



Second Human Development Notebook
UNDP-El Sistema

**NATIONAL SYSTEM OF YOUTH AND CHILDREN
ORCHESTRAS AND CHOIRS OF VENEZUELA (EL SISTEMA)
ROLE MODEL FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION
AND THE CULTURE OF PEACE
2016-2025**



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AND THE CULTURE OF PEACE
2016-2025**

50th anniversary
National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela



Second Human Development Notebook
National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela
Social Inclusion and the Culture of Peace. 2016-2025

**United Nations Development Programme
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Executive Summary

Presentation of the Second Human Development Notebook of the Simón Bolívar Music Foundation and of the United Nations Development Programme.

Title: *National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela. Role Model for Social Inclusion and the Culture of Peace. 2016-2025*

Theme: Results of the study of the process of social inclusion and the culture of peace of the National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela (El Sistema), from 2016 to 2025.

Objective of the study: To visualize the characteristics of the pedagogical approach, the dynamics of access and participation, the impact on the communities, and the innovative strategies for maintaining and expanding El Sistema during the 2016-2025 period.

Objective of the report: To show in a clear and objective manner how the features of the pedagogical approach, the dynamics of access and participation, the impact on the communities, and the innovative strategies for maintaining and expanding it were visualized, analyzed and assessed.

Justification: The relevance of the mission, vision and achievements of El Sistema with respect to its contribution to inclusion and social integration, and to the construction of a culture of peace, constitutes the justification of the research.

Methodology of the study: It is characterized by its integral multiplicity. Its approach is mixed (qualitative and quantitative), and the analysis is multilevel (it encompasses the individual, the community and the structural features).

Instruments for collecting information: They are both documentary and field data collection. Diverse types of documents were reviewed (reports, academic works, books, manuscripts, newspaper material) and interviews, surveys and focus groups were conducted (management team, students, teachers, young male and female leaders, members, staff and the community).

Structure of the report: Six chapters: I “Facing the Challenges: Resilience and Adaptability”, II “Pedagogical Model: Comprehensive Education, Inclusion and Social Change”, III “Transforming Lives”, IV “Collective Musical Practice for Social Inclusion”, V “Music Education to Bring About Social Change and the Culture of Peace”, VI “An Inspiring Role Model”.

Findings: The lessons learned by all the people who in one way or another integrate, sustain or benefit from the activities of personal growth that El Sistema programs on the basis of its pedagogical model are evidenced in this report. Special mention should be made of the evidence that what is offered is musical education not only for the purposes of artistic learning, but for comprehensive human development, inclusion and social integration, the practice of participation and collective co-responsibility, and, consequently, for social transformation and the culture of peace. El Sistema, on the basis of a solid philosophical foundation and its decentralized structure, stands out as an institution with the capacity to adapt and act with resilience, one that has international projection and has established strategic alliances.

Recommendations: They point to the continuity of strategies for adaptation, expansion and strengthening, as well as integration of key elements, coupled to systematization and documentation.





Prologue 1

Second Human Development Notebook

Advances, Challenges and Consolidation of El Sistema

Eduardo Méndez

Executive Director of El Sistema



EDUARDO MÉNDEZ

When I accepted my leadership responsibility in the National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela (El Sistema), I was clear that our mission was going to go much further than simply being a music school. Our program uses music as a driver for holistic transformation through social inclusion, the building of coexistence, respect, and non-violence. In this way, each beneficiary impacts their environment and community, helping to forge better citizens and build stronger societies.

The objective is not simply to progressively include the greatest possible number of boys, girls, and young people in El Sistema, but that each one of them transforms into a more complete human being, more developed and disciplined, more committed to their environment. That is the true essence of El Sistema: to turn adversities into opportunities for innovation and growth, and to take advantage of the power of music to promote human development.

In recent years, we have strengthened El Sistema through several key actions, though always honoring the legacy and vision of Maestro José Antonio Abreu, the founder of this transforming project. First, we managed to adapt quickly to the challenges of the pandemic, finding new ways to motivate our participants and to keep the flame of the project alive. Second, we were awarded the Guinness record for the largest youth orchestra in the world, an achievement that clearly evidences the capacity of our organization to unite thousands of young people around music. And third, we have worked tirelessly in the cultivation and transmission of the “mystical spirit” of El Sistema, ensuring that the foundational vision and values remain alive despite the changes.

For that reason, our expansion plans are aimed at taking this transformative experience to more corners of the country and the world. We want to consolidate the Music University of El Sistema and Sistema Fest as platforms that allow us to project internationally our model of integral development through music.

However, in order to achieve a lasting impact, sustainability is fundamental. We have worked very hard to standardize our processes, to train and retain our internal talent, and to transmit the “mystique,” the spirit of the project from generation to generation. This has allowed us to maintain the quality and growth of El Sistema, even in the most challenging moments.



At the end of the day, our legacy will not be measured by the number of participants who pass through our ranks, but by the transformation that we achieve in their lives. That is the dream that we must honor and continue building in the years to come, so that El Sistema continues to be a beacon of hope and a driver of change in our society.

