



November 2017



Photo: Outcome Stories

This issue of the Newsletter profiles ICSW activities in the Latin America and the Caribbean region. A range of issues related to the social protection of older persons, including health care services and the sustainability of pension systems figured prominently at the international conference organized by ICSW in cooperation with Dirección de Información y Defensa de los Afiliados (DIDA) on 29-30 November 2017 in Santo Domingo. We present a brief description of the discussions and conclusions of the Conference. The Newsletter also highlights a book on the situation of older persons in Latin America.

The feature article is devoted to issues of early childhood development in Argentina in the context of achieving the SDGs.

Sergei Zelenev, ICSW Executive Director and Editor of the Global Cooperation Newsletter.

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ICSW and partners convene the Conference on social protection of older persons in Latin America.



The international conference convened in Santo Domingo on 29-30 November focused on a range of options in Latin America and the Caribbean concerning social protection policies designed for older persons. Apart from the hosts—participants from the Dominican Republic, who represented various branches of the government as well as non-governmental organizations, the speakers came from several other countries in the region -- Mexico, Colombia and Uruguay, as well as from regional organizations (PAHO). The issues on the agenda included the demographic transition, the rights of older persons, the sustainability of social security arrangements, health care policies for the aged and other matters that are important in the context of the ageing process in the region.

Underscoring the significance of demographic change and a number of challenges stemming from the growing number of older persons, **Nelsida Marmolejos**, DIDA Director and regional president of ICSW for the Latin American region drew the attention of the participants to the increased life expectancy in the region owing to the

improvements in health care and lower fertility. She emphasized the need to better inform older persons of all options available to them, as well as the need to provide legal assistance to the elderly in defending their rights.



In her introductory remarks, **Eva Holmberg-Herrstrom**, President of the ICSW, said that ageing and related policies represent an important part of ICSW activities around the world. People in many countries where we are working see ageing issues as crucial contemporary issues, given that the world population is ageing. ICSW raises its voice against age discrimination and rejects ageing stereotypes, in which older persons are depicted in negative terms, as a burden to society. Older persons are very active and fully integrated in many countries; they are seen as a source of wisdom and experience. Abuse and violence against older persons must be made punishable by law everywhere. She referred to her native country Sweden as an example of progressive attitudes towards older persons, with independence and “ageing in place” as the norm, with national policies supporting active ageing and general well-being.

Mirtha Sosa Crevoisier, Vice-President of ICSW, spoke at length about the opportunities and challenges of ageing in

the region. She draw examples from her native country Uruguay to provide vivid illustrations of the active role that older citizens play in society. She emphasized the important role played by social protection in her country in ensuring health coverage and providing basic income.



Sergei Zelenev, Executive Director of ICSW, underscored that the dignity of older persons must be an important consideration in all discussions on ageing. Human dignity has long been recognized as a key UN principle for older persons. Apart from its moral connotations, it is also a legal principle at the core of all major human rights documents. The adoption of Agenda 2030 created a new momentum in promoting the dignity and worth of older persons. Universal social protection, one of the key goals of ICSW, remains an important priority for national action; it facilitates the realization of basic rights and is vital for upholding the dignity of all members in society, including the elderly. The speaker also covered such issues as the inclusion, participation and empowerment of older persons, outlining specific measures required for such purposes so as to improve the plight of older persons. A gender dimension, with women often bearing the brunt of double discrimination -- as women and as older

persons—must also not be overlooked in all discussions on ageing.

The participants also discussed at length issues relating to pension reform, the provision of social services, health care and other matters pertinent to ageing policies.

The SDGs and early childhood in Argentina

By Gala Díaz Langou and Florencia Caro Sachetti

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Recently, Argentina has made progress in terms of regulations and social policies that prioritize early childhood. In 2016, the National Government highlighted the need to design policies that focus on families with young children, and in that context it

developed the National Plan for Early Childhood, which seeks to expand the supply of childcare and early education services. However, significant challenges persist. It is imperative to reduce inequities so that children can effectively exercise their rights regardless of the socioeconomic and labour status of the family, and the place where they are born and raised.

