# YOUNG PEOPLE AND COVID-19:
## CHALLENGES AND RESILIENT PRACTICES DURING THE PANDEMIC



## Key Points

The emergency caused by the spread of COVID-19 has put a series of issues in the spotlight: the lack of information about the situations of women and young people, gender inequality, and how economic, social, and health measures affect people. There is an urgent need to educate people on the realities experienced by women and young people so that their attention is tended to in institutional response measures to the pandemic.

Mental health, education, and food security are at the center of most of the challenges young people have experienced during the pandemic as a result of the physical isolation measures that have been put in place.

Despite the adversities posed by the pandemic and the measures being taken by authorities, young people, their families, and communities have sought the assistance of others and depended on solidarity strategies to mitigate the impact of the situation.

Recommendations for local and national authorities are based on the recognition of human rights and sustainable development goals as guiding beacons for action in mental health, education, food security, migration, livelihood, health, sexuality and reproduction, security and protection, mobility, domestic coexistence and early marriage; issues explored and addressed by research participants.

Participants provided proposals and advice to other young people and communities on what coping mechanisms have worked for them in addressing the pandemic's challenges.

*You can read our brief assessment "Understanding Teenagers' and Young Women's Resilient Experiences and Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Colombia" at www.profamilia.org.co.*

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## How are teenagers and young women living during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic poses a health, humanitarian and economic crisis, with a long-term projected impact, especially for young people who make up 25.2% of the population in Colombia.  This issue is exacerbated by multiple or overlapping inequalities, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, sexual orientation, among others.

For this reason, Profamilia, in alliance with Partnership Maternal Newborn and Child Health, conducted a brief assessment of the challenges, services, and practices to overcome these challenges with 23 teenagers aged 15-19 and women aged 20-29. The objective of the research was to assess the needs, experiences, and resilient practices of teenagers and young women during the COVID-19 crisis in Colombia, to substantiate promotional activities and key policy responses with specific relevance to women, teenagers, and young people. The analysis of these experiences has produced evidence that allows for the creation of useful recommendations for advocacy in health and other issues relevant to young people. Such recommendations will facilitate their empowerment for the promotion of accountability processes and citizenship social control in the future.

> "My mom gives the children food and some seeds to plant at the reservation, so that they can cover their basic home needs; she also encourages them to go into the garden and grow food"
> **Camila, 18 years old**

### Significant challenges faced by young people

Interviewed teenagers and young women further described the challenges this pandemic has posed to their mental health, education, and food security. In particular, they reported mood swings due to isolation, difficulties in educational access and quality due to virtualization, and difficulties in purchasing food due to rising prices and lack of money.

Interviewees also mentioned challenges concerning their migration experiences, livelihoods, sexual and reproductive health, and security of their environment. They reported losing their formal jobs, being unable to work informally, and having difficulty making ends meet for basic needs such as food, water, electricity, and housing due to their current working status. They also reported difficulty in accessing products, such as contraceptives or menstrual health supplies and services, such as specialist appointments.

Although they were mentioned less frequently, interviewees also identified challenges in terms of keeping a peaceful coexistence at home and mobility. They mentioned increased communication and mistreatment problems among household members and a sense of lesser safety caused by having fewer people on the streets.

> "(...) But, you know, online education is a privilege. If we put it in practical terms, it's a privilege because not everyone can even have a basic tool like a computer or have access to the Internet" **Adriana, 22 years old.**



## What can communities and authorities do?

This is a crucial time worldwide. All COVID-19 preparation and response plans must take into account the experiences and any direct and indirect impact on young people. In particular if they are in vulnerable situations or are part of historically discriminated groups. National and local authorities must adopt measures to mitigate their needs and strengthen their welfare systems, using a human rights approach and following the 2030 Agenda. Communities can learn from resilience practices and recommendations made to them by young people to address individual and community challenges.

