

Human Rights of Youth: Working with and for youth in vulnerable situations including conflict, violence and insecurity

Youth Consultations | Guatemala & Latin America Report

Dates: The consultation was launched with an online questionnaire to participants on 26 May, followed by two online sessions, held on 2 and 9 June 2022.

Participants: The consultation brought together a total of 24 participants from Guatemala and the wider Latin American region, including 15 women and 9 men. The event was co-facilitated by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Guatemala, in partnership with Youth Advisory Board Member Rosario del Pilar Días Garavito.

Human rights barriers and obstacles for youth and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Participants highlighted the following areas in which young people face discrimination:

- Right to participation
- Right to education
- Right to decent work
- Racial and gender identity

Participants discussed key challenges, as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in each of the above areas.

Right to participation

Challenges

- Youth participation is instrumentalized, without allowing youth access to substantive decision-making spaces
- Access to spaces for participation is limited by age and social inequality
- Public policies do not contemplate the participation of young people, they do not consider the specificities of the various youth groups according to geography, socioeconomic status, identities, etc

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

- By causing the closure of spaces for participation that had been opened
- The closure of training and meeting centers limited access to training and contact between young people from different regions for exchanges
- Transfer of participation to digital platforms had a detrimental impact on those who are disadvantaged by the digital divide
- There is a general feeling of decline in civil and political rights, resulting in a decrease in citizen participation
- As youth are not part of the populations prioritized for subsidies during the pandemic, they are impoverished or in crisis

Right to education

Challenges

- Remote education leaves the educational process in the hands of families

- Support is not received for specific needs such as autism and other supplemental policies
- Across the Latin American region, education follows a strong patriarchal trend
- The imposition of religion in education leads to the exclusion of sexuality education
- There are not enough public policies that offer scholarships for young people in social associations
- Quality versus quantity, especially applied to secondary education. Technical career opportunities could be interesting for young people but there are not enough of these.
- The quality of infrastructure in public schools is poor; e.g. lack of water
- Devaluation of the teaching career makes it difficult for teachers to teach with quality since they must take up complementary jobs to earn a better wage.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

- Inability of the government to keep students present in their educational centers, which is why there was a greater dropout rate at the university level
- The economic impact forced young people to prioritize work to ensure income for food and family needs
- The digital divide has been an obstacle to the participation and education of all youth in Latin America
- Limited funding for education
- Grants were targeted at priority populations, which often did not include youth
- Social inequalities were amplified as a result of the remote education process during the pandemic
- Investment in resources to access virtual platforms
- Educational quality problems are accentuated, mainly linked to remote education and connectivity
- The closure of meeting spaces and essential services have affected the mental health of young people

Right to decent work

Challenges

- Lack of sources of employment
- Poorly paid work and insufficient wages
- Gap between work experience, education and entry requirements for entry-level jobs
- Few educational opportunities for decent employment
- Recruitment system based on favors and personal contacts
- Labor overexploitation
- Class gap between professions and trades that does not allow social mobility
- Difficulty in continuing with economic entrepreneurship due to the requirement of commercial registration
- In order to become independent and survive, access to credit is needed. It is a huge challenge that is worrying because the lack of access to credit for young people is going to generate a generalized crisis for something very simple. There is going to be a generation that is will not consume or collect enough capital, which will generate poverty for the next generation.
- A discriminating factor is presented based on experience and educational requirements. In terms of health, there is no specific insurance coverage for young people.
- No figures on the health of young people and their employment situation are available

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

- Lack of information on labor rights, despite massive lay-offs
- Changes in labor policies, such as part-time shifts
- Difficulty for economic independence, or a job opportunity that allows it. In work environments, there is a certain paternalism. Employers feel like they have to explain things in detail or provide more directions to youth because they are young. In all aspects, there is discrimination for being young.
- Increase in employment in the informal sector.
- Loss of employment and social security means youth lack access to health services.
- Loss of purchasing power

Racial and gender identity

Challenges

- Any identity other than male, white, rich, cisgender is discriminated against; including neurodivergent people
- People who are not of a hegemonic identity have to change to be accepted
- Conservative and religious culture across the Latin American region lacking in tolerance as a result of a lack of education on diversity
- Diversity is intrinsic to the human being. It should be treated with great importance
- Discrimination comes from both the State and society

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

- Weakening of the youth organization for participation in political issues of the situation of each country
- The technological gap hindered the ability to communicate and participate

Recommendations and solutions to promote human rights for youth

- Include more actors and stakeholders to find solutions. In addition to the State, consider the private sector to focus on business and human rights, labor inclusion for young people in decent jobs, as an alternative source of financing for scholarships. Consider the participation of banks so that they facilitate young people's access to loans and seed capital that allow young people to develop their lives and achieve autonomy.
- Strengthen the implementation of active learning methodologies for inclusion, in contexts of diversity.
- Promote cooperative learning for inclusion of students in vulnerable situations, to ensure that more young people enter and remain in university.
- Guarantee the permanence and continuity of policies related to youth by allocating the budget to spaces for citizen participation that allow dialogue with local governments.
- Ensure the participation of young people in advisory boards formed by and for youth to guarantee their meaningful participation.
- Use the intersectional approach for diverse youth.
- Involve rural youth in the human rights process.
- Greater control in spaces for youth that guarantee the true representativeness of the population they are supposed to represent. The duty of those they represent is to be the channel of communication for young people who are most marginalized in their communities with limited access to technology.
- Establish communication channels between institutions and youth, taking advantage of the communication networks among the young population to promote knowledge and awareness of State and regional organizations and institutions.