I am convinced that, with the same passion and determination that has characterized us until now, we will manage to take this project to new heights of excellence and transcendence, just as Maestro Abreu dreamed. It is on account of that we are pleased to present this Second Human Development Notebook, focused on showing the progress, the challenges and the consolidation of El Sistema in times of crisis, inviting readers to find in its pages the achievements and perspectives of this initiative within the framework of the celebration of its 50th anniversary.

Prologue 2

Second Human Development Notebook

The Transformative Power of Music as a Pathway to Human Development

Luis Francisco Thais Santa Cruz

Resident Representative of the United Nations
Development Programme (UNDP) Venezuela



LUIS FRANCISCO THAIS SANTA CRUZ

Music has a unique capacity to bring out the best of the human condition: discipline and creativity, listening and cooperation, excellence and sense of purpose. When that force is organized around an inclusive vision, culture also becomes development: it expands capabilities, strengthens bonds, generates belonging and opens real opportunities so that girls, boys, and young people unleash and deploy their potential.

This Second Human Development Notebook compiles and analyzes, from the human development approach of UNDP, a Venezuelan experience that is recognized worldwide: El Sistema. Within the framework of its trajectory and on the occasion of its anniversary, this document places in perspective recent learnings, and evidences how the collective practice of music can be translated into results that transcend the artistic: a holistic formation, social inclusion and daily construction of coexistence based on respect, cooperation and non-violence.

The proposal of El Sistema offers a key lesson for the development agenda: progress is consolidated when capacities are expanded and communities are strengthened at the same time. Music education, understood as a process of shared learning, creates an environment where talent is cultivated with effort, merit is coupled with solidarity and diversity becomes a source of richness. In such a space, inclusion is not an abstract concept: it takes the form of access, continuity, accompaniment, belonging and growth opportunities for those who, otherwise, could be left out.

The Notebook also shows that human development is built at multiple levels. At the personal level, it is expressed in self-esteem, aspirations, habits, leadership and skills to work with others. At the community level, it is reflected in engagement with families and territories, in the generation of positive references and in the creation of safe spaces of intergenerational encounter. And at the institutional level, it is evidenced in the capacity to sustain a pedagogical model, innovate, form teams and consolidate alliances that expand its reach and impact.

For the UNDP, this Notebook is a source of pride and an invitation. It is a matter of pride on account of a long-standing collaboration with an emblematic institution -which has included support to expand access by providing instruments, accessories,



and equipment- and it is an invitation to look carefully at what works: initiatives that produce visible results, that generate cohesion and that contribute solutions coming from culture, education and community participation. On that same note, the accompaniment to its international projection has contributed to strengthening educational and formative pathways and to positioning El Sistema and its orchestras and choirs in reference scenarios. And, with this Second Human Development Notebook, we seek to consolidate the evidence and reflections about its impact, incorporating resilience, inclusion, alignment with the SDGs and international reach. At a time when the world seeks integrated and sustainable responses, El Sistema shows that it is possible to combine excellence with equity, quality with inclusion and individual aspiration with the common good.

This Notebook aims to contribute to that collective learning. May its findings inspire alliances, policies and programs that place people at the center; that promote opportunities for all; and that reinforce the conviction that human development is, above all, the expansion of what is possible: for each boy and girl, and young person, and for the societies that we build together.





Introduction

In 2025, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela (El Sistema). It is a propitious occasion to inquire, reflect, evaluate and present evidence of the achievements of its trajectory throughout the decade 2016-2025. Why this period? The answer does not take us by surprise: in 2015 we presented the First Human Development Notebook – *Role Model Practices in Inclusion and the Culture of Peace: National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela*. We showed fundamental traits: vision, mission, values and a pedagogical model as the foundation of social inclusion and the creation of a culture of peace.

El Sistema has had a vigorous pace of development that suggests beforehand new advances and achievements, subsequent to 2015, that are worth highlighting. In this Second Notebook we see how these elements have been deepened and to what extent El Sistema has acted with resilience in a dynamic context to ensure its sustainability and expansion, at the same time that it contributes to inclusion and social and human development.

El Sistema proudly shows its meaningful motto: “To play, to sing and to fight.” Both its experience and its reality are so impactful that El Sistema has been described as “the Venezuelan musical miracle.” But, that miracle arises from the effort of men and women, young people, and children who, with dedication and commitment, aim for individual and collective excellence.

The impact of El Sistema has been so broad that it is recognized nationally and internationally as a model of transformation, inclusion and social cohesion, through music education. This has not only been a recognition of its value. The model has been replicated, with the pertinent adaptations, in many other countries, always maintaining the spirit and original mystique.

With the intention of giving an account of the continuity of that miracle and of its expansion, we deliver the Second Notebook to present the results of a meticulous investigation into the evolution of El Sistema in the last ten years. The objective of our study was to visualize in a clear and objective way the features of the pedagogical approach, the dynamics of access and participation, the impact in the communities, the innovative strategies of sustenance and expansion. As related to this report, our purpose is to show, in the same clear and objective manner, those elements that have been identified, analyzed and evaluated.

Our Starting Point

El Sistema has solid philosophical and pedagogical foundations. The conviction of the founder, Maestro José Antonio Abreu, that music can be a transforming tool for the holistic development of human beings has permeated every aspect of the model -from the teaching methodology to the organizational structure. This humanistic perspective, which conceives collective musical practice as a means to cultivate values and form honest individuals, capable of becoming agents of social transformation, has inspired this research that addresses the last ten years of the trajectory of El Sistema.