One of the main obstacles in that process is the lack of follow-up, monitoring and evaluation in policy implementation. Against that backdrop, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which Argentina committed along with other UN members in 2015, offer a unique opportunity for advancement.

This article evaluates the degree of achievement of the SDGs related to early childhood that Argentina has adapted to its national context, monitoring different indicators. The aim is to describe Argentina's situation, the existing regulations and the policies implemented, and to provide recommendations that can contribute to the attainment of the SDGs.

The importance of early childhood

Early childhood, defined as the period that goes from pregnancy to four years old, is a crucial stage for the physical, cognitive and emotional development of young people. All children have the right to achieve the full development of their capabilities; yet in Argentina, families with children exhibit the highest levels of poverty. Prioritizing early childhood is the best decision that a country can take, for it makes it possible to achieve equity and efficiency simultaneously. That has a positive impact on the future of children and on society as a whole. Several arguments support that view.

First and foremost, as stated in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child

(1959) and the subsequent UN Convention (1989), all children have the right to achieve the full development of their potentialities. That requires that adults ensure children's access to their rights. States must be the ultimate guarantors of the fulfilment of those rights.

Second, neuroscience highlights the importance of the first years of life and the prenatal phase in brain development: during this period, 40% of an adult's mental capabilities are attained (Araujo y López-Boo, 2010). Children need a stimulating and stress-free environment, which implies quality care, nutrition and motivation.

Third, early childhood issues are also connected with the gender agenda, as children are in great need of care and that is mostly performed by women. It is therefore essential to analyse the way in which the supply of care services is structured and the alternatives for women to participate in the labour market and access social rights (Faur, 2009).

Moreover, investments in early childhood prove to be highly cost effective, in terms of their high returns for society, as well as for the cost that insufficient investments entail: studies estimate that US\$ 1 invested has a return of up to US\$ 17 (UNICEF, 2010), while the lack of adequate investment could entail a global cost of \$1 trillion annually (Barnett, 2009). Lastly, investing in early childhood is also relevant from a demographic point of view, as Argentina is currently in the midst of the window of demographic opportunity, characterized by a low dependency ratio, and that will last for only 30 more years (Filgueira and Aulicino, 2015). Once that period is over, elderly people will represent a bigger share of the population and that will have significant economic and fiscal implications.

Argentina's Situation in Early Childhood with regard to selected SDGs

For the period 2015-2019, the government has established ending poverty as one of its key priorities and, in line with that, Argentina has subscribed to a voluntary review on the 2030 Agenda in 2017. The National Government produced a report, which highlights the targets to be emphasized and establishes a baseline for the indicators. This article analyses Argentina's performance on SDGs 1, 2, 3 and 5 in the context of early childhood and whether the level of compliance of those goals is in line with the existence of social protection floors.

The indicators proposed by the UN are examined and contrasted with the data available for Argentina. That task introduces a big challenge, since the credibility and legitimacy of national statistics were severely compromised during the previous government (IMF, 2013) and that hinders the strengthening of a long-term evaluation policy (Aquilino, 2015).

The voluntary review of the 2030 Agenda can provide an important opportunity for the country to develop an effective information system, strengthening the quality of available data for monitoring and evaluation, both at the national and the sub-national levels. A multidimensional and coordinated approach in setting criteria and the design of data collection would be an essential step for monitoring progress on the SDGs.

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Since 2003, Argentina has experienced a significant reduction in poverty levels, yet that declining trend has been reversed in recent years, as poverty rates have increased since 2012. Additionally, the

national rates hide important regional disparities.

