



COLABORA.Lat

Towards a New Model of
Governance after Covid-19

POLICY BRIEF # 4

COVID-19 AND THE UNPROTECTED YOUTHS IN GUATEMALA

Sofía Montenegro

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Team of collaborators

Editing

Antonella Perini, Ignacio Lara, and Jennifer Cyr

Communication

Aniela Stojanowski

Design

Jacqueline Schneider

Author

Sofía Montenegro is a political scientist by the Universidad Francisco Marroquín (Guatemala). She earned her MA in Public Opinion and Political Behavior from the University of Essex (England). Formerly an intern at J-PAL LAC, she was also a School of Data 2018 fellow. Currently, she works as a teacher and as a social researcher at Diálogos (Guatemala).

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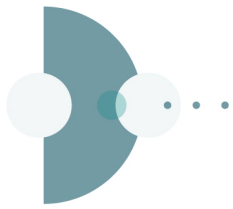
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The Covid-19 pandemic has brought us into uncharted territory. It represents a crisis with health, economic, social, and also political dimensions. Besides, it has exacerbated the inequalities and exclusion suffered by sectors living under conditions of vulnerability. It represents a crisis that has given rise to additional concerns, due to the likely deepening of political discontent and the consolidation of authoritarian practices through the expansion of the Executive Branch's powers and the restrictions of civil rights in a post-Covid-19 scenario.

This reality has shown us that the pandemic poses a challenge to which we cannot respond unilaterally, from the one-sided perspective of a single government or specific community. This is a global challenge with profound impacts on several dimensions of society, as well as differential impacts on the different women and sectors living under more vulnerable conditions. Therefore, it is a challenge that requires a multidimensional solution with an intersectional approach – a solution that is not yet available to us.

This is why we need political practices that promote collective intelligence-oriented collaboration as a way of finding solutions to public challenges, such as the one posed by the pandemic. The premise behind collective intelligence is, precisely, that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something. Translating this fact to the way in which decisions are made in a society represents a significant challenge, and requires collaborative mechanisms involving a variety of actors. It specifically requires collaborative governance.

For this reason, the *Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19* project aims at studying and making recommendations on the governance models that have the greatest potential to respond to convoluted crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. By collecting quantitative and qualitative data in several



Latin American countries, we seek to generate diagnostic and prospective information about the impact of collaboration on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the responses developed to address the numerous problems that have emerged during the pandemic, especially in vulnerable communities.

The project is grounded in the conviction that defining a framework of good practices in governance, inclusion and gender parity will lay the foundations for a new long-term democratic agreement in Latin America.

Antonella Perini, Jennifer Cyr, and Matías Bianchi

Colabora.Lat is driven by an Implementation Council comprising universities and think tanks with experience in research and territorial anchoring in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico.

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COVID-19 AND THE UNPROTECTED YOUTHS IN GUATEMALA

SOFÍA MONTENEGRO

Diálogos (CSO)

The pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Guatemalan youths

Guatemala has one of the youngest populations in Latin America, its average age being 26.5 years old, according to the latest census conducted in 2018. In addition to being a young country, Guatemala is amid an important demographic change. With the onset of a demographic dividend, the percentage of working age population has increased, and the percentage of dependent population (people under 14) has fallen.

This represents an opportunity for the economic growth of a country. However, in order for it to occur, there must exist enabling conditions and, in the case of Guatemala, there remains an important social debt regarding public investment and social protection (PNUD, 2012).



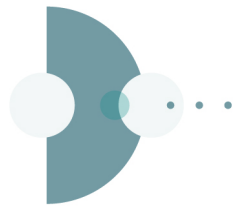
The Covid-19 pandemic has increased social inequalities and unevenly affected vulnerable populations, such as youth, who are going through a decisive life stage in terms of their education and personal growth.

In order to gauge the impact of Covid-19 and fill the existing gaps in official data, a series of semi-structured interviews were held at youth offices and organizations, with a view to detecting what problems were exacerbated as a result of the health crisis, and verify whether the Government gave a prompt and adequate response for Guatemala's youth.

Although obtaining official data is a challenge (for example, owing to the interruption of the National Employment and Income Survey in 2020), the interviews have revealed that Guatemala has seen both regression and infringement of people's rights and in terms of care for their comprehensive health.

