

A Child-Centered Approach to Justice:

Ibero-American Insights for a Regional Agenda

PATHFINDERS

FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES
HOSTED BY THE NYU CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ibero American
**ALLIANCE FOR
ACCESS TO JUSTICE**



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Authors

María Fernanda Rodríguez, Lead Coordinator, Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice and **Nicolás Espejo Yaksic**, independent consultant.

Outstanding Collaboration

Mercedes Correa Saravia, Advisor to the Technical Secretariat of the Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice.

Additional Collaboration

- **Adriana Lander Osio**, United Nations Latin American Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders
- **Florencia Abed Dickson**, Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ)
- **Georgette Urrea**, Technical Secretary of the MARC-TTD Commission of the Ibero-American Judicial Summit
- **Gloria Manzotti**, United Nations Development Programme, Latin America and the Caribbean
- **Ignacio Obando**, Probono Network of the Americas
- **Marisol Cortés**, United Nations Development Programme, Latin America and the Caribbean
- **Patricia Bermejo**, IIDP
- **Sebastian Van den Dooren**, Inter-American Association of Public Defender (AIDEF)

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Ibero-American Alliance Members



Technical Secretariat



Executive Summary

This report, prepared by **the Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice (IBA or Alliance)**, provides a comprehensive overview of the current conditions of access to justice for children and adolescents in Ibero-America.

The Ibero-American Alliance was founded in 2021, and among its main objectives are: promoting the exchange of data, experiences, innovations, and ideas at both local and regional levels; identifying and promoting best practices in the implementation of a people-centered justice approach; fostering judicial collaboration; and advocating for the political and financial support needed to strengthen access to people-centered justice in the Ibero-American region.

In 2023, the Alliance launched its first **Regional Report**, which focused on three areas: data and innovation; the regional normative framework for access to justice; and actions taken by the formal and informal regional justice systems to ensure no one is left behind.

This new report, **A Child-Centered Justice Approach: Ibero-American Perspectives for a Regional Agenda**, represents the second milestone of the IBA.

This report highlights **existing challenges** as well as **good practices** and proposes a **roadmap to advance toward a child-centered justice system**, as part of the commitment to leave no one behind within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

The preparation of this report involved participants from the justice ecosystem across the region, including public defenders, prosecutors, judges, representatives of human rights bodies, civil society organizations, and United Nations agencies. In line with this collective effort, the report includes a detailed analysis of the drafting process of the Ibero-American Common Rules on Restorative Juvenile Criminal Justice, led by the main judicial networks and regional bodies.

The report is divided into the following sections:

The Ibero-American Alliance, founded in 2021 and formally established in May 2022, aims to bring together key justice actors from Latin America, Spain, Portugal, and Andorra to promote people-centered justice in the Ibero-American region.

Building on the success of the IBA, and recognizing the transformative role that regional alliances play in justice reform and the promotion of people-centered justice, the African Alliance for People-Centered Justice was launched in 2024. Its goal is to mainstream the concept of people-centered justice, support local and national actors in the implementation of justice-centered policies, and foster a unified understanding of its principles across the continent.

Section 1: Regional Context

Based on a regional assessment, the document identifies the main factors that disproportionately affect children and adolescents in their access to justice journey and highlights how child poverty, structural violence, forced migration, and persistent exclusion limit their ability to access justice.

Although children and adolescents' rights are formally recognized in national and international legal frameworks, justice systems still face major challenges in adequately addressing their needs, ensuring their meaningful participation, and preventing revictimization. Among the key challenges are:

- **Barriers faced** by Indigenous, migrant, or disabled children and adolescents, which involve a combination of legal, linguistic, and structural obstacles.
- **Lack of child-friendly spaces and justice operators trained** to work with children.
- **Lack of data**, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of the landscape.

Section 2: (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) Access to Justice and the Development Agenda: People-Centered and Child-Centered Justice

The report proposes a structural transformation of justice systems based on six core principles:

- Institutional redesign from a child-centered perspective.
- Prevention of violence and victimization.
- Child empowerment.
- Strengthening of procedural safeguards and resources.
- Intersectoral coordination.
- Use of data and evidence for decision-making.

It also presents a conceptualization of access to justice that goes beyond the judicial domain—integrating ecosystemic, restorative, and people-centered approaches.

These proposals are aligned with international standards such as [General Comment No. 14](#) of the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child, the [100 Brasilia Rules](#), and the [Justice Action Coalition](#) action plan.

