Mexico and addressing the issue of violence and peacebuilding.

Representative of Argentina: insisted on the need for adults to listen to what adolescents have to say.

Representative of Paraguay: remarked that in the framework of the country’s National System for Comprehensive Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, councils had been established at the district, departmental and national levels, in which children and adolescents were invited to participate and their views taken into account in decision-making and in the establishment and implementation of public policies. The speaker expressed the belief that countries must fulfil rights—the intention alone was not enough—and concluded “nothing about us without us”.

Representative of Peru: the youth representative of Peru described the experience of participating in one of the country’s consultative councils with the support of UNICEF and emphasized the political training that this represented.

Representative of the Plurinational State of Bolivia: the representative commented on the various issues mentioned in the course of the Dialogue, such as the minimal State implied in the strategy *Con mis hijos no te metas*,³⁵ the fundamental importance of nurturing children and adolescents and the dissemination of experiences that had yielded good outcomes.

³² For further information, see [online] <https://frm.org.br/?lang=en>.

³³ For further information, see [online] <https://frm.org.br/aprendiz-legal/?lang=en>.

³⁴ For further information, see [online] <http://stemguyana.com/>.

³⁵ This movement has spread to several Latin American countries. For further information, see [online] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Con_mis_hijos_no_te_metas.

Representative of the Dominican Republic: the representative gave the floor to Junior, who emphasized the importance of youth participating actively in decision-making and called upon the press and the country representatives to pay attention to the ideas, commitments and goals expressed by youth.

The Regional Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) expressed appreciation for the conversations held at the present meeting and drew attention to the value of inter-agency work. He hailed the certification of the elimination of vertical transmission of HIV in Cuba and six Caribbean countries, but emphasized the need to keep working to end the infection of young people in the region, currently 54 every day. In this regard, it was important to work with and for young people, for example by strengthening sexuality education.

The Central American Parliament was committed to the cause of the struggle for women's rights and empowerment, and the drive to end violence against children and women, among other things.

Representative of Ecuador: referred to the need for the countries of the region to open their borders to address the social emergency represented by migration and uphold the inter-agency partnership and common agendas to progress on shared efforts to fulfil the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Representative of Uruguay: it was essential to protect the achievements already made, because setbacks appeared not unlikely. The speaker then referred to the participation of children and adolescents as citizens and commended the participation of young people in the present dialogue. Testifying to the commitment of the Uruguayan State in this respect, the speaker mentioned the presentation to the country's Parliament of an Advisory and Consultative Council of the Board of the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents. Adolescents were the present and conditions for the development of this generation should be built together with them.

Representative of Colombia: remarked that the country's new government had the opportunity to deploy policy interventions to fulfil the rights of children and adolescents and that the Colombian Family Welfare Institute was to launch a national strategy to prevent all forms of violence against children and adolescents.

Representative of Honduras: emphasized the importance of sharing good experiences and using them in all the countries, redoubling efforts to promote and fulfil the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Representative of Trinidad and Tobago: concerns that had arisen in a recent dialogue with children and adolescents included drugs and alcohol, psychosocial support and mental health, the impact of natural disaster on children, the need to recognize multiple intelligences and learning English as a second language.

The youth representative of Panama remarked that, as in Peru, Panama had an Advisory Committee with participation rights in which young people were prepared for leadership roles.

1. Summary of the panel discussion

With regard to adolescent participation, the starting point was their agency in their own lives and the importance of listening to their opinions. In this regard, mention was made of a number of initiatives such as consultative councils and dialogue processes in which adolescents participated and, in some cases, received political experience. It was argued that adolescents not only were—and were seen as—bearers of rights, but were also agents of change, with an important role in building equality agendas in the countries of the region. Adolescents were claiming greater spaces to participate in the social and citizen discussion and the hope was expressed that States would create these spaces.

IV. Closing remarks

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and its four core principles are: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and participation.³⁶ Children and adolescents have the right to the fulfilment of all their rights enshrined in the Convention, and to receive the protection that this implies. This obliges countries and governments to build partnerships and generate the policies for achieving this through political commitments, normative frameworks, budgeting and integration of areas of impact from birth onward and in accordance with each stage of the life cycle. The State must assume a strong, active role in protecting the rights of children and adolescents and ensuring a well-being floor for families, by means of comprehensive protection systems and by increasing social investment. The State must act jointly with other social stakeholders: academia, NGOs, the private sector and children and youth themselves.

