



a Fondation Botnar initiative

Adolescent Summit 2026

A gathering to rethink the challenges facing our country and open new pathways for adolescent well-being and development.

Social Cohesion • Education • Mental Health • Advocacy • Technology • Employability

Quito, Ecuador

May 14 -15



datalat.org



HUASIPICHANGA
URBAN CONSULTING



Adolescent Summit 2026

The message we wanted to share:

When a city listens to adolescents, both change.

After three years of implementing the Alza Tu Voz project in Riobamba and Quevedo and witnessing the transformative power of adolescent empowerment in promoting well-being in their cities, we thought it was time to bring this conversation to a national platform. We wanted to bring together adolescents, experts, decision-makers, and diverse stakeholders to reflect, learn, and co-create responses to the challenges that adolescents face across the country, specially those around safety, education, inclusion, mental health, participation, new technologies, and employability.

2

Days of shared learnings

+15

Adolescents as speakers and panelists

+20

+20 multisectoral leaders and decision-makers

+300

Attendees

3M

Media Reach

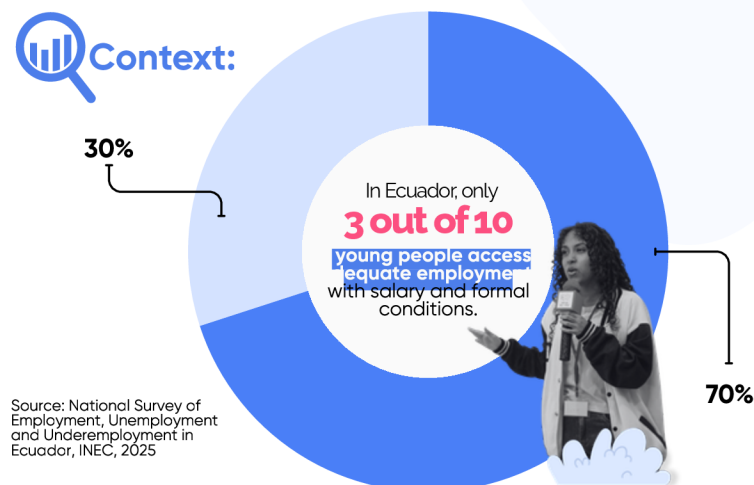


Panel 1: Employability and access to opportunities

The path to youth employability begins before the first job opportunity.

How can adolescents prepare for a future job market that feels both close and uncertain?

Context:



Source: National Survey of Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment in Ecuador, INEC, 2025

1 out of 4

adolescents and young people want to learn new skills or contribute to their personal development, well-being and access to a 'great job'.

Source: Survey 'My city and me' - Alza Tu Voz, 2023

Key Reflections:

- **Real opportunities for adolescent employability begin long before young people have work experience:** they are built when civil society, the private sector, and the public sector create spaces for adolescents to explore future pathways, receive guidance, practice their skills, obtain feedback, and be accompanied as they move from "I don't feel ready" to "I can give it a try."
- **Building skills alone is not enough if adolescents have nowhere to apply them:** socio-emotional skills, communication, leadership, teamwork, and digital competencies must be connected to real-world challenges, company visits, internships, projects, and ongoing feedback.
- **Adolescent employability starts before the first job:** it begins when adolescents have access to clear pathways linking school, technical education, university, mentorship, internships, and their first meaningful experiences in the world of work.
- **Fear of making mistakes limits innovation and participation:** when adolescents are expected to "get it right" from the very beginning, their confidence to try, propose ideas, ask questions, and learn through the process is diminished.
- **We must expand opportunities beyond the context in which a person is born, studies, or lives:** this requires strengthening role models, networks, and accessible spaces for practice that reach adolescents from diverse territories and socioeconomic realities.
- **Adolescent employability requires shared responsibility:** businesses, academia, civil society, international cooperation, and the State must create concrete conditions that enable more adolescents to access information, networks, training, hands-on practice, and first opportunities.

Young people don't need everything handed to us; we need spaces to learn, make mistakes, and grow.

-Wendy Tacuri, Adolescent Alza Tu Voz Riobamba

The challenges facing Ecuadorian adolescents will not be solved by a single law or a single institution. They require recognizing the complexity of the problems, making tensions visible, generating opportunities for those starting from more unequal contexts, and mobilizing all of society to move from conversation to action.

-Julio José Prado, Economist and Professor of Economic Environment and Competitiveness at IDE Business School





Panel 2: Empowerment, Digital Advocacy and Participation

Adolescent participation is not a photo opportunity; it is a way of governance.

We explored how adolescents can become protagonists of the changes they want to see in their environment.

Context:

5 out of 10



adolescents feel they lack enough support to act as agents of change in their cities.

