

# 18. Children and Youth

## → MANDATE

*At the Quebec City Summit in 2001, the leaders of the Americas recognized that the development, protection and participation of the region's children and youth are essential for ensuring that they reach their full potential and addressed the issue in various areas of the Summits of the Americas. The Action Plan's section on Children and Youth calls for the convening of conferences to study the well-being of children and youth in the Americas, and addressed the problem of international parental child abduction. They also recognize the roles of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Inter-American Children's Institute (IACI) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in the promotion of the rights of children and youth.*

Countries have been tasked with developing and implementing inter-sectoral policies and programs to protect the rights of children and youth, and to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of these rights. To monitor the well-being of children, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) examined the indicators of chronic malnutrition in its report on the Social Panorama of Latin America: 2002-2003. Over the past decade, the percentage of children who were underweight fell from 13%-14% to 8%-9%, while chronic malnutrition declined from an average of 23%-24% to 18%-19%. These are good health trends. However, figures also indicate that the number of cases of stunted growth remains high in many countries. Over 20% of children under the age of

five have low height-for-age in Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, rural areas of Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru. Only three countries—Chile, Costa Rica, and Trinidad and Tobago—had low (5% or less) rates of chronic child malnutrition. The seriousness of this condition lies in the fact that the cumulative effects of inadequate nourishment and a lack of nutrients during the most critical years in a child's physical and psychomotor development, are largely irreversible.

PAHO assists countries in strengthening and implementing public policies to ensure the well being and integral development of children and adolescents. One initiative is the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) strategy, which



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trains health workers on prenatal care and treatment of children in 17 countries in the region with high infant mortality rates. According to PAHO, the program has already saved tens of thousands of lives.

In addition, PAHO assists in the development and implementation of programs to improve the provision of social and institutional support for the comprehensive health and growth of adolescents. Their work includes the development of national adolescent health programs and advocacy on behalf of, and in conjunction with, adolescents themselves, to promote healthy environments and lifestyles for youth.

One of the mechanisms created by PAHO for youth and adults is a project called ADOLEC/BIREME, located at [www.adolec.org](http://www.adolec.org), which offers people interested in adolescent health reports, articles, research results and experiences in a virtual library on Health. Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua have web pages and interactive forums for youth.

A Round Table on the legal status and human rights of children and adolescents

under the inter-American system gathered more than one hundred judges, prosecutors, lawyers, legislators, and academics from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay in Montevideo, Uruguay, this past May 8th, 2003. The meeting was held in light of the "Consulted Opinion OC-17/2002" —released by the Inter-American Court on August 28, 2002 as a result of the petition of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR)—addressing the "Human rights and Juridical Condition of Children." The Inter-American Children's Institute (IACI) gave technical support in response to the Inter-American Court's request. This Round Table provided training to those involved in administering justice, following the obligations outlined in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* as specified by the Quebec City Summit mandate.

According to the 18 National Reports submitted to the Summit Implementation and Review Group (SIRG), as of July 2003, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay had reported on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, la Red de Información Jurídica (RIJ) produced an annex, Systematization of International and National Norms on the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents in South American Countries, which provides the detailed incorporation of the rights of children and youth in their national legislation ([www.cajpe.org.pe/rij/](http://www.cajpe.org.pe/rij/)). The IACI also developed a prototype of public policies that greatly affect children as well as a manual for their application.

In the fulfillment of the Quebec City-Summit mandate to work to reduce cases of international child abduction, the Inter-American Children's Institute (IACI) organized a Governmental Meeting of Experts on International Abduction of Minors by one of their parents, which took place in Montevideo, Uruguay on August 12-13, 2002. The meeting examined the international enforcement of regulatory instruments related to the international abduction of minors by one of their parents, and carried out an analysis of

## PROGRESS

*The International Labor Office (ILO) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union produced a handbook called "Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor: A practical guide to ILO Convention No. 182," which highlights a program developed by the non-governmental Organization (NGO) Casa de la Esperanza in Panama City and Colon City, Panama. This NGO has an integrated program for children and parents aimed at providing them with nutrition and primary health care, educational programs for children, and technical training for adults and adolescents to enhance their capacity to earn incomes. La Casa de la Esperanza works in cooperation with various government agencies and several organizations which offer social services. This network facilitates the access of children and their parents to a wide range of support services.*

the current status of this phenomenon in the Americas. (www.iin.oea.org)

The State of the Children's Report by UNICEF notes that "the goal for children and young people is not simply to increase their participation but to optimize their opportunities for meaningful participation" in all areas of life (www.unicef.org). Recent research by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) demonstrates that youth involved in volunteering are more likely to become active citizens through voting, participating in civic groups, and giving philanthropically. They also have been found to have higher educational and economic achievement rates, and are 50 percent less likely to use drugs, abuse alcohol, or drop out of school. Public and private youth services and conservation groups have been set up in countries including Brazil, Chile and Mexico. Other countries such as Argentina, Colombia and the United States are using service learning as a principal element of education reform, to link academic goals to hands-on community-based learning.

#### CHALLENGES

One of the major challenges in the Hemisphere includes combating the worst forms of child labor. Effective national plans for combating child labor include: sensitizing public opinion, legislation, enforcement, education, and support for the children and their families. The ILO Handbook, also states that national programs, and scattered and isolated actions may have little impact, and may be counter-productive. The ILO recommends combating child labor by including it as a central feature of a country's overall development policy and objective.



The Inter-American Children's Institute (IACI) outlines various challenges in which it focuses its work, including better systematization of country reports to the Follow-Up Committee on the Children's Rights, coordination of actions in favor of youth and a national youth system in all Member States, particularly for cases related to youth and adolescents that involve multiple countries in the region, such as:

- Illegal abduction of minors by one of their parents
- International Adoption
- Kidnapping of children and adolescents
- Trafficking of children and adolescents
- Commercial and non-commercial sexual exploitation of children
- Violations of children and adolescent rights when one of their parents is in a different country

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