A. General elements

In the multiple interventions and across the four panels of the discussion, a number of elements stood out concerning how the fulfilment of children’s and adolescents’ rights should be approached. On the basis of the common aim of overcoming poverty inequalities, the need was remarked for solid institutions capable of undertaking the necessary intersectoral work at all levels of government (national and subnational); integrated information systems to support evidence-based decision-making; long-term policies that will not be affected by changes in government; normative frameworks (especially legislation) that permit

³⁶ The four guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are: (a) non-discrimination: all children have the right to be treated equally without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, disability status, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status; (b) the best interests of the child: the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions or decisions concerning children, particularly in relation to their care and protection; (c) right to life, survival and development: every child has the inherent right to life and to achieve his or her fullest potential through physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual development; and (d) participation: children have the right to express their views freely on all matters that affect them, and those views must be given due weight. These principles form the basis for all other rights to be fulfilled. See United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), “What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child” [online] <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/what-is-the-convention>.

citizens to demand the fulfilment of policies; evaluation and monitoring mechanisms for follow-up to policy implementation and transparent budgets; and engagement of the voice of the different social organizations, starting with those of children, adolescents and young people themselves.

Something that was emphasized on all the panels was the need to systematize good experiences and adapt them to the characteristics of each territory or reality. In this framework, South-South cooperation emerged as a valued model and, in particular, there were countries, such as Paraguay and Panama, which requested cooperation from others, or Costa Rica, which offered to share its expertise.

B. The voice of adolescents and the perspective on them

The Dialogue included participation by many adolescents and young people, who not only presented to a pre-eminently adult audience the projects developed in the framework of the Concausa initiative,³⁷ but also took an active part in the discussions, both as panellists and as representatives of their countries. The Declaration of Santiago is a true expression of their demand to be heard to co-create a better world that ensures fulfilment of their rights: to live in a non-violent, fairer world, with better education that prepares them for the demands of the future, with access to information for decision-making.³⁸

The general discourse of the adult panellists referred frequently to the importance of listening to adolescents and the existence of councils for this purpose in many countries was emphasized. However, their discourse on this age group tended to view it in three spheres: as a kind of bridge between childhood and adulthood, requiring educational models that enable better labour integration in the near future; as subjects mistreated in the framework of an adolescent and youth penal system dominated by practices such as detention; and, lastly, as the targets of programmes to prevent pregnancy and HIV transmission, but always as the objects of initiatives, not as co-creators of them on the basis of their own decisions and rights.³⁹ Some of the participants emphasized the associative capacities of young people, which could be one of the elements supporting intergenerational work and dialogue to create policies geared towards this age group.

C. Concerning forms of violence against children and adolescents

Violence and its types were a cross-cutting theme throughout the event. The family and the State as guarantor have the duty to protect children and adolescents against all forms of violence (physical and humiliating punishment, repression of the right to freedom of expression, use of correctional physical violence in parenting practices, among others), because it represents a violation of fundamental rights that harms personal dignity and the physical and emotional integrity of victims, and age-based discrimination. In this regard, it is essential to develop evidence-based, multidisciplinary and multisectoral prevention and response strategies, that are adapted to the respective scenario and have shown positive results.

³⁷ Concausa is an initiative of ECLAC, UNICEF and América Solidaria with the collaboration of Caserta Foundation and the sponsorship of Pedro de Valdivia Pre-University School. For further information, see [online] <https://www.concausa2030.com/english/>.

³⁸ See annex.

³⁹ For example, in the area of sexual and reproductive health, the predominant vision is one of disease prevention, not an integrated vision of what adolescents want and their wishes in relation to their emotions and affections. In addition, the issue of adolescent pregnancy is viewed only from the perspective of the mother's risk of dropping out of education: there is no gender perspective that takes account of the father's participation.

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region in which violence, in its multiple forms, is normalized and forms part of daily life. Within the family, punishment is used to educate small children; smacking is used as a form of discipline; and freedom of expression of adolescents and young people is repressed violently; all this is also linked to high levels of violence against women and girls. Only a few countries have enacted legislation against the use of physical and psychological punishment of children, and to prohibit child marriage. Our societies, through government and civil society action, must tackle engrained chauvinist and patriarchal cultural patterns, as well as the inability to resolve conflicts peacefully, constructively and positively that underlies that normalization.⁴⁰

Violence in early childhood compromises children's physical development, erodes their confidence in adults and affects their progress at school. Positive parenting support is needed for fathers, mothers and other caregivers (including grandparents), along with protection systems capable of preventing, detecting and intervening in these situations. In this regard, several countries referred to the creation of ad hoc programmes or the need for them (Grenada and Belize), but always in the line of direct support for families (in terms of meeting physical needs and the need for affection, bonding and proper stimulation). The presentation by Argentina referred to support for caregivers outside the family sphere, with the use of toolkits and different support materials.

