



What do girls and boys from Latin America and the Caribbean have to say to the G20 leaders

Summary of regional consultations with children for the G20 Brazil 2024





Introduction

This document presents an analysis of consultations with children and adolescents¹ aged 11-17 years in nine countries in the Latin American region. Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil, between september and October 2024, in the context of the G20 meeting in Brazil in 2024. Their testimonies reflect the profound inequalities they face in their communities, particularly in areas such as poverty and hunger, access to education and healthcare, the effects of climate change and gender-based violence.

Through their voices, it highlights the differentiated effects of these challenges on girls, who are often more affected by structural and cultural barriers that limit their opportunities for development. The document also compiles recommendations addressed to governments, proposing inclusive and sustainable policies that promote gender equality, child safety and social justice throughout the region.

¹ A total of 964 girls (658) and boys (301) aged 11 to 17 years participated in the consultations, complemented by 24 interviews with girls and boys aged 11 to 17 years.

Poverty and hunger

Poverty impacts children and adolescents in their communities in unique and profound ways, affecting their development, education, health and overall well-being. From their testimonies, children and adolescents highlight how **poverty** intensifies gender inequality, especially limiting opportunities for girls and increasing the risk of violence, exploitation and early marriage. Children and adolescents identify unemployment and lack of resources as the leading cause of poverty, 34% and 33%, respectively. Likewise, **41% of the children commented that they are not sure that other children in their communities have access to three meals a day.**

As Ashly Yajaira, 12 years old, from Honduras, comments:

“Many girls live on the streets and take advantage of this situation in terms of abuse, rape, family disintegration is also different for girls because they become housewives and raise their siblings, they get together with a man at an early age, they work and their efforts are not valued equally, they are not paid the same”.

Differentiated impact on Education and Labor

- In the case of access to education, 43% of children and adolescents consider that not all children in their community have the same opportunities to go to school.
- Girls report dropping out of school due to domestic responsibilities and lack of support to continuing their studies, a barrier that is particularly severe in low-income families. *“Girls stay at home helping out, unlike boys who have more opportunities to work and continue studying”* (Dévorah, 14 years old, Peru).
- In communities where informal jobs predominate, girls are more exposed to risks of exploitation and human trafficking due to stereotypes and job insecurity: *“The available jobs accept fewer women and sometimes hide trafficking risks”* (Adolfo, 17 years old, Peru).

Exposure to Violence and Risk of Early Marriages

- Violence and child marriage are recurring issues, particularly in rural areas. *“In my community there are cases of early unions due to the dependency generated by poverty and stereotypes”* (Minerva, 17 years old, Peru).
- Poverty aggravates vulnerability to violence in public spaces, where girls suffer harassment and physical violence, particularly in marginalized urban areas: *“Girls are more susceptible to violence; menstrual poverty also limits their participation”* (Karen, 17, Brazil).

Limited Access to Health Services and Menstrual Hygiene Products

- 32% of girls and adolescents have only occasionally had access to menstrual hygiene products and 4% have never had access. Menstrual poverty poses a significant barrier for adolescent girls, affecting both their health and participation in educational activities.: *“Girls need menstrual products, but access is limited and affects their health”* (Ashley, 17 years old, Ecuador).
- 38% have missed school due to menstruation. This reveals how economic and social barriers disproportionately affect girls and adolescents in health and hygiene issues.
- Access to medical services is also restricted, especially in rural communities or communities far from urban centers, which has a greater impact on girls. *“We have to travel to the city for medical diagnostics; without resources, girls go without care”* (Cielito, 14 years old, Bolivia).

Inequalities in Resource and Food Distribution

- Girls often receive less food in contexts of scarcity, due to gender norms that prioritize feeding men. *“Food is distributed first to the father or brother; girls often suffer from malnutrition or anemia”* (Daphne, 17 years old, Colombia).

