

Intervention of Ambassador Carlos Amorín

Junta Ejecutiva UNICEF

Country Program 2021-2025

In the beginning allow me to thank Mrs. Jean Gough for her support and also Mrs. Luz Angela Melo for her hard work in our country, these thanks are extended of course to their respective teams.

UNICEF shows in this Country Program Document for Uruguay 2021-2025 which is aligned with the public policies priorities of Uruguayan government and its awareness on the new context set by COVID19, with encompass challenges and opportunities to continue to take care of our children.

In particular, I would like to refer in this brief presentation to the importance given to the education in Uruguay, exemplifying this commitment in the management of the pandemic and how the authorities proceeded in order to ensure access to education.

When the first COVID cases were confirmed on March 13, the Government (which had taken office only two weeks before) announced the national health emergency and implemented measures such as the cancellation of public events, partial closure of borders, quarantine and the suspension of in-person classes.

As everywhere, in the context of the pandemic, families and schools had to be creative in order to meet the learning and socialization needs of children. In Uruguay classes were suspended just a few weeks after the school year began during the month of March 1st.

As you must already know, Uruguay has implemented the "One laptop per child" program (Programa Ceibal) since 2008, so it already had the fundamental platform to be able to transfer education from classrooms to cyberspace, materializing a very interesting experience of applying technology to educational life. This long-standing technological investment has helped to avoid some of the negative effects of dropping classes, while at the same time opening up new teaching possibilities at all levels from preschool to college.

We cannot forget that schools are not just a place to learn, but also allows recreation and peer to peer socialization, and in schools located in critical contexts, is safe place for children in vulnerable situations, also guaranteeing their food, for which large efforts were implement to ensure access to food.

In this sense, the efforts of the educational authorities focused on the search for solutions and implementation of protocols that would allow a safe return to in-person classes.

The staggered return to classes began on April 22nd with the opening of rural schools, which are the ones with the fewest students.

This early return to the classrooms gave thanks to an efficient of online classes, since it was possible to sustain the educational component and the bond of the students with the teachers and the educational community.

In mid-July 2020, in the first balance of the return to schools, the government announced that more than 70% of high school students returned to the classroom, while in primary education it was 63% and in rural ones, more than 60%.

For the scholar year 2021 that will start on March 1st. is planning open all primary school, using in addition to the school buildings other public and private facilities in order to have an adequate and safe distance among children.

However, it cannot be denied that there is a lot of work to be done, in particular regarding school dropouts at secondary education, for which we hope to continue working with UNICEF on this pending goal.

Coming to the health situation, Uruguay has a universal coverture for all the population – which has been a very strong basis for the attention of the COVID 19 emergency; within the framework special attention is given to the children through prevention and health care.

Next, in terms of cooperation with UNICEF, I would like to highlight a milestone of our joint work, in 2019 the Minister of National Defense and UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding that establishes the framework to collaborate in the development of the draft policies and procedures to the child protection in the context of United Nations peacekeeping missions.

For its part, UNICEF contribute to the training and protocols of the Uruguayan blue helmets in the protection of children's rights and offer the experience to the different countries that they contribute troops and let me tell you that Uruguay highly appreciate these efforts.

Finally, I wish to highlight the importance of UNICEF continuing to work together with Uruguay, in the framework of the Country Program 2021-25 - which is aligned with the public policy priorities adopted by the National government - in order to address the challenges that have been identified and continue to protect our children.