Its path began in 1975 when Maestro Abreu conceived it “to systematize instruction and the collective and individual practice of music through symphonic orchestras and choirs, as instruments of social organization and humanistic development”. El Sistema “is a social program funded by the Venezuelan State dedicated to the pedagogical, occupational and ethical rescue of childhood and youth, through instruction and the collective practice of music.” “It is an institution open to society as a whole”, linked to the communities, with multidisciplinary teams directed by a common goal, that sees “the orchestral movement as an opportunity for personal development in the intellectual, spiritual, social and professional spheres, rescuing the child and the young person from an empty, disoriented and misguided youth.”¹

El Sistema operates in the National Center for Social Action for Music, “a space full of magic where the arts converge and offer children, youth and adults adequate areas for music education, instrumental rehearsal rooms and choral practice, concert and theater halls, chamber music rooms and an open-air acoustic shell.”² These facilities

host the various programs of El Sistema: Academic: Orchestral, Academic: Choral, Simón Bolívar, Alma Llanera, Folk Music, Special Education, Introduction to Music, New Members, Hospital Care, Academic Formation, Academic: Lutherie, Academic: Penitentiary.

It was this vision of El Sistema as a social practice of transcendence and undeniable repercussion that gave origin to the research whose results we present in this report.

Comprehensive Multiplicity of the Research

In order to conduct the study of the trajectory of El Sistema in its last ten years, we adopted the same theoretical-methodological approach that had been used for preparing the First Notebook. It is a mixed approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods, with which we addressed the multilevel analysis of the impact of El Sistema on the individual, community and structural spheres and areas.

We wanted to gather the voices and experiences of the various entities involved: students, families, communities, teachers, young leaders, personnel employed in diverse tasks, management personnel. These voices allowed us to gain an integral understanding of the scope and effects of the program of El Sistema.

The expansion, diversity of programs, accessibility and integral approach make the centers indispensable to study the success and wide call and reach of El Sistema. The centers are the primary structure for collective music education and practice. We selected twelve centers located in the Greater Caracas, on the basis of the following five criteria: “social inclusion,” “comprehensive education,” “promotion of a culture of peace,” “interinstitutional and community collaboration” and “family integration.” Once selected, we grouped them in two blocks: consolidated centers and emerging centers (those recently created) in a clear process of consolidation.

Another aspect that highlights the multiple nature of the research is the fact that we have considered various sources of information. We started with a rigorous documentary search and reviewed reports, books, academic works, newspaper material, documents of El Sistema and, even, manuscripts. A set of documents that describe recent practices and policies of El Sistema enabled us to visualize essential elements that allow us to characterize its evolution within the analyzed period:

- Eduardo Méndez. (2025). *Una mirada hacia el futuro*;
- Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar. (2019). *Diagnóstico de la transversalización del enfoque de género en El Sistema*;
- Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar. (2022). *El Sistema en cifras*;

¹ National System of Youth and Children
Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela.
2018. *El Sistema*. Web site:
<https://el.sistema.org.ve/>

² Ibidem

- Fundación Simón Bolívar. (2023). *El Sistema, avances y perspectivas de integración musical*.
- Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. (2020). *Sistematización de El Sistema como modelo de resiliencia*;
- Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. (s.f). *Tocar, cantar y luchar 2025*;
- Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. (s.f). *Vinculación de El Sistema como política de inclusión social en el cumplimiento de la Agenda 2030 y ODS*.

Alongside the documentary review, a field study put us in contact with substantial sources. In the first place, we interviewed some executive leaders of El Sistema: Eduardo Méndez, executive director of El Sistema; Herich Sojo, general director; Lorena Lugo, sectoral project director; Leonardo Hurtado, academic-musical director of El Sistema and director of the José Antonio Abreu Chair; Mayra León, director of the Research and Documentation Center; Andrés David Ascanio, sectoral director of academic-musical formation; Ronnie Morales, director of the Simón Bolívar Music Conservatory.

Through the interviews, detailed and in-depth information was gathered about the experiences, perceptions and social imaginaries of the highest authorities of El Sistema. In a very brief summary, we can say that they highlight a broad vision of the future and point out different strategies aimed at maintaining that vision. They also refer to key factors of the success achieved, and the risks that they have faced and tactical plans to mitigate them. Finally, they point out lessons learned and good practices that led to the consolidation of El Sistema.

In the second place, we conducted a survey directed at members (students) and academic-music instructors (teachers) of the centers that we studied. We considered that in order to know more deeply the real impact of the inclusion model of El Sistema it is necessary to approach the perceptions and assessments of those who experience it day by day. The activity was convenient for collecting the ideas about the program of academic and music education and the impact of El Sistema in personal and group development. Eight hundred-thirty surveys were conducted, seven hundred twenty-three were conducted with members and one hundred-seven with instructors.