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“When there is poverty in a community, girls are more marginalized. They face stereotypes that limit their opportunities, while boys have more freedom to continue their studies or work.” (Maria, 15, Guatemala).

Effects of Climate Change

78% of children believe that climate change can affect their lives. In that sense, children’s responses to questions about climate change reflect both their direct experience with its effects and their perceptions of the responsibility of governments to address it. What the children say offers a window into how they experience this environmental crisis, revealing both shared concerns and perspectives unique to their context.

Their experiences highlight how extreme conditions impact their **education, health, safety and emotional well-being**.

Isolation and limited access to essential services: Children ranked the loss of harvests and food production as the second most critical impact of climate change (35%) and reduced access to water as the fourth (27%). Also, children in the nine countries included in the consultation agreed that they suffer from storms/heavy rains that block access to hospitals, affecting their physical and emotional wellbeing. This generates stress, negative thoughts and episodes of anger, added to the economic instability of their families due to the cancellation of jobs because of bad weather. Dyrón, 14, from Peru said:

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“We are isolated in emergencies... This affects us physically and emotionally. We feel stressed, and the rains make us think negative thoughts.”

- **Impact on education and mental health:** Lack of infrastructure and extreme weather force some schools to leave early due to the unbearable heat. This affects their learning, as they miss classes, which means less preparation for the future. Minerva, 17, from Peru mentioned: *“The heat at school is such that we miss classes... it affects us academically and in preparation for independent living.”*

- **Vulnerability to disease and precarious conditions:** Flooding and water stagnation have increased cases of dengue fever and other diseases. Poor conditions in health centers mean that families, especially girls, face risky situations when seeking treatment. 14 years old Cielito from Bolivia commented that her friend *“had severe dengue fever, but fortunately she was taken in time”*.

- **Increased risk for girls during disasters:** Emergency situations expose girls to increased risk of violence and rape in shelters. This compounds the challenges of safety and access to hygiene, as 16-year-old Karen from Brazil commented: *“In the shelters, which should be safe, there were many cases of harassment and rape... we girls are more exposed at this time”*.

- **Limited adaptation and lack of sustainable policies:** 48% of the children consider that their community, territory or city is not prepared for the impacts of climate change. Young people express the need to implement environmental awareness campaigns and sustainable practices in sectors such as agriculture and livestock. They also highlight the importance of involving children in solutions to preserve the environment. As 13-year-old Belen from Bolivia explained: *“We should implement our ideas... adult-centrism often does not take us into account and remains just a photo.”*

Girls and boys are deeply affected by climate change, and often face additional challenges due to gender inequalities. Their experiences highlight the urgency of inclusive and sustainable policies that consider their well-being and ensure their future in a safe and healthy environment.



Inequality and Gender Violence

Both girls and boys show a clear awareness of gender inequality and the types of violence faced by girls and women in particular. Some relevant points are highlighted below:

Increased exposure of girls and women to violence and exclusion:

- Girls and adolescents express that they feel more exposed to sexual violence and harassment. For example, they mention that *“a woman cannot go out alone in the street very late because of the risks she faces, such as harassment or sexual violence.”*
- Social stereotypes that limit girls’ activities are perceived: *“Because we are women, we are pushed aside because they think we are weak... until now they don’t let us play soccer because it belongs to men”*.
- 17-year-old Lamoni from Brazil comments: *“Girls, in reality, are much more exposed and more harmed by exclusion. A black woman, besides being black, is a woman, and yet she suffers for not being recognized and not being valued. Children also suffer prejudice when they are black because the world is racist, LGBT people also because the world is LGBTphobic.”*

Girls emphasize the complex experiences of discrimination and exclusion they face, which intersect with various identities. Girls’ opinions remind us that struggles for equality must consider the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation and other identities, allowing us to develop more effective and just strategies for the empowerment of all girls and women.

