

## The 2030 Agenda as a development tool for young people in Argentina

Gabriela Agosto <sup>1</sup>  
Mariano Fontela <sup>2</sup>  
Laila Brandy <sup>1</sup>  
Martín Langsam <sup>2</sup>

**Abstract** *Youth and adolescent populations constitute a critical set in global population. They are important to development agendas not for their quantity, but for other types of problem that favour the intergenerational reproduction of poverty and establish inequality gaps that accentuate processes of “de-institutionalisation” and “de-socialisation” of these populations and others: education systems insufficiently adapted to the current world of work or to the mass schooling of young people from vulnerable households; precarious labour markets, which many young people enter with poor qualifications; or socioenvironmental conditions that severely affect the health conditions of youth in marginal neighbourhoods. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals clearly signal the path forward for coming years, as well as highlighting the need for stronger, more innovative public policies to ensure “that no young people will be left behind”. The 2030 Agenda represents a unique opportunity for the State, private sector, civil society and the international cooperation system to harness positive synergies to improve young people’s quality of life.*

**Key words** *Adolescents, Sustainable development goals, Public policies, Policymaking, Health policies*

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<sup>1</sup> Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales de la Presidencia de la Nación, Argentina. Av. Julio Argentino Roca 782/5° Piso. C1067ABP Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires Pcia. Bs. As. Argentina. gabriela.agosto@politicassociales.gob.ar  
<sup>2</sup> Universidad Isalud. Ciudad Autónoma de Bs. As. Argentina.

## Introduction

Why is it important to address youth problems specifically? Nearly one in five of the world population is from 10 to 24 years old<sup>1</sup>. Despite the aging trend, the youth population will continue to grow in absolute terms in coming decades. While, in the most developed regions, young people are 17% of the population, in less-advanced countries, they account for 32%, which poses distinctive education, health and employment challenges. This population group often receives little attention, while policy makers commonly address the issue of population aging.

In Latin American countries, the outcome of the “window of opportunity” that the demographic transition could represent will depend in part on whether or not young people actually manage to gain greater access to quality education, on whether they have the tools necessary to perform successfully in the labour market and on their physical and mental health. In order to assure greater future wellbeing, more democratic societies and a more equitable and sustainable world, there is a need to push through policies that address youth problems, especially for the most vulnerable.

Some of the features of vulnerability among young people are reflected transversely in economic and social statistics. For example, homicides are the fourth cause of death among young people, while 97% of deaths among youths occur in low- and middle-income countries<sup>2</sup>. Youth population is also characterised by discontinuous labour placement: in Latin America, about 50 million young people from 15 to 24 years old suffer from various different forms of precarious labour relations, and 22 million neither study nor are employed<sup>3</sup>. Public debate about youth tends to include more or less explicitly pejorative references, often ignoring that they and their everyday activities are often fundamental to their households’ strategies<sup>4</sup>. The magnitude of the phenomenon and the inequality with which it is incident on different income quintiles should be reason enough to reconsider the appropriateness of traditionally sectoral education and employment policies.

Similarly, these inequalities are expressed in high rates of morbidity and mortality. Millions of young people in developing countries continue to suffer malnutrition, overweight or obesity, which leaves them more vulnerable to diseases and premature death. The fertility rate among adolescent girls in Latin America is greater than

80 per 1,000 and nearly 50% higher than the world average<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, complications during pregnancy and childbirth continue to be the second cause of death among women from 15 to 19 years old<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the second cause of death among adolescents<sup>7</sup>.

## Youth in Argentina

In Argentina, following the severe socio-economic crisis that began in 2001, the youth issue and precarious labour relations were the central focusses of social concern. Young people’s vulnerability is a source of tension both for social integration and for reproduction of the labour force. The adverse effects of a lack of participation in productive activities have combined with relational isolation to drive social disaffiliation<sup>8</sup>, which, added to exclusion from formal employment, erodes the possibility of personal achievement and reproduces patterns of exclusion across the generations. Guillermo Pérez Sosto and Mariel Romero<sup>9</sup> identify one decisive factor in youth vulnerability: the precarious labour market. In Argentina, at an early age, many young people enter a labour market where, in the 18 to 24 year age group, 59% of jobs are “off the books”<sup>10</sup>. That is why it is necessary to produce input to designing State interventions centred on strategies to reactivate social integration provisions<sup>11</sup>.

The shortcomings in education and the difficulties involved in finding successful placement on the labour market are also associated with problems that condition long-term development. Surveys of illicit substance and alcohol consumption among young people show growth in recent years<sup>12</sup>, while the adolescent pregnancy rate continues high. It is not effective to address young people’s education, labour and health problems by sector approaches; it will take a comprehensive approach to overcome them. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity for concrete action to assure the rights of young people and develop their opportunities and abilities.