The third instrument of the field study was the design and implementation of focus groups. The first set of groups was made up by young leaders of the centers selected for the study. A second, by mixed participants: members, management and personnel, representatives of the members, members of the community. We organized twelve work sessions with each one of the focus groups in order to document relevant



elements of the transformation process that takes place in the life of the members and their communities, enrich the debate about the transforming potential of musical and artistic education, beyond its aesthetic and cultural value; and perceive the positive incidence of musical formation in the integral development of children, adolescents and youth, and in the construction of a more inclusive and peaceful society.

The analysis categories used for the focus groups of young leaders were learning, personal change, sense of identity and belonging, evaluation of the educational process and impact of the teaching performance. In the case of the mixed focus groups, the categories were opportunity of access, center-community link, sense of identity and belonging, impact of the center on social inclusion, impact of the center on the culture of peace. The analysis of the contents resulted in the creation of word clouds that give account of the importance granted by the groups to specific contents or ideas, based on how frequently the “key words” came up in the statements that were analyzed.

It is worth highlighting that this study was carried out in educational settings that prioritize the protection of children, safe learning environments free of violence, discrimination and exclusion, and full respect for the principles of inclusion and non-discrimination. Following United Nations standards (such as those promoted by UNICEF in safe and protective learning environments, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), it was guaranteed that all interactions with children and young people respected their dignity, rights and psychosocial well-being. The design of the

study was evidence-based, with complete methodological transparency: the criteria for selecting the centers were identified and applied, the research instruments for the generation of information were previously informed, the anonymity of participants in the surveys and focus groups carried out was maintained and a rigorous qualitative/quantitative analysis was carried out, thus ensuring reproducibility and validity of the findings.

Findings in Six Steps

The Second Human Development Notebook is made up of six main chapters. The first of them, “Facing the Challenges: Resilience and Adaptability,” refers to the capacity to face the challenges that El Sistema has, though always maintaining its essence and its mission of having a positive impact on the lives of children and adolescents, as well as young people. We describe its innovative nature and its ability to adapt to a variety of circumstances and challenges.

The second chapter, “Pedagogical Model: Comprehensive Education, Inclusion and Social Change,” focuses on El Sistema as an educational a highly significant project. We highlight its fundamental features and components: social inclusion, educational innovation, programmatic diversity, character education and teaching of values, comprehensive development, contribution to social development and to the construction of a culture of peace. We identify and describe the educational settings, and we refer to the attitude of the teaching team toward its work.

In order to delve deeper into the contribution of El Sistema to the personal and comprehensive or holistic development of the members, as evidenced in the research, we present a third chapter entitled “Transforming Lives.” We show how El Sistema goes beyond music education and contributes to the development of competencies and socio-emotional abilities, and how the empowerment that occurs in the members contributes to community and social transformation.

The personal and comprehensive development that El Sistema proposes and achieves is not limited to a single sector. In the fourth chapter, “Collective Musical Practice for Social Inclusion,” we evidence that El Sistema has managed to democratize access to broad social sectors, addressing with particular care those who are the most vulnerable. The incorporation of culturally diverse elements and the mainstreaming of the gender approach are key aspects of social inclusion.

In the fifth chapter, “Music Education to Bring About Social Change and the Culture of Peace,” we integrate the notions “social inclusion” and “social integration” that lead to



the creation of a platform conducive to the education of individual who are conscious of their social role. We see how El Sistema, in this sense, has an impact on children and adolescents, as well as on young people who, in turn, impact their communities and, again at the same time, the social environment.

We have dedicated the last chapter, “An Inspiring Role Model,” to showing our findings in relation to the national and international expansion of El Sistema. The institution has not limited its pedagogical model to reduced spaces. On the contrary, we show that its vision of the future, the strategic alliances established, the realization of international events and its connection with the sustainable development goals (hereinafter, SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, have led El Sistema to position itself as an educational practice that is replicable in different contexts.

We hope that the study of the evolution of El Sistema in the last ten years (2016-2025) clearly shows the progress, achievements and vision of the future of the institution. In this way, we intend to contribute to the dissemination of the results and lessons learned that can be an inspiration to other organizations, communities or countries. The study presented in this Second Notebook contributes to enhancing and strengthening the design and implementation of public policies focused on childhood and youth, on human development and social change.



“I was the founding director of the 23 de Enero center. The beginning was tough, but also one of the most extraordinary experiences of my life. I entered a very strong, very hostile community. On more than one occasion I had to face very complex situations where I felt fear. But I told myself: ‘I have to stand firm, because if I want change for them, I have to be the first one standing.’ I succeeded — I faced situations where I had to dare to go further, beyond music. It was not about thinking of my own well-being first, but about the well-being of my team and the well-being of all the children.”

Focus group with young leaders, Chacao I Center.

Chapter I
**National System of Youth
and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela**

Facing the Challenges: Resilience and Adaptability

*El Sistema is not really a system
because it is always constantly
changing.*
Maestro José Antonio Abreu

In the midst of the constant social challenges and challenges that are inherent to contextual changes, the National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela (El Sistema) has been able to maintain its essence and its capacity to positively impact the lives of thousands of boys, girls and youth, alongside the necessary transformation that has been carried out in order to deal with new circumstances. One of the most outstanding aspects of that transformation has been the surprising capacity for innovation and adaptability shown by El Sistema. Against all contingencies, whatever their type or nature, the leadership of El Sistema has been able to diversify its sources of financing, innovate in the implementation of its education program and increase strength through commitment and teamwork.