- Invest in innovative ideas of youth that have the potential to become actions that will benefit society.

Good practice examples of youth rights advocacy

- In Bolivia, the participation of youth in municipal decision-making spaces has been achieved.
- In Guatemala the Ch'viricuarta project carried out artistic actions in the street (murals, workshops, historical memory) that questioned the absence of youth spaces at the local level to provoke the opening of a Municipal Youth Office. The limitation was that the organization was not taken into account in the process. A strength was the space for youth coexistence that even attracted boys and girls to the project. Among the strengths is that everyone in the group is young and does the work voluntarily as community service. Reaffirms the commitment to community service.
- In Guatemala, the National Youth Front implemented the campaign "Being young is a right" with the objective of making the problems of youth visible in various spaces and digital platforms and reaching decision makers. As a result, a boost was given to the national youth law. Now the youth organizations of the Front use the campaign in all their advocacy actions. A strength is that the campaign had a budget, a weakness is that it was not enough to sustain activities in the territories.
- In Brazil, UNICEF held a workshop for youth in vulnerable situations in various regions/territories in which strategies were built with companies to create national mobilization for the climate. A strength was the formation of a group with the participation of three sectors/actors: young people with experience in territorial/grassroots interventions, UNICEF, and private companies.
- In Guatemala, the Physics and Mathematics Student Association holds workshops to promote the education and participation of young people in physics and mathematics actions. One strength was the creation of science dissemination material in Mayan languages for access to other territories outside the city.

Successful actions for promoting youth rights had the following elements in common:

- Young people at the center of participation, mobilization and debate
- Consider the different realities and contexts in which initiatives are developed
- View the range of participation needs of young people
- Creativity

Challenges for youth rights advocacy

- It is important to acknowledge that challenges are not the same for all people, nor are they lived in isolation, and that they can have a cumulative effect. Challenges must be approached from an intersectional perspective. Young people with limited financial resources may experience harassment and risks to their safety.
- Opportunities to participate in youth programs and politics are restricted.
- There is a lack of information on spaces for youth participation; information should be disseminated as widely as possible.
- In difficult and/or high-risk contexts, youth participation is discouraged. The struggles need to be collective and of larger groups.
- The challenges young people in the Latin American region face are particular and more pronounced compared to the challenges in other regions, limiting youth participation as well as the exercise of certain rights for young people.
- Low educational rates, violence against trans youth, and a general context of rights violation that normalizes risks and threats.
- There is no Human Rights Education. Many programs on defending human rights are conducted as brief workshops without continuity or follow-up

- Corruption
- Criminalization of human rights defenders (HRDs) and violations of their rights have been a reality for a long time. Institutions are co-opted, they do not respond to their duty to protect, therefore young people do not turn to them for help.
- Lack of resources to finance and sustain youth initiatives.
- Lack of spaces for dialogue between youth and government.
- HRDs in territories and rural areas are taking risks and have no protection mechanisms or networks. International organizations encourage HRDs to come forward and commit to providing instruments for doing so; however, when HRDs denounce violations they expose themselves. When international organizations then depart, the HRDs in territories and rural areas remain exposed.

Participants discussed actions for duty-bearers and for rights-holders and underlined their shared responsibility to work in a clearly articulated manner.

Duty bearers

- Address the demands, concerns and rights of young people
- Respect rights
- Implement strategies that reach community and grassroots organizations
- Develop strategies to care for HRDs as well as policies to respect human/youth rights
- Implement strategies and policies for that support/protect authorities to protect HRDs, so that if violations occur, HRDs have a safe and trusted place to go to file a complaint

Youth organizations and rights holders

- Evidence and demonstrate the diverse contexts and realities
- Show the transversality of challenges experienced by youth and vulnerable populations
- Make use of existing mechanisms to exert pressure and access rights
- Involvement, participation, articulation
- Decentralize projects and initiatives to include young people in communities who do not have access to protection mechanisms and spaces to talk about their issues

Participants discussed how youth could be better supported and empowered to advocate for their rights.

- Increase dialogue between organizations to defend human rights
- Train more people with an intersectional perspective to work for rights; gender, sexuality, etc.
- Cross-sectoral action (public, private) to promote youth participation and youth debate
- Shared spaces with private initiatives, international and local organizations to raise awareness of the needs of young people living in territories and rural areas
- The decentralization of projects and initiatives is important so that they reach beyond capital cities; they must reach communities where there are many young people who can get involved and participate
- Young people receive tools and support, but there are limits to what can be achieved when public institutions are co-opted. The support that is given to youth is distorted when institutions do not have the capacity to respond to young peoples' demands.

The present report summarizes key discussion points and topics raised by participants; it does not reflect the official positions of OHCHR, Education Above All or Silatech.