Additionally, the Ibero-American Alliance for Access to Justice—based on the Praia Group's definition—proposes the following conceptualization of access to justice for children and adolescents:

"The ability of children and adolescents to realize their rights and obtain a fair resolution of justice problems in accordance with human rights standards; taking into account and respecting their specific condition as well as their personal characteristics such as age, gender, national or ethnic origin, among others. This must be achieved through official or unofficial justice institutions that are impartial, with appropriate legal support, and through the application of intersectional approaches that recognize and address the inherent diversity of this group."

In addition to identifying specific legal, procedural, and situational barriers faced by different groups of children and adolescents—such as Indigenous, migrant, disabled, or those without parental care—the document also highlights legislative progress and good practices across the region.

Section 3: (Chapter 4)

Principles of Child-Centered Justice: Progress in the Region

The report highlights various ongoing initiatives, such as:

- Juvenile restorative justice models in **Uruguay** and **Chile**;
- Child-friendly interview rooms in **Argentina**, **Spain**, and **Colombia**;
- Adolescent councils that helped design judicial policies in **Mexico** and **Paraguay**; and
- Regulatory frameworks and comprehensive protection laws in **Peru** and **Portugal**.

It also proposes moving towards the construction of a regional restorative justice model for children and adolescents, with active participation from the adolescents themselves and culturally and territorially adapted common protocols.

In Focus: Towards a Restorative Justice Model for Children and Adolescents in Iberoamerica

The **Ibero-American Common Rules on Restorative Juvenile Criminal Justice**, presented in this report, constitute a soft law instrument that marks a milestone in the building of normative and operational consensus around a restorative model that is inclusive and adapted to the specificities of children and adolescents in conflict with the law. Their development demonstrates the region's capacity, through its key judicial networks and cooperation bodies, to generate high-impact technical and political agreements that strengthen regional advocacy and promote concrete transformations in justice systems.

The Common Rules include substantive principles such as the exceptional nature of deprivation of liberty, the comprehensive repair of harm, and the active participation of adolescents and communities—consolidating them as a regional best practice that can guide new reforms and strategies across Ibero-America.

Section 4: (Chapter 5)

Vision and Regional Agenda

The report serves as a tool for political advocacy and regional cooperation. It calls on state actors and civil society to make concrete commitments, to ensure that no child is left behind in the exercise of their right to justice, and to consolidate this right as an essential pillar of sustainable development, social cohesion, and democratic strengthening in the region.

It develops five key messages:

1. **Access to justice is realized through a process**, which does not begin in the court nor end with a sentence.
2. The **judiciary is a key actor** in an ecosystemic justice response, **but it is not the only one**.
3. **Genuine participation of children and adolescents** is indispensable for transforming justice.
4. Building justice **with, for, and from** children requires redesigning the system.
5. A **justice system that works for children** is a justice system that improves for everyone and is projected into the future.
6. Access to justice is an **enabler of rights** and a **driver of inclusion**.

This report aims to be the first in a series of specific reports that incorporate the participation of children, allow for more precise data collection on their needs, and contribute to driving concrete progress in the regional agenda.

