

## ***They are Girls, Not Mothers: risks of sexual violence and pregnancy for Latin American girls are on the rise***

**We are at a decisive moment to protect the health and the future of thousands of girls in the region**




**July 6, 2020**

Latin America and the Caribbean is the region in the world with the [highest rates of unwanted pregnancies in girls under 15](#). The crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated this situation, intensifying the risks and inequalities for girls' health and futures.

In several countries of the region, there has been an increase in sexual violence against girls in the context of lockdown policies. This situation becomes more concerning as, despite the rise in sexual aggressions, girls are facing additional barriers to access essential health care services, as well as to the social protection and administration of justice that they need after suffering abuse.

In Peru, [at least 350 cases of sexual violence against girls](#) during the lockdown have been registered, while [access to the emergency kit for victims of sexual assault has been denied or delayed](#) and [it is reported that therapeutic abortion, as established by law, has been denied](#). In this country, so far this year, [358 girls aged 10-14](#) have given birth. In Guatemala, [1,962 pregnancies in girls have been registered between January and May 2020](#). Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, where [more than five girls are forced into motherhood every day](#), the State is still hiding the impacts of the pandemic, including [data on sexual violence faced by girls](#). In Ecuador, not only [the denial of access to sexual and reproductive health care](#) has been documented, but also [the criminalization of adolescents who seek these services](#).

Over the past few months under lockdown policies, several cases in different countries demonstrate the magnitude of the vulnerabilities faced by girls in these contexts. In Argentina in May 2020, access to the legal termination of pregnancy was denied to a 12-year-old girl who was facing a forced pregnancy resulting from rape at the Santiago del Estero province. The provincial health system committed many irregularities, preventing access to legal abortion in a timely manner. In Uruguay, last June 12, a case became public of a girl from the city of Lascano, Rocha, who ended up pregnant at the age of 12 by her stepfather.

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Health systems throughout the region have been focusing on the COVID-19 response, leaving aside the sexual and reproductive health care on which the well-being of women and girls depends, precisely at the time of urgent need for these services.




***"The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that changes are not only necessary and urgent, but possible. The health of thousands of Latin American girls is at risk due to sexual violence and the lack of States' protection. This is a critical time to ensure that not one more girl has her health and future taken away from her due to a pregnancy from sexual assault. Access to essential health care services, such as emergency contraception and legal abortion, is the minimum response that States must ensure for girls who have faced abuse. Let us build a new normal in which all girls can grow up healthy, strong and safe"***, stated representatives of the *Niñas, No Madres* regional movement, made up of a diverse coalition of local and international organizations dedicated to the protection and defense of the health and rights of Latin American women and girls.

The "*Niñas, No Madres*" (Girls, Not Mothers) campaign is launching today [a petition](#) calling on Latin American governments to ensure access to information, comprehensive sex education and essential sexual and reproductive health care services for all girls, particularly those who are in the most vulnerable conditions.

The "*Niñas, No Madres*" [website](#) provides detailed data about the issue of sexual violence and forced motherhood that affects all of Latin America and includes information on the measures that States must take to address this situation.

On Wednesday, July 8 at 5:00 p.m. Guatemala / Nicaragua, 6:00 p.m. Peru / Colombia / Ecuador / Mexico, 8:00 p.m. Argentina, Latin American journalists will discuss this topic. The streaming will be available on [ninasnomadres.org/en-vivo.php](http://ninasnomadres.org/en-vivo.php).

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