During the dialogue speakers emphasized the need to strengthen institutions to eradicate different types of violence (cultural, armed, domestic and collective, among others); identify its causes and triggers by means of mechanisms of early warning and communication with authorities; restore positive conflict resolution capacities at all levels, from the most micro level (domestic) upward; rebuild the social fabric through diverse activities; reclaim the public space with actions of common interest; prosecute crime on the basis of evidence to reduce impunity; and, lastly, generate opportunities adapted to the local level.

Lastly, the adolescents who participated in the panels during the dialogue spoke of the fear felt on a daily basis as a result of having experienced violence motivated by skin colour or gender, the murder of friends, and kidnapping and rapes of girls. This was a particular topic of concern, which they said must be resolved urgently. It had no place in the world they wanted to live in.

D. Building a culture of peace

The culture of peace is a crucial topic, given the extremely broad presence of violence in daily life, its corrosive effect on even the best tools for coexistence and the construction of democratic societies, and its brutal impact on children and adolescents. Getting all the parties to discuss ways of building a culture of peace means agreeing upon strategies likely to work. At the same time —and even more importantly— it means generating a large-scale, long-term commitment to build, together, a world in which children and adolescents can grow and develop safely and without fear.

E. The uptake of new technologies

The impact of new technologies in all spheres of our societies' development is unavoidable. Its relationship with the rights of children and adolescents cannot be neglected, especially given the massive presence of technological progress in the new generations. Growing and developing today, amid the incalculable availability of information and the communication possibilities offered by digital media, raises new and unthought-of challenges. Little was mentioned about this during the dialogue: there were a few references to its impact on the circulation of information or usefulness in taking education to diverse groups. Its potential to infringe rights was also mentioned, for example, in the

⁴⁰ As mentioned in the panel on violence, the dialogue did not touch on the incidence of violence at school.

circulation of information linked to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, or in cyberbullying at school or in other spheres. It is certainly an issue that remains pending. There was also mention of the possibility of updating certain elements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, since the use and effects of ICTs we know today did not exist when it was drawn up.

F. The role of the private sector

The specific mention of this point arose in the presentation of some representatives of the United Nations and the firms Deloitte, Microsoft and Meliá. The firms described the steps they had taken to improve the private sector's knowledge and engagement with its role in the protection of children and adolescents. For example, they described experiences of studies that laid the foundations for altering standards on work-life compatibility (such as parental leaves or breastfeeding breaks); programmes for using ICTs to enable and facilitate access by children with different types of disabilities to education, to re-enter education or to relate to others; and, lastly, the generation of codes of conduct to protect against sexual abuse and exploitation of children in tourism. Participants also referred to the importance of engaging the private sector and service providers in contributing financing for the various activities and/or programmes that could be implemented in the countries.

It would be of interest to pursue further discussion and dissemination activities regarding the many possible lines of joint work between the public and private sectors on child protection.⁴¹

G. Some little-mentioned population groups

The only passing mention made of certain populations suggests the need for special treatment of their rights status in the future. Firstly, indigenous and Afrodescendent children and adolescents who, as shown in the findings of the study presented, suffer the largest equality gaps and need to be afforded greater visibility not only in measurements and targeted policies, but also in the construction of history in the region, recognizing the contribution of their cultures. Children and adolescents with disabilities were mentioned only in the presentation of the META network and by some of the Caribbean countries, as groups that effectively require the necessary adaptations for their full inclusion and consideration of their vulnerability to different types of abuse. With respect to migrant children and adolescents, reference was made to the absolute urgency of recognizing and tackling the causes of migration and the conditions they find themselves in, by creating protection systems for them. Girls, as a specific population group, were almost always mentioned from the perspective of abuse and sexual exploitation.

H. Work and partnerships with UNICEF and appreciation of the ECLAC-UNICEF regional dialogue

Lastly, but no less importantly, it bears mention that all the panels paid tribute to the work that different countries of the region have been carrying forward with UNICEF and their partnerships with UNICEF and other agencies to better inform policies and programmes for children. The member States also commended the effort of ECLAC and UNICEF to create the present space, the regional dialogue, to review and discuss the progress and challenges in the region regarding development goals for children. There was unanimous support for the idea of establishing the dialogue as a biannual forum.