Resilient Navigation

The document entitled *Sistematización de El Sistema como modelo de resiliencia*³ highlights the capacity of El Sistema to keep up throughout its fifty years of existence. Especially, in recent years, despite having faced the diverse economic, political and social complexities that prevailed in Venezuela and, even, the dramatic and unusual situation that the COVID-19 pandemic entailed, El Sistema maintained the continuity of its program of music education, the support for its members and the fulfillment of its mission.

El Sistema has adapted creatively to the circumstances and sustained its programs, on the basis of its essence, values and original principles. But it has not only managed to remain, but it has even expanded its coverage and preserved the vision of turning its music education practice into a world policy. This is the result of its capacity for resilience, understood as “the capacity to adapt to an adverse situation, and to recover its initial state after a disturbance.”⁴

³ Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. (2020). *Sistematización de El Sistema como modelo de resiliencia*

⁴ Ibid, page 5

In this regard, El Sistema deploys various strategies, such as reorganizing activities, using technological tools, supporting the families of the members of the orchestras and choirs, sustaining the commitment of its personnel and creating alliances with public, private and multilateral entities. For its part, the document entitled *Una mirada hacia el futuro*⁵ sets forth that, with its comprehensive management style, El Sistema strengthens its administrative practices and strategic planning, thereby guaranteeing sustainability.

The capacity for resilience and adaptability of El Sistema is evidenced in the results that it has obtained. There have been quite a few achievements that have been attained and the satisfaction that all those involved have been able to experience in these last years has been considerable indeed.

Evidence of the Resilience of El Sistema

The capacity for resilience and adaptability of El Sistema is highlighted by the results of its management during exceptional circumstances. “For El Sistema, resilience is a matter of sustaining over time a model of social inclusion with potential for universal scalability that sets social public policy guidelines.” This is pointed out in the document entitled *El Sistema en cifras*, in which the Simón Bolívar Music Foundation⁶ presents an inventory of data that bring to light the outstanding features of El Sistema during the last years. Some of them are listed below, as updated, in some cases:

- More than four hundred (400) public officials of El Sistema have been trained in matters related to the Protection of Children and Youth, and Good Treatment.
- One hundred thirty-six thousand (136,000) musical instruments have been included in all the academic and music education programs in the country.
- One million three hundred thousand (1,300,000) children and young people are active in children and youth choirs and orchestras.
- Four hundred forty-three (443) centers and one thousand seven hundred twenty-two (1,722) regional modules operate throughout the country.
- One thousand seven hundred seventy-two (1,772) groups of introduction to music, one thousand four hundred seventy (1,470) choral groups, one thousand seven hundred twenty-two (1,722) orchestral groups, six hundred ninety-four (694) Alma Llanera groups active throughout the country.
- Sixteen (16) live music concerts and forty-two performed and broadcasted online (42), during the year 2021.
- El Sistema claimed the Guinness World Record as the Largest Orchestra of the World, with 8,573 musicians playing one hundred two (102) instruments at the same time during the certification event.

⁵ Méndez, E. (January 8, 2025). *Una mirada hacia el futuro. Papel Literario, El Nacional*

⁶ Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar. (2022). *El Sistema en cifras*



In addition to these data, the document also offers relevant information about El Sistema, in qualitative terms and in line with its policy of social inclusion:

- Carrying out musical and teaching activities compatible with the Sustainable Development Goals (hereinafter, SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations
- Commitment with the reduction of poverty, mainly of the children and young people who belong to the academic music training programs
- Learning and adaptation of modern technologies, in order to expand the methods of music education
- Social investment as related to and inclusive education
- Commitment with ensuring equity and gender equality
- Manufacturing musical instruments as a source of inclusive development (equitable and stable) and independence
- An innovative nature as an inclusion model
- Strengthening the rights approach in music practice
- Strengthening national and international strategic alliances
- Strengthening international cooperation replicating the model
- Construction of the Training Center for Music Teachers, and development of the future project of the Latin American Music University
- I and II World Congress of El Sistema as a space of exchange and international positioning.



These data bring us closer to the reality of El Sistema. As we have been able to see in these lines, they show us the resilient capacity that has enabled it to prevail and thrive. But, alongside the documents, we can find the voices of those who day by day strengthen the foundations to build and grow.

Committed Leadership, Values and Passion for Work

We interviewed the young and distinguished members of the leadership team of El Sistema in order to verify how they experienced the process of adaptation and transformation, during the stage of the decade 2016-2025, and in what manner they have reflected on it. We have seen that this vital, agile, flexible and open-to-change team has been able to pay attention to the needs of the staff and delegate responsibilities in a strategic manner, so as to meet the challenges and maintain high standards of academic, musical and managerial quality. Consequently, the elements that they highlight with respect to the consolidation of El Sistema throughout its history are of the utmost importance.

- *Leadership continuity.* The founder of El Sistema, José Antonio Abreu, passed away on March 24, 2018. The orderly transition of leadership, which kept intact the values and passion for work of Maestro Abreu that he turned into his real strength and that of El Sistema, was a key element to maintaining the stability that the institution had achieved, despite this most sensitive loss.