The "infantilization" of poverty has been a disturbing trend: while moderate and extreme poverty affected 27.7% and 6.1% of the total population in 2017 respectively, poverty levels for children aged 0 to 4 were much higher -- 39.4% and 11.9% respectively. The same trend is observed in the indicator of Unsatisfied Basic Needs, which reflects deprivation levels based on dimensions other than income.

During the period of declining poverty, there were significant changes in social policy. Previously restricted to workers in the formal sector of the economy, since the dawn of the 2000s social protection schemes have been expanded to other sectors of the population. In 2016, 69.3% of children and teenagers benefited from some kind of social protection (Presidencia de la Nación, 2017).

However, in 2011 more than 12% of the total population under 18 years of age was eligible but did not receive any type of budget transfers (ENAPROSS I), providing a vivid illustration of the fact that coverage was not universal. Social protection coverage differs substantially across regions and even within families, as there are households in which only some children receive transfers.

A key social protection instrument introduced during the last decade was the Universal Child and Pregnancy Allowances, conditional cash transfers (CCT) created in 2009 to address poverty and its inter-generational transmission based on the equal rights of children. Yet while more than 3.9 million children received the transfer in August 2017, around 1 million could have benefited but were not reached.

Thus, in spite of the progress made on social development, gaps persist: a

significant share of the population lives in poverty, and that proportion is higher for families with children. In addition, while social protection coverage has expanded, it is not yet universal.

As it stands, the cash transfer regime is prone to two major weaknesses. On the one hand, it is fragmented, as the different types of transfers depend on the labour condition of adults, instead of on the rights of children and teenagers. On the other hand, it is inequitable, as the amounts received by the beneficiaries can be regressive and the criteria to grant them is heterogeneous. To move forward, some policy measures could be introduced to improve cash transfer coverage.

To begin with, it is vital to reach all the households with children that meet the CCTs' eligibility criteria. Additionally, the amount of the grants should be modified to make the system more progressive. Lastly, it is necessary to rethink the different co-responsibilities required for the granting of contributory and non-contributory transfers, as they negatively affect the equity of the transfer regime.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Inadequate nutrition is the result of social, economic and environmental factors, and it can have a long-lasting impact on people's health and development. That effect is particularly significant in early childhood. In Argentina, malnutrition has increasingly become a concern, with wider prevalence in the most vulnerable sectors of society.

The National Survey of Nutrition and Health (2005) revealed that 1.3% of children of 6-60 months old suffered from wasting and 8% of children were shorter than could be normally expected. Both conditions were more prevalent for children living in extreme poverty, and

disparities were significant at the regional level. Regarding overweight, 10.4% of children under 5 years of age suffered from obesity, and that was more prevalent among the non-poor.

Malnutrition, not necessarily related to socio-economic conditions, has become a serious issue across the country, and its impact can be especially significant in early childhood. It is vital to develop strategies to promote healthy food choices and physical education at schools, so that healthy habits are encouraged from an early age. Moreover, industry regulations and incentives should be provided to foster the production, availability and consumption of healthy food products.

Given its key role in children's health and development, the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for babies up to 6 months old should also be underscored, together with complementary breastfeeding for children up to 2 years of age.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages

Over time, substantial progress has been made in increasing life expectancy, preventing avoidable deaths and diseases, and improving well-being for all. Yet a closer look on the situation for children and pregnant women reveals there are still many challenges ahead.

First, Argentina failed to comply with only one of the Millennium Development Goals, namely, no. 5, which called for a 75% reduction in the maternal mortality rate. In 2015, 3.9 women died per 10,000 live births. Although the national rate is below the current SDG target for 2030 (7 deaths per 10,000 births), ten provinces were above that level in 2015.

Regarding infant mortality, the ratio registered a remarkable drop between 1990 and 2015, from 25.6 to 9.7 deaths per 1,000 births, yet it also shows notable regional differences. A declining trend can also be seen in the mortality of children under 5 years of age: it fell from 19.3

deaths per 1,000 births in 2000 to 12.6 in 2014.

