

## Family diversity and COVID-19: The voice of the professionals

In the preceding work, "Family Diversity and Covid-19: The voice of the families" it was reflected, from the voice of the families, how the pandemic is a challenge and a mirror that reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the system of family support in its triple role of prevention, promotion, and protection. This proposal is the other side of the same coin. Knowing how professionals have experienced this impact, the adaptations made in their daily work with children, adolescents and families in their diversity, as well as their proposals for improvement is a key exercise. Thus, this work aims to reflect the voice of professionals on various issues, from their main emotions during this crisis to what they have learned from it, so that it gives us a positive and constructive look towards the future. This work has been possible thanks to the participation of professionals belonging to four Spanish entities, all of them faithful exponents of care to the family diversity that was wanted to be highlighted: [Cáritas](#), [Fundación Secretariado Gitano](#), [Fundación Ayuda a Niños y Adolescentes en Riesgo \(ANAR\)](#), and [Asociación para la Protección del Menor \(APROME\)](#).

During the pandemic, professionals have dealt not only with their own **emotions and concerns** but also with the families they work with. In general, professionals reported feeling tense, anxious, stressed, or anxious during the pandemic. Specifically, professionals belonging to the Fundación Secretariado Gitano reported having felt "*great concern for Roma families because their living conditions before the pandemic were difficult and with the pandemic, they have become much*



David Redondo/Cáritas España.

*more acute.*" The large demands for support have led professionals to work outside their working hours, which has been an added stress. Professionals from APROME pointed out

that the fact of working from home, together with social isolation and continuous exposure to negative information, has caused hopelessness at specific times. Caritas professionals reported having



ANAR.

experienced a general wear and tear of equipment, the causes go beyond overwork, being the urgency of the situation to implement assistance measures which has caused the discomfort of the workers. For its part, the ANAR Foundation stated that the complexity of the cases attended during the period of absolute confinement (e.g., domestic abuse, gender violence or serious psychological problems) has been a great challenge for professionals.

Despite the fact that the situation has been stressful due to the high workload, professionals have felt involved in a collaborative **working environment** where they have been able to give mutual support in tasks and functions, and also on an emotional level. In the words of Cáritas, there has been an “*attempt to accompany and take care of*” the teams. APROME reports that during the beginning of work there were small personal conflicts related to the resistance to provide solutions and personal means that would favor the proper course of work activity. According to Cáritas professionals, changes in the workspace, from telematics to face-to-face, with masks and all their implications, have generated new forms of communication. However, APROME also reports that the work teams have emerged from this crisis with a reinforced vision of the team itself.

The map of **needs detected in relation to family diversity** is wide and diverse. Fundación Secretariado Gitano highlights the economic needs for the most basic issues such as food or hygiene products, including masks, as well as the need for digital resources to minimize the digital divide. In this case, both schoolchildren,

adolescents as well as women in the training process saw the continuity of their education affected. From APROME they highlight the need for social, medical, psychological and psychiatric care for the elderly and children, with special needs and mental health, pointing out that *“these needs have been seriously neglected, which has caused alterations in families and has repercussions negatively on social welfare”*. The ANAR foundation emphasizes that the tension of the situation has manifested itself in an increase in difficulties in family relationships, which has led to an increase in intra-family violence. From Cáritas professionals highlight the need to streamline bureaucratic procedures, in addition to ensuring a possible presence in the procedures that can guarantee the universalization of services, the need for the presence of digital communities and support from the telematics, the need to retake the spaces of the most vulnerable or the need to develop a sense of community.

Regarding **satisfaction with the response provided and the service's ability to adapt**, the different entities agree that they have responded in the best possible way to the most urgent needs of families during the pandemic, highlighting the ability to adapt and re-adapt to the needs that have arisen. For example, the ANAR group



Fundación Secretariado Gitano.



developed the CHAT ANAR which allowed them to offer a high quality service. In his words, *“we have been able to 'enter their homes' through our help lines, especially the ANAR Chat that has a silent and safe technology for minors who were in coexistence with their aggressors 24 hours a day, thus as quick help for serious psychological problems such as suicide attempts, self-harm, fear and extreme violence”*. Beyond satisfaction with the work done, APROME highlights that *“professionals have fared worse in this situation.”* The sense of obligation and effort with families sometimes led to giving up their own needs related to organization, care and self-recognition in the face of overexertion.



The entities have made a technological advance that has allowed, mainly during the period of strict confinement, that the professionals have been able to continue providing the service through communication technologies. The Fundación Secretariado Gitano highlights the use of online communication platforms and cloud storage systems, as well as security mechanisms for handling information. In this space, the ANAR foundation stands out for having managed to develop an innovative technology (ANAR Chat) in record time that allows them to coordinate in real time with the legal and social departments. *"This coordination is absolutely necessary to be able to generate the best possible guidance, refer resources and intervene in risk situations in contact with Child Protection Services, Security Forces and Emergency Teams."*

After the complicated situation generated by the pandemic, professionals also extract **reflections and positive learnings**. In general, the teams have been strengthened, they have been able to generate alternatives and resources that they would never have thought of. Fundación Secretariado Gitano highlights that these synergies between teams and other social entities are fundamental when working with human rights. The ANAR Foundation mentions that the situation has also served to realize the fundamental role they play in accompanying children and adolescent population who have no other family member to ask for help. From a personal level,

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professionals have learned to improve stress management, develop resilience and value even more family and personal relationships. For their part, the professionals of Cáritas highlight as learning after this crisis the need to



APROME

deepen the perspective of human rights and be aware that we are not alone, “*we go hand in hand with others and, above all, of the people we accompany*”.

Professionals who have participated in this work have also shared the **keys to improve** their respective services for the future. From APROME they point out the need to take care of the team, recognizing and reinforcing the achievements; continue advancing in digitization; reduce management pressure on all members of the organization; organize, order and gradually adjust the 'little chaos' produced by continuous changes; working together with the administration, the organization, families and professionals. The Fundación Secretariado Gitano highlights the need to have mobile devices that keep them in contact with the families they serve, as well as to have the computer equipment to donate to students or lend them during the school year, with a data rate included. In addition, they also highlight the need to include measures aimed at caring for the mental health of professionals, for example, through regular monitoring of the mental health of work teams. ANAR highlights the need to adapt the infrastructure so that its service capacity does not diminish. And, finally, Cáritas points out that the situation experienced implies higher levels of training, participation and coordination on the part of the professionals, as well as the incorporation of other learning. In addition, the times we live in demand from professionals' higher levels of demand in terms of time, skills and dedication. And finally, they include "*the right to connect and disconnect*" because of the need for care and self-care.

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