> "There are days when I wake up a little stressed, and I don't know why, the stress, the quarantine, the infected people who can't get out might contribute to that "
> **Lucia, 28 years old.**

## What do young people recommend to the community?

## What should local and national authorities do?

### Mental Health

Establish routines at home, with defined schedules and spaces.

Enjoy personal hobbies and learn new skills.

Use of ICTs to receive support or learn.

Expand and diversify technological attention and service channels for the whole population, taking into account the needs of young people.

Increase the dissemination of information on mental health services and tools for emotional self-care tailored for young people.

Allow for recreation, entertainment and culture during isolation.

### Education

Continue class routines with personal preparation of adequate times and spaces.

Combine virtual education with the use of ICTs.

Adhere to safe strategies for the re-opening of schools.

Diversify the use of media for educational continuity, including television and radio, with differential approaches.

Consider the Internet as a public service.

Implement teacher training on online education methodologies Prioritize strategies against school and educational dropout during the pandemic.

### Food Security

Be more supportive and promote solidarity with people in need during the pandemic.

Eat well, with regular hours and balanced products.

Learn about and try to plant food in homes.

Increase money and in-kind transfers to the poorest and most at-risk population.

Maintain agricultural supply chains, controlling excessive price increases, and strengthening local producer markets.

Promote solidarity, urban agriculture, and self-sufficiency.

Disseminate information campaigns on healthy food and proper nutrition.

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### Migration

Be sympathetic to the reality and circumstances in which migrants live.

Promote solidarity with migrants.

Adopt widely advertised campaigns against xenophobia.

Guarantee access to health care for migrants, avoiding obstacles due to their migratory status.

Include migrants in response and attention plans.

### Livelihood

Save as a family and individually.

Create and implement entrepreneurial initiatives to generate income, emphasizing the use of ICTs.

Create agreements to reduce debts and other financial commitments.

Ensure the fulfillment of basic needs and support household consumption through money or in-kind transfers.

Support the most vulnerable worker groups with training, boosting innovation and entrepreneurship

Promote the implementation of a universal basic income, gradually adapted during the emergency with sustainability and extension in the future.

### Health

Raise awareness on the magnitude of the pandemic and the responsibility that we as individuals have to stop its spread.

Respect isolation measures by using and complying with all biosecurity elements and protocols at home and when going out or using public transport.

Acknowledge the essential nature of sexual and reproductive health services during periods of emergency.

Ensure access to menstrual health products, contraceptives, and medications for the most vulnerable and income affected population.

Carry out sexual education campaigns for the safe enjoyment of sexuality during the pandemic, against gender violence and sexual and reproductive health services.

### Sexual and Reproductive Health

Act with ownership and responsibility, prioritizing self-care, and ensuring the fulfillment of protection measures.

Discuss and develop communication with partners in a constructive way.

Seek professional help and information from safe and reliable sources.

Keep positive communication with the family.

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### Safety and Protection

Comply with quarantine measures and to report events or situations that affect citizen coexistence and put people's rights at risk.

Coordinate actions across all institutions to contain the impact of illegal armed groups in order to eradicate forced recruitment of children and adolescents.

Create and implement an alert system for abuse of authority.

Professionalize, modernize and democratize security services with a human rights approach.

### Transportation

Avoid the use of public transport, only when necessary.

Implement alternative transportation methods such as cycling or walking.

Always use protection and biosafety elements.

Ensure the free circulation of goods and services related to health, public supply, and public services.

Monitor the transport price market, ensuring mobility coverage for people requiring health services.

Use objective criteria, free from categories suspected of discrimination such as sex or gender, when adopting restrictive locomotion measures.

### Coexistence at home

Distribute household tasks equally.

Calmly express feelings and emotions, reflecting and engaging in dialogue during conflicts,

Strengthen family unity based on the respect for difference.

Strengthen security and justice officials´ capacity to provide gender-based violence assistance.

Provide pedagogical tools for the prevention of child abuse and the practice of paternity and maternity.

Encourage the transformation of traditional gender roles egarding household and human care tasks.

Promote tools for non-violent conflict resolution.

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