- *Teamwork.* The organizational culture of El Sistema is based on the commitment, passion and the collaboration of all the members of its staff. This foundation, alongside the shared mystique, has been tool that has shielded the institution when faced with difficulties.
- *Strategic alliances.* Building bonds and creating connections with key agents -both at the national and the international level- has allowed El Sistema to nourish itself with external knowledge and resources. These have been able to counteract the urgencies faced.
- *Strategic use of technology.* The incorporation of technological tools, especially during the pandemic, has been key to maintaining the continuity of its pedagogical work and the connection with students. El Sistema has been able to embrace innovations in order to evolve and adapt to the challenges.

We can ask ourselves which are, specifically, those challenges or risks to which El Sistema has responded during the last years. Our interviewees have pointed out some of them.

- *The impact of talent mobility.* The fact that a good part of the professional population, among it that dedicated to music, left the country and moved elsewhere, led El Sistema to design fast track strategies for accelerated training in order to replace those professionals who had left the country, in addition to strengthening the retention processes.
- *Economic and organizational sustainability challenges.* In view of the fact that El Sistema has the Simón Bolívar Music Foundation as its administrative platform, it receives from the State an important support and resources. At the same time, it has continued strengthening a scheme of alliances in order to respond effectively to the changing needs of the prevailing context and guarantee its sustainability in the long term.

In the first place, the members of the leadership team have the unwavering conviction that music is a tool of social transformation and comprehensive development of the members. In the second place, they see collective musical practice as a means to cultivate values and abilities in boys, girls and youth. These visions are the engine that moves them and urges them to reinvent themselves, adapt themselves and enhance the resilience of El Sistema when faced with adversities. Let us now perceive this feeling that drives them in their own words.



HERICH SOJO

- *Herich Sojo, Director General:* "The collective practice of music is the very essence of El Sistema. Those who manage to understand this transforming philosophy remain and continue promoting its growth, even in the midst of the major crises."



LORENA LUGO



RONNIE MORALES



MAYRA LEÓN



LEONARDO HURTADO

- *Lorena Lugo, Sectoral Project Director.* “Reinventing ourselves with passion to strengthen the legacy of El Sistema.”
- *Ronnie Morales, Director of the Simón Bolívar Music Conservatory.* “What has kept El Sistema alive is the desire of the boys and girls to continue singing, to continue playing, to continue learning,”
- *Mayra León, Director del Research and Documentation Center.* “El Sistema has been strengthened due to the profound sense of belonging, commitment and loyalty of those who make it up”, “Their attitude that privileges ‘it is always possible’, instead of ‘it can be done...’, has been fundamental and has enabled El Sistema to continue growing and to see difficulties as opportunities.”
- *Leonardo Hurtado, Academic-Musical Director of El Sistema y Director de la José Antonio Abreu Chair.* “El Sistema constantly reinvents itself, adapting to the new times without losing its essence, so that each generation of boys, girls and youth can find in music a path toward personal and social transformation.” “Reinventing oneself without losing the essence: that is the key to the sustainability of El Sistema.” “El Sistema has managed to adapt to the times, without losing its transforming essence.”

At the center of the process of transformation and adaptability based on resilience, is the unbreakable philosophy and social vision that has guided El Sistema since its beginnings, under the visionary and transforming leadership of Maestro José Antonio Abreu. His humanist philosophy, founded on the conviction that music can be a powerful agent of social change, has been the motor that has driven El Sistema to reinvent itself and adapt to the new and complex challenges that have arisen throughout recent years.



ANDRÉS DAVID ASCANIO ABREU

“The foundations are so solid, and the roots so deep, that all the personnel trained throughout these years have managed to keep the tree and the structure of El Sistema afloat.”

Andrés David Ascanio Abreu
Sectoral Director of Musical Academic Training



“One of the most important things the center does is inclusion. I haven’t been working here long, but I’ve known the staff for many years because my daughter studies here. I’m talking about the inclusion of many young people who have been on the streets and who have found a new vision for their lives through music. Many people who were lost to drugs and crime have found in this program called El Sistema an opportunity to move forward. We have achieved change in the kids — better behavior here and at home.”

Mixed focus group, 23 de Enero Center.

Chapter II
System of Children and Youth Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela
Pedagogical Model: Comprehensive Education, Inclusion and Social Change

To the extent that we know how to start our youth and children in the fascinating enterprise of innovation, creation, study and art, to that same extent we will be able to decisively ensure the quality and dignity of all the futures, and the possibility itself of meeting the immense challenge of being and living in dignity, peace, justice and freedom.
Maestro José Antonio Abreu

⁷ Fundación Simón Bolívar. (2023). *El Sistema, avances y perspectivas de integración musical*

⁸ Alemán, X; Duryea, S.; Guerra, N.G.; McEwan, P.J.; Muñoz, R.; Stampini, M. and Williamson, A.A. (2016). *Los efectos de la formación musical en el Desarrollo infantil: prueba aleatoria de El Sistema en Venezuela*. The study also highlights the challenges of aiming the interventions towards vulnerable groups within the context of a volunteer social program, suggesting that although the program offers free education and instruments, the possibility of maintaining in time the participation of the most vulnerable children, might require additional targeting and retention strategies as supplementary incentives or supports, so as to improve the targeting and encourage a wider participation and retention of the most underprivileged groups in El Sistema.

