Recommendations of children and adolescents

The children who participated in the study formulated the following recommendations:

- It is important to have safe spaces for listening and dialogue between children and their adult guardian deprived of liberty with the support of the State and of the society. Children need to be heard and recognized, to break the secrets and the silence that condemns them. “I, to this day, need support, love, and to be heard.” Nicaragua, girl between 13 and 17 years of age.

- Provide relevant psycho-social and financial support to all families affected and especially to the caregivers of these children during the different stages of the execution of the sentence.

- Implement multi-sectoral programs with emphasis on promoting a welcoming and protective education system for these children.

- Protect the right of children and their families to live free from violence, ill-treatment, inhuman or degrading treatment.

- Prioritize prevention programs as well as treatment of addictions for children and their families in their communities.

- Improve police response by implementing changes in arrest and search procedures. “That the police don’t go to the house and beat the elders in front of the children.” Uruguay, boy between 10 to 12 years of age.

- Reform justice and penitentiary systems with better quality and longer time visits in prisons... “That the visit is longer... That there are games, to play ball at least”. Chile, boy between 10 and 12 years of age; improve the infrastructure of prisons to make visits more child-friendly. “It’s dirty ... and there are dead mice ... and it smells badly ... and the bed and the rooms are very small ... and it’s very hot.” Dominican Republic, girl between 6 to 9 years of age; promote a humane and dignified treatment towards them and towards their guardian who is deprived of liberty. “They literally get you down on all four to check you from head to toe. They make you cough, crouch. And with women it was worse because they would stick their fingers inside them to see that they had...” Uruguay, boy between 13 and 17 years of age.
**Impact on children of a guardian who is deprived of liberty**

The deprivation of liberty of a mother, father or guardian generates all kinds of consequences in all aspects of the lives of children.

### Stigmatization, discrimination and social condemnation

Children with a mother, father or guardian who is deprived of liberty are often victims of stigmatization, discrimination and social condemnation. They are often rejected, avoided and feared, thus creating feelings of isolation, shame, rage and hopelessness. “At school, people who do not like you say, Oh, your relative is in jail. They start saying things about you as if you were the delinquent.” Mexico, boy between 12 to 16 years of age.

### Family life

Changes in the family environment, care situation and economy have a negative effect on the life and upbringing of children. “My family did change a lot when my stepfather was taken to jail. My mother no longer ate, she stopped doing things… and was going out to sell and all that, and did not come back until one or two in the morning. Nobody took care of my youngest brother, he was left alone…” Mexico, girl between 12 to 16 years of age.

Children from single-parent families tend to experience situations of even greater vulnerability. They are often uprooted, emotionally neglected, abandoned and when the mother is deprived of liberty their risk of institutionalization increases. “My mother has been imprisoned since I was eight years old, she committed a robbery, she has been there for six years and it has affected me in everything because I was sent to an institution and it is scary.” Uruguay, girl between 13 to 17 years of age. “I was around ten years old... My dad was taken to prison first, then my mom.” Chile, girl between 13 and 17 years of age.

The early assumption of adult responsibilities is another one of the consequences that children suffer. Their childhood is cut short: “I take care of my baby brother, I come to the youth center and then I start cleaning.” Uruguay, girl between 13 and 17 years of age.

### Emotional health and well-being

One of the important impacts is on the emotional health and well-being of children: sadness, pain, fear, shame, hatred and anger are some of the feelings which are most mentioned by children. “The entire family feels sad, depressed. Because they feel lonely.” Argentina, boy between 6 and 9 years of age.

However, when there are situations of domestic violence and the guilty parent or guardian is deprived of liberty, children feel liberated. “In my family my father yelled at my mother, my mother was always about to cry and my family was a disaster that’s why my mom put my dad in jail, so he would not bother her again. And how do you feel now? happy because being with my mother is happy because my father is the worst.” Nicaragua, girl between 6 and 9 years of age.

### Education system

The need to work and earn an income, the lack of routine and authority in the home, and the lack of capacity of the educational system to accommodate children with an adult guardian deprived of liberty contributes toward increasing absenteeism and school drop-out.

“I didn’t go to school until my dad and my mom came out of jail.” Nicaragua, boy between 6 to 8 years of age. It also limits their recreation opportunities and their participation in playful, educational and social activities. “I don’t go out on the street because I help my mom in the fry-up that she has from Monday to Sunday, every day.” Nicaragua, girl 13 to 16 years of age.

### Home economy

The deprivation of liberty of a mother, father or adult guardian generates severe financial problems by forcing other household members to join the work force. “Someone who did not work had to begin to work, for example my grandmother had to work to feed us.” Uruguay, boy between 13 to 17 years of age.

The deprivation of liberty of an adult guardian also exposes children to child labor, life on the street, as well as situations of violence, exploitation. “My grandmother did not have money to buy me uniforms or a backpack and I had to go to the market to sell with my grandmother during all that time.” Nicaragua girl between 6 to 9 years of age. “I went out to chop wood in order to help my mother and then sold it together with a partner.” Uruguay, boy between 13 to 17 years of age.