Another vital step towards ensuring children and maternal well-being is to guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health services. Data from the Ministry of Health (2015) shows that there is widespread use of contraceptive methods among women of reproductive age: in 2013, more than 81% declared that they use some type of birth control. Nonetheless, access to free contraception is limited, and the women's level of material deprivation and education seem to be associated with different degrees of awareness about birth control.

Teenage pregnancy also remains a problem. For the 10-14 year-old group, it has fallen slightly from 1.8 in 1990 to 1.6 in 2015, with some fluctuations in between. In 2015, 15% of live births were from mothers under 20 years of age, and this age group registered the highest proportion of unintended pregnancies (68.1%).

Finally, access to health insurance is vital for ensuring the well-being of all. The Argentinian State provides universal healthcare coverage, and a high share of the population resorts to alternative healthcare providers. In 2016, 70% of the total population had some healthcare provider other than public services; yet that share dropped to 58% for early childhood, and there are remarkable discrepancies based on economic status.

A key policy aimed at improving access to universal healthcare coverage is *Plan Sumar*, which reaches 20% of the population. One of its main goals is to reduce maternal and child morbidity and mortality. In 2017, 15% of *Plan Sumar* beneficiaries were children under 5 years of age, although there were huge regional differences. That programme is part of the Universal Healthcare Coverage, a strategy that seeks to formalize access to public

health services and with which the National Government intends to reach the entire population by 2030.

The Universal Child and Pregnancy Allowances also play a role in improving children's well-being; a portion of the transfer is conditional on providing proof of health checks and vaccinations.

In order to address infant and maternal health, it is necessary to create a national strategy for pregnant women, childbirth and the care of new-borns. *Plan Sumar* has been an important step, as it provides medical care for pregnant and postpartum women and children. Expanding Universal Child and Pregnancy Allowances coverage could also improve children's well-being.

As for sexual and reproductive health, it is of utmost importance to raise awareness of the need to prevent and reduce unintended teenage pregnancies. Enhancing sex education and improving access to contraceptive methods and sexual and reproductive healthcare services is vital for that purpose. In addition, policies need to be strengthened in order to prevent sexual violence and abuse and to provide effective access to the termination of pregnancy for cases where it is legally allowed. The National Plan for Unintended Teenage Pregnancy can also become an essential tool for addressing those issues.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

In recent years, the gender agenda has gained significant momentum in Argentina, yet the country still has a long way to go. As cultural norms have historically considered children to be their mothers' responsibility, progress in gender equality can have significant implications for children, especially during their first years of life.

Improving access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services is an essential facet of the problem. In addition to the points covered for SDG 3, Argentina has adhered to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and it has also adopted laws on Humanised Childbirth, a National Programme for Sexual Health and Responsible Parenthood and Comprehensive Sexual Education. Additionally, the National Institute for Women was established to promote gender equality.

Female poverty is the counterpart of the infantilization of poverty: households with more children are proportionately more frequently female-headed. One of the reasons is the unequal distribution of the child-raising and care work between genders. That has an impact on women's possibilities to access and stay in the labour market, which hinders poverty alleviation.

In 2013, official estimates revealed the disproportionate burden of care and unpaid domestic work borne by women compared to men. While 88.9% of women stated they were involved in such tasks, only 57.9% of men did. Moreover, women spent on average 6.4 hours per day on domestic chores, almost twice as much as their male counterparts (3.4 hours). Even when women's working hours increase, their participation in unpaid work does not decrease, while the opposite is observed for men.

Against that backdrop, an adequate and sufficient provision of care services must be ensured. In 2016, the National Plan for Early Childhood was designed, aimed at expanding and improving the supply of caregiving services. Yet with regard to 'time to care', policy is lagged behind: the parental leave regime depicts a clear gender imbalance, as fathers have only two days of leave and there is no parental leave. Additionally, access to the leave

regime is conditional on the socio-economic situation of parents.

