



COVID-19 and the impacts on violence against children

Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

New York, July 2nd, 2020

Good morning everyone,

As a pathfinding country, Colombia share the concern about the increased of violence against children during COVID-19. In the first month and a half from the isolation measures implemented since March, our Family Welfare Institute received almost 16.000 reports associated with violence against children.

Violence can manifest in many different ways. Today, I would like to focus on the online risks as now children are spending more time online than ever before. Without forgetting that every time a kid is abused online there is a real kid behind, which we all must do our best to protect.

Due to the pandemic, Colombia implemented distance learning to protect kid's health, but raising huge challenges in terms of children's safety. In a very short period of time teachers, parents and children had to migrate to the digital space, many with little or no knowledge on how it works, even less about its risks.

To address this challenge, the Ministry of ICT, under the spirit of *keeping children informed and empowering them with the skills to use the internet safely*, developed several awareness campaigns to educate parents and children on the main online risks. Since 4 March the Ministry has:

- Created more than 30 tips sheets for parents and children on: how to use internet in a smart way; gaming safely; how to quit an Internet dependency state; how to be safe online and in the real world; 5 things we shouldn't do in social media; and what is sexting and its risks, among others.
- They also launched a miniseries on their YouTube channel called EMIFAN, where a teenage girl faces everyday online experiences such as gaming risks, viral challenges, cyberbullying and sexual exploitation. Using kid's language, the web series intend to prevent violence against children and familiarize them with the online reporting mechanisms.
- At the same time, the Ministry of Education launched a series of webinars to strengthen the capacities of teachers and educators focus on prevention of any forms of violence, including online. They also created a unified system of information on school coexistence in which over 3.000 headmasters can report cases of cyberbullying and other cybercrimes; do follow up and activate routes to approach them.



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Knowing reporting is crucial to protect children's rights, the Family Welfare Institute developed the "My hands teach you" strategy that, deployed mobile teams and units to facilitate reporting and reestablished kid's rights; provide pedagogical elements to improve relationships within the households and promote positive parenting.

Apart from the Police, the ICBF and local helplines, Colombia has a virtual line to protect every child called "TeProtejo" where anyone can anonymously and confidentially report online any situation that affects children. *TeProtejo* existed before COVID-19 but now it is more relevant.

Other stakeholders, such as RedPaPaz, a grantee of the End Violence Partnership, and Telefonica, have been key in strengthening the platform and spread its use.

Colombia's commitment with the prevention of violence against children it's not new. Along the years my country has engage in different initiatives and projects to improve children's quality of life and to protect their fundamental rights.

One of the most recent projects "GIGA", looks forward to map and connect all the schools in the country to provide the students and their surrounding communities with connectivity, the hidden hero of the pandemic and a key factor to recover better and boost economic growth.

Our efforts have been recognized by The Economist Intelligence Unit Index, Out of the Shadows, the one and only ranking that measures countries' response to child sexual abuse and exploitation, including online and the ICT engagement. Colombia was ranked No.6 out of 60 countries.

All these initiatives contribute to create a safer environment for children beyond COVID-19.

All of us gather here today know violence against children is preventable. It is now time to foster cooperation between all the stakeholders and translated into real actions. My government is determined to work together and build alliances that allow us to tackle the challenges to leave no child behind. Events like the one today are the best examples of what our joint efforts can achieve.

Thank you all