⁹ Alemán, X; Duryea, S.; Guerra, N.G.; McEwan, P.J.; Muñoz, R.; Stampini, M. and Williamson, A. (2015). *Evaluación de El Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela*. Informe Final. In this final report, special mention is made of an important finding: the increase of the self-control of girls, boys and youth and the reduction of their emotional difficulties (like emotional symptoms, behavior disorders, hyperactivity and problems with their peers). These effects are more pronounced in the case of the most vulnerable boys and girls -i.e., those who have mothers with a lower educational level and live in a situation of violence. Therefore, the potential of El Sistema to increase self-control and to reduce the behavior difficulties in boys and girls, especially the most vulnerable, is highlighted

El Sistema is based on a humanist and transforming vision. Its pedagogical work is founded on a methodology that guides the learning and teaching process toward the collective practice of music, always keeping in mind that a socio-artistic education program can generate transformations at multiple scales. This educational model focuses on achieving the academic, artistic, professional, ethical, emotional and social growth of the members of the institution.

The opportunities for comprehensive development that El Sistema provides to children and young people from multiple social contexts, alongside the commitment that they assume by becoming involved in the pedagogical dynamics, has a profound impact on social inclusion. The educational model conceives music as a tool for cultivating values such as discipline, teamwork and community integration, and this is a key aspect for the achievement of a more integrated and cohesive society.

In the document *El Sistema. Avances y perspectivas de la integración musical*,⁷ El Sistema defines itself as an institution that has music as a tool of social transformation, inclusion and comprehensive development of the human being. Studies conducted and presented by the Inter-American Development Bank point out that the approach of musical teaching as a tool for social inclusion and human development and transforming action, is evidenced in the changes of children and youth, especially of those who are more vulnerable, who reduce behavior difficulties and increase self-control, which contributes to prevent violence and crime.^{8,9}

El Sistema has developed and consolidated throughout its fifty years of institutional life on the basis of a pedagogical model that is founded on inclusion and service to the community through music. It is thus set forth by its academic-musical director, Leonardo Hurtado, who adds that this model has its focus on excellence as a continuous process of musical construction, though with an ethical perspective.

FIGURE 1

[illegible]

The educational project is based on methodological innovation because it seeks to combine tradition with innovative teaching methods. It is about focusing the educational process on musical excellence, on training artists at the height of virtuosity and creativity.¹⁰ The updating and improvement of the curricula, incorporating practical approaches and aligned with the needs of the students, is a defining guideline of El Sistema. The project for the creation of a University of Music, as envisioned by the young leadership, is aimed at professionalization and academicization as tools for modernizing pedagogical strategies and raising even more the level of training, without losing sight of the pedagogical principles and the institutional dedication or “mystique.”

Another outstanding element of the pedagogical philosophy of El Sistema is the importance that it attaches to the constant review of its education programs and curricula, as a means to adapt to social contexts, the dynamics of change and the needs of the members. This perspective has led to the expansion and diversification of the academic and artistic offering. New formats and musical genres have been added, ranging from the teaching of classical music to the integration of Afro-Venezuelan rhythms and autochthonous musical expressions.

In this regard, the executive leaders of El Sistema highlight the experience of the ‘Vive el Sistema Fest’, a festival inaugurated as within the framework of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of El Sistema (April 24-May 11, 2025), with the purpose of expanding the reach and accessibility to El Sistema, thus positioning proposals related to popular and contemporary genres.

As affirmed by Eduardo Méndez, its executive director, the core value of programmatic diversification is that it allows us to address increasingly diverse populations, adapting to the realities of the communities that El Sistema serves and keeping in mind the constant pursuit of academic excellence. The broad academic offer is consistent with the beacon that unconditionally guides El Sistema: social inclusion.

An education based on values is a solid foundation for the integral development of people capable of valuing their own existence and their being part of society. In El Sistema, the values-based education is the result of daily coexistence, through the process of music education¹¹ and choral and orchestral practice.

11 *ibidem*

The results of both the surveys and the focus groups that are gathered in this study show that the values that the pedagogical perspective of El Sistema fosters are, respect, solidarity, empathy, cooperation, fellowship and team spirit (Figure 2). These values lead to teamwork, a real sense of belonging and the development of key socioemotional skills, which prepares the members for a better interaction with the environment. Additionally, El Sistema fosters discipline, order and leadership, values that lead to the organization of thought and behavior, which are essential for personal growth. Motivation and commitment are added, and both of them are indeed most important skills that are required in order to attain excellence.