While one sees an increasing presence of gender issues on the agenda, active policies are needed to ensure that the issue moves from words to concrete action. In addition to guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights for women, care policies are vital. Providing access to quality care and education services for early childhood can contribute to children's well-being and gender equality, as it facilitates women's insertion in the labour market, and it can thus impact on gender equality, poverty and economic growth.

Another key measure is the gradual reform of the maternity and paternity leave regime so as to make it universal, equitable and co-parental. It is essential to increase the length of the paternity leave and create a parental leave, with incentives for fathers to take it, in order to redistribute domestic and care work more evenly between men and women. Additionally, a new regime needs to bear in mind various family conformations and the extension of the benefit to informal workers.

Finally, it is crucial to carry out periodic time-use surveys and measure and evaluate the contribution of care and domestic activities to the national economy. The visibility of such work turns out paramount for the proper design of public policies and strategies that address the unequal distribution of unpaid work and for improving gender equality.

Final remarks

Despite the progress made regarding the well-being of the vulnerable groups, rights are still not guaranteed for all. Owing to the need to leave no one behind, it is necessary to focus on the universalization and progressivity of social policy, so that

everyone can effectively exercise their rights. The infantilization of poverty highlights the need to put a particular emphasis on early childhood.

While different policies have been implemented, statistical deficits and the lack of monitoring and evaluation in policy implementation create obstacles hindering the fulfilment of children's rights. In that context, Argentina's voluntary review on the 2030 Agenda presents a key opportunity to advance on data production and policy follow-up. This article seeks to contribute to that advancement by analysing the baseline, tracking progress and recommending measures for the achievement of the SDGs related to early childhood.

It is essential to stress the need to ensure social protection floors for all, as they provide an effective and useful framework that enables the fulfilment of human rights. All children need to be guaranteed a universal basic income that allows them to access essential goods and services, regardless of the socio-economic situation of their family. It is critical to improve coordination between the various government sectors and levels, create partnerships with the private sector and civil society, generate comprehensive information systems, and implement progressive and sustainable financing structures. Only with a holistic, multidimensional and coordinated approach will be possible to meet the SDGs and contribute towards building strong, resilient societies.

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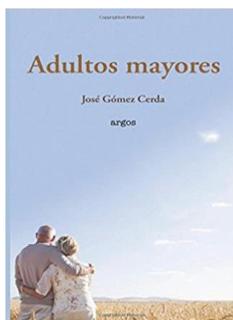
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SENIOR CITIZENS in LATIN AMERICA¹

By José Gómez Cerda



I would like to present to the readership of ICSW Global Cooperation Newsletter my book called **Los Adultos Mayores**.

People over 60 years old in Latin America and the Caribbean are, in line with the UN definition, considered older adults. Pensioners and retirees also fall into this category, although in some countries it covers groups such as military, teachers and civil servants --even when they under the age of 60.

In this book I deal with the situations that older adults may face in life -- in such areas as aging, health, nutrition, pensions, violence and abuse, sex and population. In the productive phase of life we pay taxes on everything we buy, whenever we make an economic transaction. Actually, we spend our lives paying to governments. That's why when we reach an older age, we can expect a refund of what we have paid; therefore one can say that pensions and retirement are not gifts from governments, but a return of a part of our contributions to the economy.

The digital version of the book has several videos, which help to better understand each of the topics covered, using sight and sound to illustrate each of the topics.

The book begins by discussing various topics related to older adults, aging, the health of older adults, older adults and nutrition, pensioners, and the abuse and mistreatment of older adults.

Law 87-01 of the Dominican Republic establishes a series of services to be provided by the social security system for pensioners and retirees, such as orientation, adaptation and education programs through the media; occupational therapy, housing, social clubs, special incentives for recreational, educational, sports and cultural activities.

The rights of older persons are also discussed.

¹Los Adultos Mayores, by Jose Gomez Cerda, Editorial Argos. Santo Domingo, 2015

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