⁴¹ This could be framed in terms of General comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights. See [online] https://www.unicef.org/csr/css/CRC_General_Comment_ENGLISH_26112013.pdf.

Annex

Annex 1

Declaration of the adolescents⁴²

Good afternoon to everyone. We, the youth representatives of North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean, have prepared this declaration to spread awareness of our views on our current situation. We believe that the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been of great help in changing the way children and adolescents are seen, because it serves as a base and as a guide for us to grow and develop freely. The present dialogue was a landmark in our lives, we spent five weeks preparing our participation with a group of 90 adolescents and young people from 26 countries on the right to effective participation, to freedom and an identity, to gender equality, to the reduction of violence and to a quality education. This declaration contains what we feel and think, our proposals for change and the commitments we undertake as young people for the full exercise of our rights. There follows a summary of this declaration. The young people will read it in their mother tongues: Cuba will speak of participation in English, Belén and Ana Rose on identity in quichua and Spanish, Antonia on gender in Spanish, Leticia, on behalf of Patrick, will talk about violence in Portuguese and Mónica will talk about education in creole. Thank you very much.

Cuba

We, the youth, on giving you the opportunity to use our voices, we live in a reality where our voices are pressed, the ... open spaces where we can express our ideas, participation should be flexible and broad to include everyone. Each should be respectful and tolerant, we should focus on hearing the voices of the ones that have been silenced through the centuries, promotion of public politics and initiatives to make decisions, destroy taboos, receive integral sexual education, must be implemented to achieve the quality education we want and need. Promoting safes spaces of participation and realizing initiatives for informing the communities is indispensable. To success we should work with the State, the civil society and private sector, and with the voices of the children and the youth. We must communicate constantly to the authorities everything that concern us and inclusion vulnerable children and adolescences is primordial and with that we can't promote participation spaces without high article order. We must share our stories with young people and engage with promotes the defend of our rights,

⁴² See the full declaration at [online] https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/2018_1112_declaracion_de_adolescentes.pdf.

the rights we deserve, desire and need. My name Cuba Rilly and today I represent Latin America and the Caribbean, and we have the responsibility as youth to fight for our rights of participation.

Belén (spoke in Ecuadorian quichua)

Ana Rosa (translation from Spanish)

The society we live in represses our identity because of stereotypes that generate discrimination. What identifies us is not just our name, in itself the way we express ourselves to the world. And so, we propose that birth certificates should be free and accessible throughout the Americas. The most vulnerable communities do not have access to this procedure, which prevents access to basic services and directly infringes their right to an identity. For that reason, new education systems and public policies must be adopted, public policies that promote acceptance, respect and tolerance for different forms of expression, regardless of nationality, sex, sexual orientation, functional diversity, religion or belief, ethnicity, language or other, so that children and adolescents can development in an authentic manner. I am Ana Rosa Cárdenas (Cárdenas) from Peru, a member of Concausa 2018, and for us freedom is not being afraid.

Antonia (translation from Spanish)

Gender, gender is determined by a sociocultural factor prolonged through the generations, we are protagonists of Goal 5: Gender equality. We see that girls and women are more affected because they are subject to discrimination and violence caused by chauvinism, which generates an equality gap. Our society is afraid to break the paradigms and we consider that awareness needs to be raised about women's rights, because their continued repression causes social stagnation. We propose implementing more public policies for the full development of girls and women, and promoting gender equality in the home and in educational establishments, which we consider fundamental for the full development of our society. In addition, to keep developing society, we consider it necessary to expand the use of inclusive language, we consider that the State must ensure resources for practices that reinforce gender equality, we also urge States to open a discussion on abortion, with women as the main participants. We want to mobilize the population, disseminate information and thereby promote an equitable society. We seek to change laws in order to favour gender equality, end harassment, end the non-visibility of women and prejudice against accusers, and end femicide. Stop killing us, we oppose sexism, no gender role represents weakness, women cannot continue to suffer like this. America will be feminist. I am Antonia Moreno, I am 13 years old and I represent Chile, thank you very much.