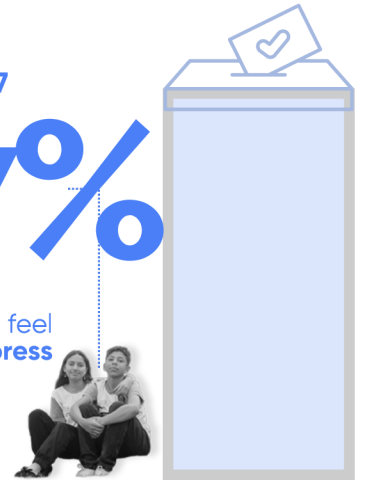
Source: Advocating in public spaces through data – Alza Tu Voz, 2025

Adolescents aged 16 to 17 represent

4.77%

of the electoral roll and still feel they still lack spaces to express themselves and advocate.

Source: National Electoral Council, 2025



Key Reflections:

- **Participation becomes advocacy** when public institutions, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders create genuine spaces for adolescents' voices to shape decisions, spaces, and policies: it is not enough to listen to them; their diagnoses, proposals, and priorities must be reflected in concrete actions.
- **Participation is also about producing knowledge about the city:** when adolescents explore their neighborhoods, observe their surroundings, and collect data about what is happening in their communities, they gain a deeper understanding of how their city functions today and feel more capable of proposing changes and transforming it.
- **When adolescents see their ideas translated into tangible action,** participation stops feeling symbolic and becomes an experience of empowerment: they move beyond simply feeling heard and begin to recognize themselves as people who can propose, decide, and shape the world around them.
- **Public space can become infrastructure for well-being:** parks, sports fields, community gardens, and murals can evolve beyond being merely physical places when adolescents participate in their design, restoration, and community activation.
- **Adolescent voices should never be used as a performance:** participation loses its meaning when adolescents are only asked to read a script or validate decisions that have already been made. Instead, they should help guide the decisions that directly affect their lives.

We, adolescents, have great potential, but we need more safe spaces where our ideas are heard and considered, not just as a complement, but as part of the solution.

-Mario Murillo, Adolescent Alza Tu Voz Quevedo

One of the greatest challenges we face as a society is to stop saying we put children and adolescents first and actually start doing it. This means listening to their voices, recognizing them as rights holders, and ensuring they actively participate in decisions that impact their lives.

-José Guerra, UNICEF Protection Officer



Panel 3: Mental Health, Ecuador's Challenge

Adolescent mental health is not built solely in the consultation room; it is shaped through the everyday architecture of community.

An honest conversation about one of the greatest challenges facing adolescents and our country: mental health, safe spaces, emotional expression, and resilience.

 Context:



7 out of 10

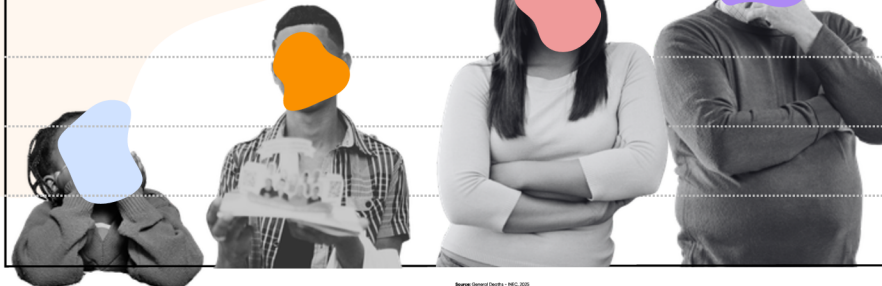
adolescents experience distress in their mental health.

Source: Survey 'My City and Me' - Alza Tu Voz, 2023

In adolescents aged

13 to 19 years

Suicide is the third cause of death in Ecuador. The first is violent deaths



 Key Reflections:

- **Adolescent mental health is nurtured long before a crisis emerges:** it does not begin only in the therapist's office, but in schools, families, neighborhoods, and community spaces where adolescents can speak openly, experience belonging, find emotional rest, and feel supported.
- **Raising one's voice requires spaces that know how to listen:** encouraging adolescents to express themselves is not enough if adults, institutions, and communities are unable to receive those voices with validation, compassion, and without judgment.
- **Community is the first line of care:** support networks, group activities, safe spaces, trusting relationships, and a sense of belonging can help prevent isolation, emotional distress, and disruptions to adolescent well-being.
- **Art, music, play, and sports can become pathways to well-being:** they allow adolescents to express emotions, build identity, regulate themselves, create meaningful connections, and communicate experiences that are often difficult to put into words.
- **Caring for mental health requires transforming everyday relationships:** families, schools, and communities can strengthen adolescent well-being when they listen more deeply, validate emotions, set boundaries with care, and recognize that every adolescent exists within a broader system of relationships.