Youth problems derived from or exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic

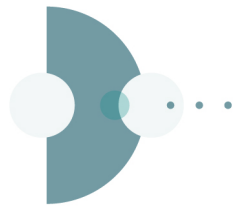
- **Economy.** As regards formal employment, the Youth Advocate of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman pointed to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the youth population. Taking as an indicator the number of people registered with the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS), between March and August, a total 53,000 youth left the Institute, while the number of people over 30 totaled 10,000 (Paredes, 2021). The loss of formal and informal jobs during the lockdown affected youth in particular.
- **Education.** Data on school dropout figures have still not been informed by the Ministry of Education. Nonetheless, according to the director of the Paz Joven organization, the Government owes a debt to youth in the field of education. Before the pandemic, only 2% of youth were studying at secondary and higher



education institutions. The closing of educational establishments made matters worse, because it restricted access to higher education on the part of youth without Internet connection and/or computer equipment, especially in the case of those living in rural areas in the country (Méndez, 2021).

- **Health.** According to Paredes (2021), youth have been the target of hardcore stigmatization both in public discourse and in social imaginary, since they are identified as the main culprits for the spread of the virus. Paz Joven believes that there exist major restrictions on the access to comprehensive healthcare, for instance, when it comes to counseling services for teenagers (Méndez, 2021). In connection with this, an increase is expected in the number of teenage and youth pregnancies.
- **Violence.** Despite the decline in the number of murders during lockdown (there was a 32% decrease), between January and August 2020, reports of domestic violence rose by 26%. The affected were mainly women, which accounted for 84% of the victims (Núñez, 2020). The same study shows that 254 of the 801 reports were made by young women aged 15 to 29 (106 of the reports to the National Civil Police did not account for the women's age).
- **Mental Health.** The Paz Joven volunteer network has registered a decline in the mental health of youth, which arises from the uncertainty the pandemic has brought to their household, along with the lack of contact with friends in other spaces (Méndez, 2021).

However, the information presented on each of these issues does not come from the development of a specific instrument. In light of this, the work that Diálogos will carry out is aimed at analyzing the realities of youth in urban contexts, in order to understand the consequences and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.



How did the Government respond to youth in the face of Covid-19?

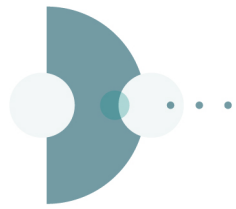
To mitigate the economic impact of lockdown and mobility restriction measures, the Government of Guatemala adopted, in April 2020, a series of Covid-19 emergency financial assistance programs aimed at vulnerable populations.

As for the youth population, none of the emergency programs was aimed at it. Youth were not mentioned, either, in the extensive prioritization criteria set to define the most vulnerable people in the country.

However, youth indirectly became recipients of some of the emergency programs, such as unconditional cash transfers under the Bono Familia relief program, whose roster of beneficiaries included roughly 2.6 million people (around 15% of Guatemala's population). According to Méndez (2021), the assistance received through the Bono Familia program especially served the basic or priority household needs, but not necessarily the needs of youth.

Other actions by the National Youth Council (CONJUVE) focused on providing training through virtual courses, and job fairs organized with the support of the Ministry of Economy. Although the initiatives received support at different levels, the youth organization Paz Joven believes that the Government's actions prioritized an agenda limited to youth employment without considering the effectiveness of the efforts:

All these government programs were strongly focused on these job fairs [...] it seems like the Government is investing a lot in these programs that don't attain the goals they are supposed to, especially when it comes to the youth population. It's not that job fairs are wrong, but they need to be improved so that the beneficiaries, especially the majority of the unemployed youth population, who do not belong to the formal sector, can have access to actual opportunities (Méndez, 2021).



Finally, it is made evident that the Government's attention to youth during the Covid-19 pandemic has been scant and quite negligible in Guatemala. The youth population was not prioritized in the programs or actions aimed at the groups affected by the health crisis. This stems from inefficient government planning at all levels: there are no modernized administrative records, nor is there an efficient bureaucratic system that allows for proper management of public resources to the benefit of the most vulnerable populations. Against the backdrop of these deficiencies, the youth were uncared for and neglected.

Final thoughts

Since before the Covid-19 pandemic, the design of youth policies has been characterized by serious shortcomings, such as a lack of measurable indicators for evaluating the National Youth Policy (2012-2020) which ended in 2020. Given that there was no monitoring or evaluation of the policy's lines of work, it was not possible to measure the benefits to the country's youths in the last eight years.

On the other hand, as part of the updating process for the National Youth Policy, there will be a renewed interest for addressing youth issues. Nevertheless, the interviews with youth organizations reveal little interest on the part of competent authorities and a lack of coordination for several of the actions to be implemented.

The interviews and workshops held with the organizations have revealed a systemic and endemic problem: there exist perverse incentives among different actors, be them international organizations or the bureaucrats responsible for designing public policies. In light of this, new governance approaches will be needed to generate more easily-adaptable proposals for a complex and ever-changing reality, which enjoy a greater degree of acceptability, and which are aimed at meeting the true needs of youth populations in Guatemala.



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