Leticia (translation from Portuguese)

We consider that violence is any abuse of power that tramples on dignity and fails to respect our decisions, opinions and rights as people, causing harm. We see that there are various types of violence, such as physical, psychological, verbal, ..., gender, harassment, school bullying and cyberbullying. We are witnesses to the fact that violence is experienced in many settings, such as schools, health centres, ..., and families, making us feel unsafe in various contexts. Inequalities, the lack of opportunities, poor quality of education, economic inequalities and governments' ineffectiveness in policymaking to prevent such acts are factors that influence the increase in violence. We see around us that violence is naturalized, so we propose that public policies should be inclusive, efficient and all children and adolescents should be protected from any type of violence. A world without violence where we can be ourselves and develop fully and, potentially, as leaders of citizens. I am Leticia Sosa, I am 18 years old and I am a member of project.... Brazil.

Monica (translation from creole)

I want everyone here, I want everyone who is here to know that education is the basis for the development of a society at the intellectual, physical and psychological level and a country that does not promote it will not progress. We know that education begins in the family and school establishments are one of the pillars that influence our lives as children and adolescents, depending on what we are taught and how we are taught. We demand that the governments of our countries provide free, good-quality education, to enable all the children and adolescents of Latin America and the Caribbean to have the education we deserve that gives us learning and development opportunities in step with the times we live in. We need an education that prepares us for adult life, we need to strengthen environmental education, sexuality education, inclusive education that includes sign language and the learning of our native languages. We want to have a broader education, not only in academic subjects, so we need teachers better trained both in academic and in psychological aspects, to better support students. For this, we understand our role in the generation of quality education in which young people are the key to organizing methodologies, promoting technology-based school environments, non-discrimination and respect for all cultures, capacities, ethnicities, sexual diversities, languages and others. As young people, we commit to devoting our best efforts to our school activities and creating better educational settings. We want free, quality education to give us the possibility of developing our capacities, learning to respect our family, our culture and, especially, to be responsible individuals in a free society, with a mind of peace and tolerance.

Before I go back to Haiti taking with me all this experience I have had in Chile, I would like to commend UNICEF, ECLAC, América Solidaria, Concausa and especially all those who are working for the evolution of the Convention, because their efforts are a great contribution for the future, for making this work beneficial for Latin America and the Caribbean, and even for the whole world. I am Monica, I come from Haiti and I am 17 years old.

Marcos Rodríguez and Marcos Roque provide closing remarks

Good afternoon to all the authorities and to the audience present, in representation of all the young people, I give you the Declaration of Santiago:

We, the representatives of 26 countries, on the basis of the youth Declaration of Santiago for the rights of children and adolescents, which was adopted by a majority of votes, ask that the Chamber of children and adolescents of the United Nations Children's Fund be formally and permanently established, in order to serve as a participatory and regulatory body. As we have stated in this declaration, we believe that fulfilment of the right to participation is essential for our empowerment, social development, and to provide timely solutions to the issues that affect us, because we believe that our voice should be heard in decisions that affect us.

Our participation and inclusion should be seen as a flexible and broad aspect of our rights, it is important that we participate in policy that involves us, but for this we need to be taken into account. María Cristina Perceval, Regional Director of the United Nations Children's Fund, we ask you to be our ambassador in this task, because we believe firmly that your capacities, position and proven interest in us will ensure that this message reaches all the governments and more adolescents. For all these reasons, we ask that the United Nations Children's Fund acknowledge this request.

We thank Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), for having given us this space, in which we were able to set out our wishes, and we encourage you to continue your interest in all children and adolescents. María Cristina Perceval, I now hand you the declaration signed by the 26 representatives of the 26 countries, thank you very much.

I know the young people have already sat down, but I ask them to stand again. I hope they will repeat what I am going to say, well... I hope they say it loud and clear and that it is heard as far as Patagonia, which is close here, but.... Repeat after me: "Hear our voice, hear our voice, respect our voice, accept our voice, implement our voice".

The first regional dialogue in Latin America and the Caribbean “On the road to equality”: 30 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was held in Santiago in November 2018. The event was organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

This event was attended by government authorities and international agencies, representatives of the United Nations system, the private sector, academia, civil society and young people. In the framework of fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this was an occasion to review the progress and challenges still outstanding in the region with regard to the rights of children and adolescents. Other themes included social protection systems for children and adolescents, early childhood development, prevention of and response to all forms of violence against children and adolescents, and adolescent development and participation.

This summary document brings together the key messages and issues raised by the panellists and country representatives and highlights some aspects that could be explored in greater depth on a future occasion.

