Socio-economic Inequality and Differential Access to Digital Technologies for Children in Argentina

Alberto Minujin

Executive director Equity for Children and Professor, The New School University New York. E-mail: minujina@newschool.edu.

Jorge Paz

Investigador Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET), Instituto de Estudios Laborales y del Desarrollo Económico (IELDE) de la Universidad Nacional de Salta (UNSa), Argentina. E-mail: jpaz@conicet.gov.ar.

Abstract

Socio-economic inequality in Argentina between children and families, as in most countries, is a structural fact that has been measured since measurable data has been available. This inequality is expressed both through monetary poverty, which in Argentina currently exceeds 60% of the population under 18, and in non-monetary deprivations that affect more than half the country's children. The pandemic and the confinement measures imposed by the national government included closing schools, as did other countries, which reinforced a dependence on connectivity in order to give continuity to the educational process. Given that access to connectivity and its effective use are strongly related to the socioeconomic group to which children and adolescents belong, it was to be expected that confinement measures would affect economically disadvantaged children more than others.

The available data show that this, in fact, is what occurred. However, it also showed an overall increase in access to and use of digital technology that was even more intense in social groups with lower incomes and greater rights deprivations. This article aims to document and analyze this process with longitudinal data covering the period 2016-2020, with special emphasis on the latter years.

The data used comes from the Permanent Household Survey. The analysis is divided into two parts and each part consists of two levels of analysis: a first part consisting of a cross-sectional analysis of the samples for the years 2016 to 2020, and a second part, which exploits longitudinal information obtained from these databases. Each of the parts, cross-sectional and longitudinal (panel data), contains two levels of analysis: one, purely descriptive, and the other, conditional, consisting mainly of parameter estimation of probit regressions.

The results of this study are highly relevant for thinking about post-pandemic public policy. Closing the digital gap in Latin America and the Caribbean could increase employment and boost sustainable economic growth. Closing the gap with respect to the level of OECD countries could generate more than 15 million direct jobs and increase regional GDP by almost 8%. In addition, what would be a direct and important effect is the impact that connectivity has on the working and professional future of girls and boys. Access to ICTs also means access to different services such as finance, commerce and job opportunities. The literature has also highlighted as very important the expansion of the concept of community, given that connectivity favors social interaction, freeing it from spatial and geographical limits.