Talking about mental health means recognizing that no one can sustain all their emotional processes alone. We need networks, community, listening, and safe relationships where we can feel accompanied without fear of judgment.

-Emilene Guevara, Alza Tu Voz Riobamba



Adolescence should not be seen as a stage of mere emotional survival. It is a stage of exploration, creativity, identity formation, and enormous potential.

-Aimee DuBois, National Mental Health Consultant PAHO/WHO

Panel 4: Security and Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is also a preventive security strategy

We analyzed how to design and sustain interventions with adolescents in complex contexts where territorial security and protective environments become fundamental.

 Context:



6 out of 10 adolescents and young people say their home is the place where they feel safest.

Source: Survey 'My City and Me' - Alza Tu Voz, 2025



Intentional homicides of children and adolescents have steadily increased since 2020; in 2025 they represented 6.3% of total homicides, and 81% of those homicides in the 0-17 age group were concentrated in adolescents aged 15 to 17.

- Renato Rivera, security expert



What happens when an adolescent's security is reduced to just a corner of their home?

 Key Reflections:

- **Adolescent safety requires shared multisectoral responsibility:** government, the private sector, schools, families, civil society, international cooperation, and communities must work together to create protective environments, real opportunities, and preventive responses rooted in local contexts.
- **Violence reshapes adolescents' everyday lives:** it changes the routes they take, the people they interact with, what they share on social media, their confidence to express themselves, and even their ability to imagine a future.
- **Prevention must begin before violence closes off opportunities:** leadership programs, mental health initiatives, education, sports, arts, technical training, conflict resolution, and early warning mechanisms can transform risk factors into support networks, purpose, and opportunity.
- **The private sector must be part of the safety response:** when violence, corruption, or criminality become normalized within a community, they affect employment, consumer behavior, organizational culture, trust, and the territory's economic development.
- **Community trust is essential to protecting adolescents:** where there are strong relationships, a sense of belonging, trusted adults, supported families, engaged schools, and safe spaces, adolescents are more likely to seek help, claim their place in the city, and build meaningful life projects.

Many young people have learned to live constantly alert of where we are, who we are with, and what we say. There are times when even expressing an opinion or sharing aspects of our lives on social media generates fear. That reality limits our freedom and affects how we build our identity and relationships.

Moreira, representative of Manta Mia

Security is not a matter foreign to the private sector. When violence, corruption, or crime become normalized in a community, they also affect job opportunities, organizational culture and economic development. Companies cannot act as if they are isolated from the social reality of the territory where they operate.

-Martin Vasconez, Deputy Manager of Sustainability at Corporación Favorita

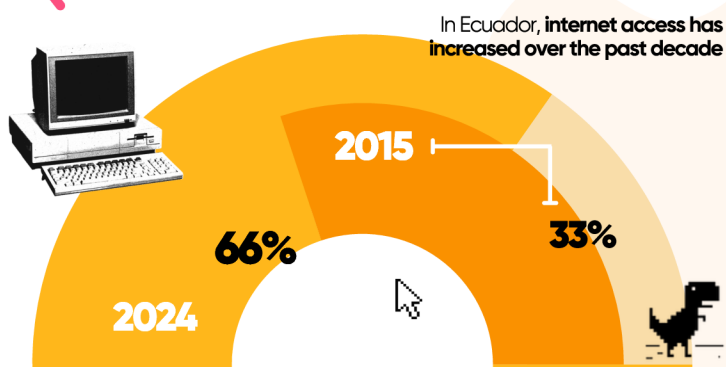


Panel 5: Technology, Data and Adolescence - Decisions that Transform Our Society

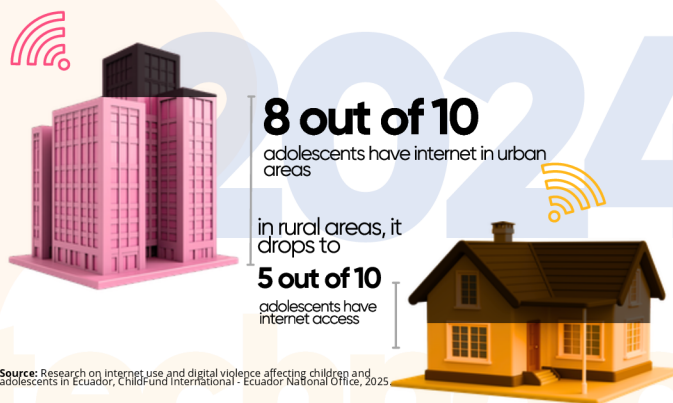
In the era of artificial intelligence, critical thinking remains one of the most indispensable human abilities.

A conversation that placed adolescents at the center of the discussion about technology and data: what decisions we make as a society and what digital future we want to build.