## The 2030 Agenda in Argentina

In September 2015 the Republic of Argentina adhered to the international initiative embodied in the United Nations (UN) Organisation Resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. In December that year the recently elected government ratified

the National Social Policy Coordination Council (*Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales*, CNCPS) as the organisation tasked with coordinating application and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. Adoption of the Agenda consisted in a multi-stage process: a) the CNCPS prioritised the international goals in accordance with the “Zero Poverty” goal set by the national government, on the understanding that the latter is inherent to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); b) the SDGs prioritised by the CNCPS were assigned to various ministries and national executive bodies for analysis, review and adaptation; c) a transverse view was adopted: the proposed national goals and indicators were submitted for analysis by the National Institute of Women (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres*, INAM), the National Disability Agency (*Agencia Nacional de Discapacidad*, ANDIS), the National Institute for the Youth (*Instituto Nacional de la Juventud*, INJUVE), the Human Rights and Cultural Pluralism Secretariat (*Secretaría de Derechos Humanos y Pluralismo Cultural*), the National Institute for Indigenous Affairs (*Instituto Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas*) and the National Institute of Statistics and Census Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*, INDEC). In that way, official goals and indicators were obtained for the SDGs in the Republic of Argentina, which were then presented at the UN High-level Political Forum in July 2017.

#### Young people in the framework of the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda includes young people as key actors in the SDGs, in that they can play the role of agents of social change. However, the youth population is still in a position of relative weakness, because it is of little importance in policy discussion and decision-making settings. That is why it is necessary to work to construct spaces and mechanisms to foster youth participation. In that regard, between 2013 and 2015, in collaboration with the UN, the national authorities included young people in consultations to determine the priorities now incorporated into the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, the government of Argentina is conducting awareness-building, capacity-building and diffusion activities to directed to various actors and the general public, to promote the Agenda so that it will be embraced as a commitment by and for all. The SDGs involve establishing long-term goals, making awareness and com-

mitment among young people an indispensable requisite for them to be more fully achieved.

On the other hand, a number of goals were set addressing youth health, education and employability problems. Prominent among them are:

*Goal 1.3:* “...implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”. The national goal proposes to increase the proportion of the population covered by social protection systems, giving special attention to children and youth, by means of a Universal Child Allowance (*Asignación Universal por Hijo*, AUH) and a Universal Pregnancy Allowance (*Asignación Universal por Embarazo*, AUE).

*Goal 4.4.* “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship”. By means of public policies, young people are offered incentives to conclude secondary school and increase their use of information technology.

*Goal 8.6. (adapted)* “By 2020 substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training”, by increasing completion of education and capacity-building to facilitate their incorporation into the labour market.

#### Youth policies in the framework of the 2030 Agenda

Prompted by the 2030 Agenda, the government of Argentina introduced the National Youth Plan (*Plan Nacional de Juventud*, PNJ), which combines efforts among government agencies in areas such as capacity-building in trades and first employment, completion of education, culture and arts policies, initiatives on sports, tourism, prevention of addictions, street situations, reproductive health, civic participation, institutional or school violence among others. The intention is thus, on a comprehensive approach, to promote public policies that will foster young people’s learning and life plans.

Prominent in the PNJ are programmes of the Ministry of Social Development and others: a) “Future Houses” (*Casas del Futuro*), which is designed to point youngsters in situations of vulnerability in new directions: they learn traditional and innovative trades and languages, attend workshops that build on their cultural, musical and artistic talents, with assistance provided by

an interdisciplinary team of experts; b) “Let’s Talk About Everything” (*Hablemos de Todo*): they are offered workshops and capacity-building on topics such as genders and sexualities, problematic consumption, eating behaviour disorders, workplace harassment or mobbing, grooming, violence and bullying and a direct communication channel through a digital platform with information and an online clinic staffed by health professionals; c) Here We Are (*Acá Estamos*): so that they can put their plans into practice, adolescents are followed up through solidarity campaigns in which materials and tools are delivered to clubs, soup kitchens, *murga* street performance groups and other youth groups.

Through the Ministry of Work, Employment and Social Security, the programme Young People with More, Better Work (*Jóvenes con Más y Mejor Trabajo*) offers a series of integrated services and training to help young people enter the labour market, acquire knowledge on trades, conclude their education, and embark on labour activities or individual enterprises.

