

Message from Ernesto Murro, President of the Social Insurance Institute of Uruguay, to the members of the Education and Solidarity Network. October 2010

It is a pleasure for Uruguay and for the Social Insurance Institute of this small Latin American country to have a conversation with the Education and Solidarity Network on this world-scale project and to share and present the experiences we are developing in our country.

In Uruguay we call the Social Insurance Institute the “Social Insurance Bank,” but this is not a bank. Rather, this is an institution that manages social security, much in the same way that is done in France by the *Sécurité Sociale*, or in any other European countries by similar institutions. As such, we applaud and are very interested in the initiative undertaken by unions and educators to concern themselves with the social protection education of children, youth, adolescents and society at large. In Uruguay, we have been involved in the subject for a few years and we now wish to share some of our experiences with you.

For us, education on social security and social protection, and the access of all citizens and the entire population to information and knowledge is a fundamental human right, and an indispensable element to effectively developing social protection systems and to implementing reforms when necessary.

Starting in 2007, we introduced a program that consisted in creating a system of formal education on social security in primary school. Then, we extended this system to secondary schools. At the same time, these efforts are part of a process of permanent education and training for all of society, given that it is also important to educate and inform workers, employers, pensioners, disabled individuals, and all citizens in general. We understand education to be a right which is fundamental to ensuring individuals’ knowledge of their rights and obligations, as well as to enabling their contributions to the reform of social protection systems when needed.

As such, in 2007, we reached an agreement with the education authorities to jointly create and publish a manual for each primary school child. This manual was the fruit of collaboration between education and social security professionals. We made a copy of it for each child. We would now like to point out some important aspects that emerged from this process, without having them be a model or recipe (in fact, they should *not* be a model or recipe). First, it was very important to us that the project be a joint effort between the Social Insurance Institute and education institutions. They chose their professionals and we chose ours. These individuals, who agreed to collaborate on this project, are employed in public service, are civil servants, and are public employees in the areas of social security and education. The second element that seemed important to us was the fact that the educational institutions succeeded in declaring education about social security and social protection part of the formal and mandatory school curriculum. The third aspect that appeared important was having printed one copy of the manual for each child. This is not a book for consultation available at the school library. Each child attending primary school – the last three years of primary school – has his own manual that he can take home, that belongs to him. This is the child’s personal copy.

Next, in 2009, we replicated this program, but this time in secondary schools. In Uruguay’s case, secondary schooling lasts 6 years: a first period of three years and then a pre-university period of three years as well. In 2009, we produced a manual for students in the first three years of secondary school. In the same way, the manual was created jointly between social security and education professionals. Similarly, it was distributed to each young student in the first period of secondary school. In Uruguay, social security is a topic included under the civic and democratic engagement curricula and therefore under the institutionalized educational curriculum. Here is the manual for the first secondary school section. This year, 2010, we put together the manual for the second secondary school section. It just came out. In all three cases, there is a manual for each student, which corresponds to the specific grade level and which belongs to the student. He or she can take it home. This seems very important to us.

In addition to what has already been said, there are three aspects that we would like to highlight. The first is the importance of child and youth participation in the process of developing the manuals. To design these interactive manuals, we worked directly with children and young people. We conducted pilot exercises with focus groups and asked participants their opinions. You will notice that in the manuals, there are comments and contributions from children, who are the program's target group.

A second aspect deals with the pedagogical techniques and the graphic designed used. The illustrators who undertook this task – just as important as content development – participated directly in the entire production process. The illustrator should not be far from those responsible for content development and from the education or social security professionals working on the project. In our opinion, their work should be a concerted effort.

The third aspect that we would like to bring attention to pertains to the low cost of this investment. This is an investment that has a large impact on the population's knowledge of topics related to social protection as early as childhood. On the other hand, the costs of implementation are low. In Uruguay, the cost of editing and printing these manuals is about \$1 per copy. We secured what we consider to be a very low cost thanks to the fact that content development is carried out by education and social security civil servants and does not, as a result, represent an additional cost. We also believe that the cost of such an endeavor should be demystified. We are inclined to think that this type of program has very high costs. Yet, our experience shows the opposite: that with very little investment, we can obtain significant results.

In Uruguay, we are now in the process of developing another program that has a particular interest at the international level. Each child that is enrolled in primary schooling has been receiving a laptop since 2007. This year, we extended this program to young students that are enrolled in secondary school. Each computer is equipped with a digital version of the manuals, which includes new games and activities. These manuals are interactive, demanding not only that children read them but also that they fill out exercises or activities at school, outside of school, at home, in the neighborhood, with family, and with neighbors. This is, to us, a particularly interesting characteristic of the program.

We also developed another tool specifically for youth: a comic strip that is distributed in places where young people go to have fun, dance, take part in festivals, or where they go to fairs, meetings and other events. The comic strip, which we began working on in 2006, allows us to reach young people on the topic of social protection. The first issues were published in print and now the comic strip is available digitally.

Our goal was to present what is being done in the region in terms of social protection education. An international conference dedicated to this topic was recently held in Santiago de Chile. Representatives from Ireland, England, Brazil and Uruguay took part. The importance of this issue is in the process of being recognized at the international level. Having said this, we believe that there is still much to be done. It is for this reason that we reiterate our congratulations to the Education and Solidarity Network as well as to all the organizations that support this initiative, such as mutual society organizations and the International Labour Organization. As for us, we are more than happy to lend our support to this initiative.

Thank you.