Context:



Source: Tecnologías de la información y comunicación - INEC, 2024



Source: Research on Internet use and digital violence affecting children and adolescents in Ecuador, ChildFund International - Ecuador National Office, 2025

Key Reflections:

Technology must serve human development: adolescents need opportunities to learn how to create, question, verify information, protect their data, and make informed decisions when engaging with digital tools and artificial intelligence.

Digital well-being requires socio-emotional skills and critical thinking: pausing before sharing content, recognizing the emotions it evokes, understanding how algorithms shape what we see, and setting healthy digital boundaries are essential capacities for self-care.

The digital divide is also a power divide: internet access matters, but so does understanding who collects data about adolescents, who interprets it, and what decisions are made based on that information.

Technology can be a tool for adolescent advocacy: when adolescents use cameras, the internet, video games, programming, or social media with purpose, they move from simply consuming content to telling their own stories, creating solutions, and participating in decision-making.

Artificial intelligence demands ethics, protection, and accountability: its use must prevent harms such as digital violence, misinformation, exposure of personal data, and automated decisions that can negatively affect adolescents' opportunities.

Data should help us care better and make better decisions: gathering evidence on digital well-being, risks, inequalities, and patterns of technology use enables the design of contextualized policies and programs, rather than responding from fear or replicating solutions developed elsewhere.

In Quevedo, technology doesn't take us away from our difficult reality; it gives us the tools to change it. When you give an adolescent a camera, internet, or a computer, we don't make noise. We make impact.

- Genesis Lima, Adolescent Alza Tu Voz Quevedo

Critical thinking remains indispensable, even in the age of artificial intelligence. The answers these tools provide should never be accepted automatically as truth; they must be questioned, verified, and thoughtfully examined. Technology can accelerate processes, but the responsibility for making decisions remains fundamentally human.

- Jéssica Morales, CEO KISTH Fondation



Panel 6: Education for Life

Education transforms when it stops preparing people for exams and starts preparing them for life.

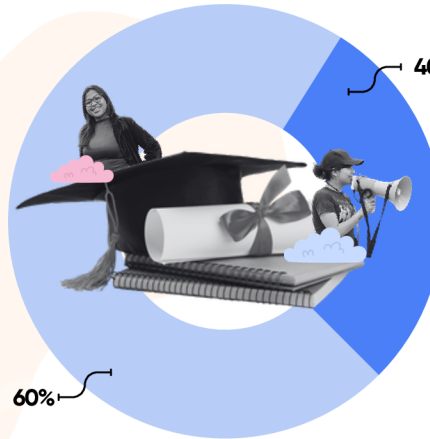
We reflected on the challenges and opportunities for an education that is relevant for adolescents.

Context:



244 thousand children and adolescents aged 5 to 17 are **outside the education system.**

Source: Ministry of Education - UNICEF, 2023 - 2024



40% In Riobamba and Quevedo **4 out of 10**

adolescents and young people say their greatest achievement is finishing their studies and obtaining a degree.

Source: Survey My City and Me! - Alza Tu Voz, 2023

Key Reflections:

- **Education for life begins when learning makes sense:** adolescents need to understand why they are learning, how knowledge connects to their realities, and how it helps them build well-being, autonomy, and a sense of future.
- **Schools must respond to people, not only to content:** retaining students and covering the curriculum do not guarantee meaningful educational experiences if young people's questions, emotions, contexts, and life projects remain outside the classroom.
- **Education systems prioritize what they choose to measure:** if attendance, grades, and curriculum completion are the only indicators that matter, they will become the sole focus of schools. If we value critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, well-being, and coexistence, these capacities must also be recognized, nurtured, and assessed.
- **Teachers need care, resources, and recognition:** transforming education requires supporting those who navigate technological gaps, violence at home, students' emotional needs, institutional pressures, and limited resources every day.
- **Learning thrives through relationships, experience, and participation:** when students collaborate, create, ask questions, work with their hands, connect subjects to real-world challenges, and feel heard, learning moves beyond compliance and becomes an experience that transforms them.
- **The school of the future must protect what is deeply human:** in a world shaped by technology and artificial intelligence, education must strengthen judgment, ethics, creativity, empathy, collaboration, and the capacity to keep learning throughout life.



What we reward and measure in education is what gets optimized. We have had 200 years of curriculum optimization and standardized tests. If we don't establish a new definition of school success, we will never optimize what matters because we don't measure it.

-Titi Hidalgo, Founder of LAB-XXI and ReinventED Schools



In the official system, memorization and grades are often prioritized, and that makes us not want to continue with the subject; we just want to get a good grade to pass.

-Celeste Sucre, Adolescent Alza Tu Voz Riobamba



The education system we have generates the educational gaps we have. The public system is governed by many state policies and there is no room to respond to the needs of our students.

-Nancy Diaz, Teacher at U.E. Vicente Anda Aguirre, Riobamba