Meanwhile, the Plan to Reduce Unintended Pregnancy in Adolescence (*Plan de Reducción del Embarazo No Intencional en la Adolescencia*) was launched, among other things: to supply and distribute means of contraception and to provide emergency hormonal contraception; to assure availability and suitable regulation for reversible contraception methods to be provided at health facilities; sexual and reproductive health counselling; distribution of material with useful information for adolescents; capacity-building in comprehensive sexual education for teachers and increased numbers of schools with comprehensive sex advisors; and communication campaigns in digital and mass media.

### Challenges looking to the future

Not only are young people possible agents of change in any society, they are also going through a stage where it is possible to reverse the inequities that condition their future development<sup>13</sup>. To that end, the obstacles to comprehensive social protection must be removed<sup>14</sup> by guaranteeing effective access to quality services that assure decent living and sustainable human development and by introducing a series of legal and policy measures designed to reduce poverty, discrimination and exclusion from the decisions that affect their lives.

Youth policies should be formulated and applied by designing interventions based on

inter-sector collaboration and a transverse approach to rights. There is ample evidence that such interventions are most effective when they go beyond the logic of the isolated individual as the beneficiary of social policy to address problems in subjects’ family and community contexts<sup>15,16</sup>. In the case of a federal government such as Argentina’s, inter-sector approaches pose an additional challenge for the various levels of government and ministerial areas, because of the need for greater degrees of agreement, planning, coordination and dialogue.

This explains the relevance of initiatives in which the State can direct interventions resting on social integration models that go beyond classic sectoral inclusion or placement policies. In such models, the State’s participation is not exclusive of, but rather in cooperation with, intervention by private enterprise and organised civil society. Inclusion policies are intended to broaden access and correct what are considered unfair outcomes, but without altering their causes. Social integration policies, on the contrary, are those that aim to restructure the social functioning that produces those outcomes. In addition, the habitual rationale of inclusion policies is to address problems one by one with specific programmes, while social integration policies aim at joint solutions to the causes of various different problems. Also, people do not integrate into a society in isolation: inclusion may be individual, but integration is effective when it is collective, group- or family-based. A variety of conceptual approaches and empirical investigations all suggest that social integration is leveraged when the most-favoured sectors are compelled to cooperate with the rest to attain their goals together, which is why social integration policies include a dimension of participation and of defragmentation of public space. Also, the proposal of social inclusion is directed exclusively to access for those who are excluded, while social integration comprises not only those who suffer deprivation, but also those who do not: it would be impossible, for instance, to overcome the “problem of poverty” without at the same time solving the “problem of wealth”; it would be illusory to solve “the women’s problem” without at the same time solving “the men’s problem”.

It is generally agreed that social inclusion policies for young people are necessary, but there is insufficient agreement on whether State policies should concentrate solely on that aspect. Inclusion policies assert the parameters of a “normal” society, which set minimum thresholds on what

is to be restituted to those who are excluded, but do not in principle challenge the functioning of that social “normality”, nor the differences produced within it, nor do they analyse the environmental sustainability of everyone’s imitating the lifestyle of the “included” sectors.

Other strategies to reduce inequalities and remove obstacles to development could be added to, and combined with, the plans and programmes mentioned above. For example, education institutions, in addition to their content and methods, could review their rigid regulations on yearly courses and regular attendance, which, in their time, were aligned with a model of adolescent whose only obligation was to attend school, but which are no longer suited to the trajectories of young people who enter and leave unstable labour situations or have to care for children, siblings or ailing relatives, added to which they often form part of single-parent homes or households where many adult members also work in unstable labour situations, meaning that the opportunities to care for other relatives change continually.

Thus, instead of exclusively providing incentives to include young people in schools, new forms of institution need to be found with the flexibility to cater to the different situations involving young people. Another example is the possibility of creating conditions in which schools and premises in the public domain can become free, safe, neighbourhood spaces for recreation, culture or sports activities for adolescents and young people. Another example would be to arrange space for care for the children or siblings of adolescents from low-income families, so that they can attend educational institutions or enter the labour market.

However, the public policy that will contribute most to young people’s social integration will be the one that can give them a vision for the future, one offering guarantees that it is worth having a life plan and devoting themselves to it. In that respect, decent work is considered by most to be the main social organiser, which structures people’s lives and productive years, making it possible to forge solid relational bonds that guarantee full social integration.

### **Collaborations**

For the elaboration of this article, G Agosto and L Brandy developed the general characterization of the problem and the analysis of the main public policies currently being implemented in Argentina, while M Fontela and M Langsam introduced critical references about possible strategies for the approach of the problem.

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Article submitted 10/10/2017

Approved 26/02/2018

Final version submitted 22/05/2018