People-Centered Justice for Children in Five Figures

Figure 1. Principles Governing People-Centered Justice Models



Figure 2. Impacts of the Statistical Invisibility of Children and Adolescents

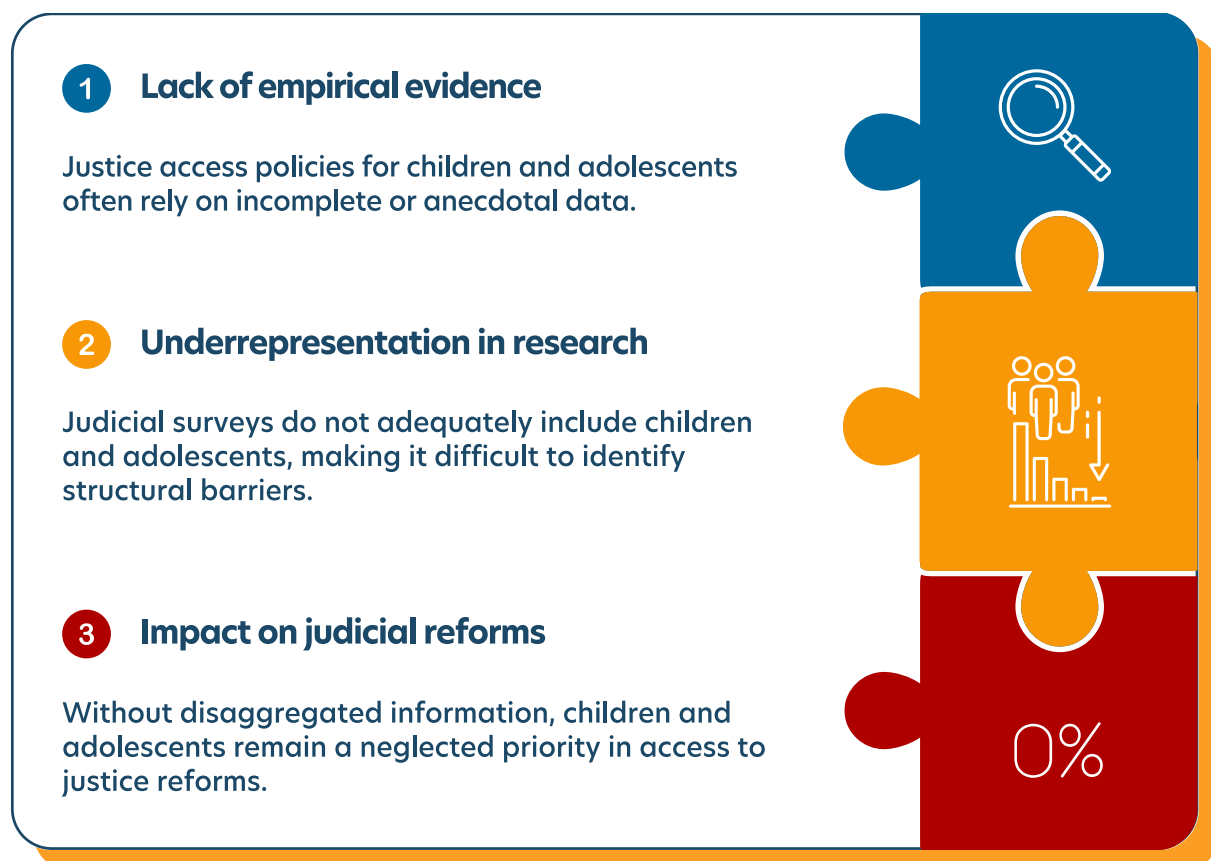


Figure 3. Access to Justice as a Driver of Social Transformation for Children