Equal opportunity:

- The girls and boys emphasize the need to educate from childhood on gender equality in schools and at home, so that boys and girls grow up with the idea that they have the same rights and responsibilities.
- Children also point to the importance of women’s participation in the workplace: *“They should accept women in jobs like construction.”*

- Some suggest government measures, such as implementing policies that are actually enforced and laws that ensure equal pay and opportunities.
- 30% of children do not believe that everyone, regardless of sex, gender, race or ethnicity, has the same opportunities in their community and is treated equally, and 53% believe that there is discrimination in their community based on sex, gender, race or ethnicity.
- 21% of children believe that adults and/or authorities are not concerned about discrimination. Subsequently, 32% think that adults are concerned about it, but do nothing about it. And 5% believe that adults and/or authorities themselves discriminate against children.

Empowerment and education:

- They emphasize the importance of providing education and resources to women and girls so that they can be independent and not depend on others to make decisions.
- It highlights the need to “empower girls and women” so that they know their rights and have the confidence to express themselves without fear of being judged.

Challenging gender norms and roles:

- Minerva, 17, from Peru, mentions how gender roles are instilled in them from a young age: ***“We have been deprived of many rights over time.”*** They ask that families and society stop perpetuating these stereotypes.
- Lariely, 17 years old from Brazil mentions: ***“I wish they would listen more to girls, it is not because we are more vulnerable that we have no power and that we cannot be leaders, speak up, be heard, give us space to express ourselves, listen more to girls without wanting to silence us. and encourage respect from an early age to combat machismo and its effects.”***

The voices of girls and boys underscore the need to create safe and equitable spaces for everyone to grow up without the limitations imposed by gender-based violence and harmful gender norms that have been passed down and normalized from generation to generation.

Recommendations to governments from the voices of the children and adolescents of the region



Testimonies from children and adolescents in the region reflect how poverty, climate change and the realities of violence exacerbate gender inequalities, limiting development opportunities for girls and perpetuating social norms and stereotypes that condition them to assume domestic roles from an early age. From their perspectives, it is essential that governments promote policies and programs that address the following key areas:

1. Actions to combat poverty and hunger: The children consulted agree that the main strategies to combat poverty should focus on improving access to employment and financial resources, as well as ensuring a fair distribution of food. These actions would not only alleviate economic deprivation, but would also help reduce the domestic and care burdens that many girls assume in their homes due to lack of resources.

a. Equitable access to education: Education is seen by girls and boys as a fundamental right and a tool for change. Governments are encouraged to establish subsidies and support programs that encourage girls to stay in school, thus providing alternatives that allow them to develop their potential without the limitations imposed by gender stereotypes and domestic roles.

b. Menstrual poverty awareness and support: For many adolescent girls, lack of menstrual hygiene resources limits their participation in school and community. Ensuring access to appropriate hygiene products and menstrual health education is key to reducing inequalities and supporting girls' full participation in their education and social development.

2. Inclusive climate policies with a focus on child safety: Children have shared how climate change impacts their health, education and well-being, especially in disaster situations, where girls face greater risk of violence in shelters. Governments are encouraged to implement inclusive climate change policies, ensure accessible and safe emergency plans for children, and establish educational infrastructures adapted to extreme weather conditions. In addition, it is crucial to encourage the active participation of children and youth in the creation of environmental policies, so that their perspectives are integrated into decision-making.

3. Strengthening gender equality education and violence prevention from childhood: Children highlighted the exposure of girls to gender-based violence and stereotypes that limit their opportunities. Governments should promote gender equality education in schools and in the community from an early age, ensuring that girls and boys know their rights and responsibilities without bias. This would include empowerment programs that provide resources to girls and sensitize boys about respect and equality, thus building a solid foundation for reducing machismo and gender-based violence in future generations.

a. Prevention of early marriages and unions: Girls express concern about child marriage as a form of violence and exclusion. Governments are encouraged to strengthen protection policies and community awareness programs to prevent early unions, promoting a fulfilling childhood free of violence for all girls.





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