Figure 4. Guiding Principles for a Child-Centered Justice Model

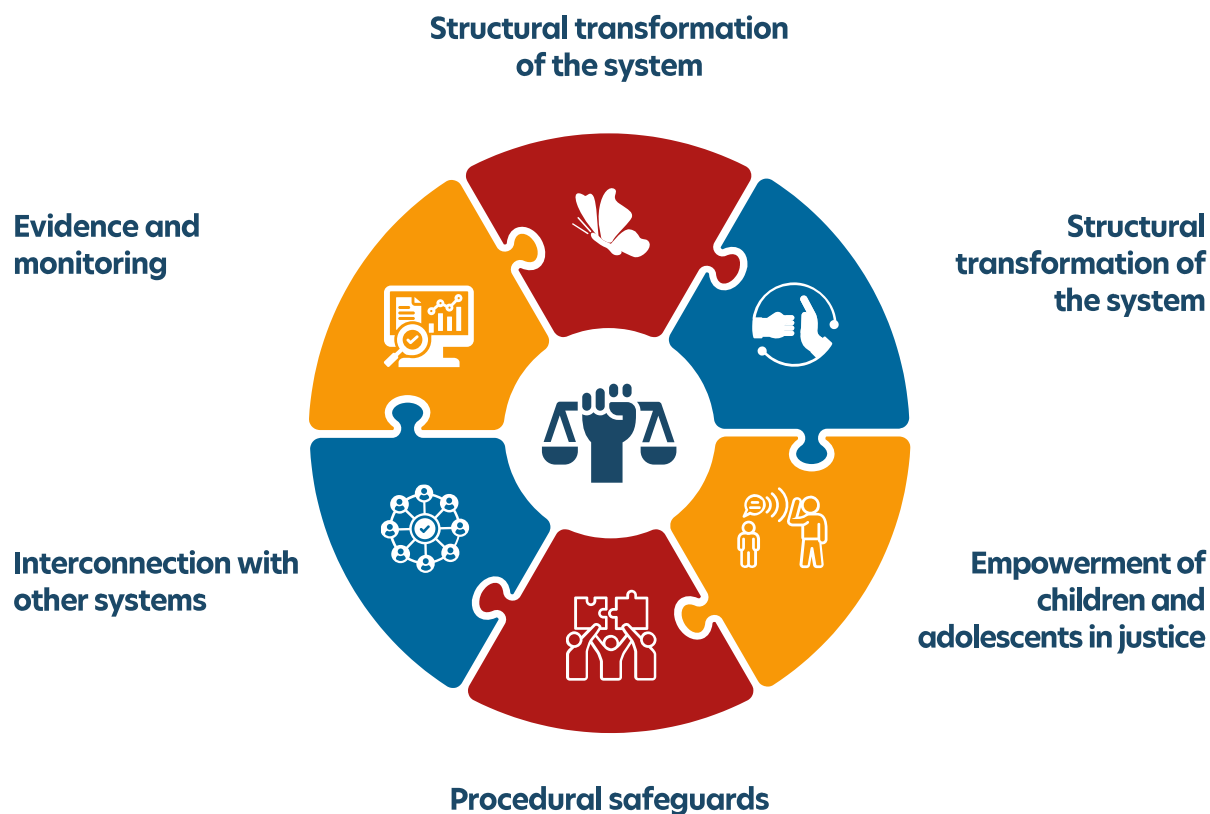
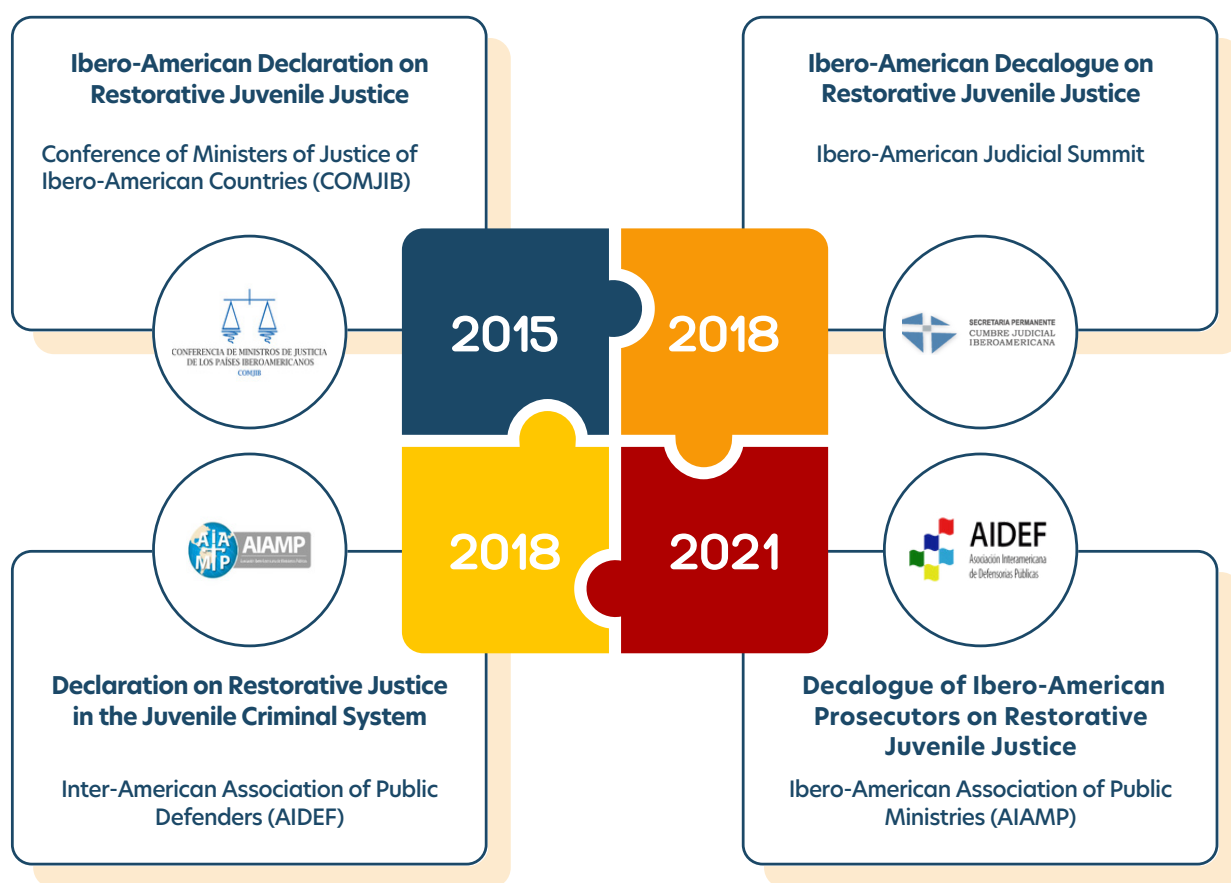


Figure 5. Institutional Milestones in the Promotion of Restorative Juvenile Justice in Iberoamerica





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