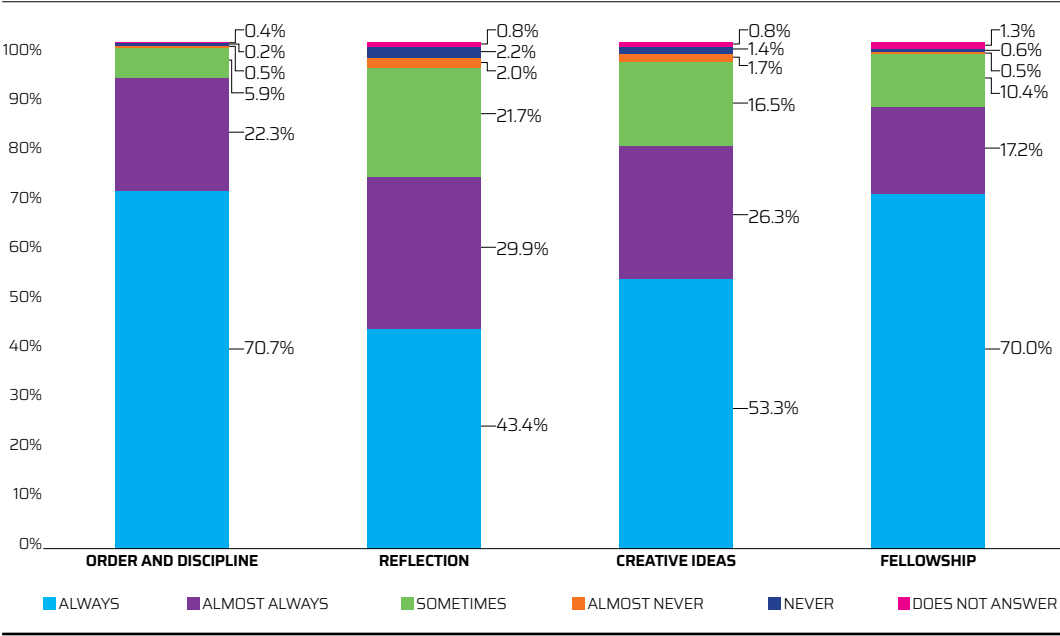
The emphasis of El Sistema on a values-based education reveals its commitment to the comprehensive development of children, adolescents and youth, preparing them to be creative, upright and community-committed citizens. In this way, the values that it fosters are essential pillars for the construction of a culture of peace, which means that El Sistema consolidates practices that contribute to the formation of a citizenship committed to peaceful coexistence.

In terms of comprehensive or holistic development, musical practice, the core of the pedagogical model of El Sistema, does not only develop technical and musical skills; the capacity to reflect and analyze, as well to innovate and generate creative ideas are also virtues that gain strength through music education. The members develop an open and plural mind, alongside socioemotional skills such as responsibility and commitment.

Students and teachers state that the simple fact of being a part of El Sistema generates feelings of commitment and persistence, while at the same time having an impact on their empowerment and development of leadership skills, which turns them into more self-confident individuals. Collaborative work leads them to take ownership of tools for coexistence, thus increasing their transforming potential in society. In turn, the personal growth that results from strengthening all of these virtues leads to social growth as far as these virtues allow adaptation to the challenges of today's world, the contribution of novel solutions and, definitively, the construction of a more just and inclusive society.

The young leaders also mention that by transcending strictly music education, El Sistema develops socioemotional skills, a keen sense of identity and belonging, and a clear awareness of their role as agents of transformation in their communities. Parents, guardians and community leaders share this vision. They have understood that music becomes a means of expression and connection, driving the personal, community and cultural development of children and youth, and expanding their horizons and future possibilities.

FIGURE 2
CHART “VALUES PROMOTED BY EL SISTEMA IN ITS MEMBERS,”
AS REPORTED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS



Prepared in-house

Pedagogical Spaces

El Sistema has different spaces for the musical training of its members and teachers. In the first place, there are centers and academic centers. Alongside that structure, it has conservatories and the university, where schools and professional and regional ensembles are developed.

The centers are the main organizational structure of El Sistema. They are the space where the programs and the schools are developed, with the different musical genres and areas of musical training, such as Musical Initiation Choral Practice, Musical Language, among others. The centers are the ones that ensure a structured learning adapted to various levels and enable El Sistema to foster the development of musical talent with a high standard. Beyond music education, the centers have the purpose of cultivating and fostering values and skills such as teamwork, discipline and leadership.

In addition, the centers are a safe space, one of inclusion, perceived by young people as a place of refuge and emotional support, where coexistence, mutual respect and collaboration prevail. Students and community see them as spaces for the community. These perceptions lead us to conclude that this pedagogical space is conducive to the personal and social transformation which the musical formation of El Sistema backs and bets on.

As related to the University of Music, it is envisioned by the directors of El Sistema, as a project for the consolidation and expansion of the education model and of academic-musical education. It will further professionalize the educational activity, integrating its methodology and philosophy at the university level. This seeks to respond to criticisms about the “empirical” character of the formation, offering a high-level academic alternative. Eduardo Méndez clearly refers to the rationale for this pedagogical space: “Our vision of the future is to consolidate El Sistema as a model of academic and artistic excellence at the university level, expanding its geographic reach and diversifying its programmatic offer to impact more communities in Venezuela and the world.”

Teaching Commitment

In addition to valuing the pedagogical model that integrates the family and the community in the process of music education, the young leaders appreciate the dedication of the teaching team, which motivates them to participate with discipline and perseverance. They value the “opportunity,” the “teaching method,” the “support” and the “motivation” that the teachers provide and state their appreciation for the quality and the accompaniment that they receive during their learning process (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3

WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY “ASSESSMENT OF THE EDUCATION PROCESS,”
YOUNG LEADERS FOCUS GROUP



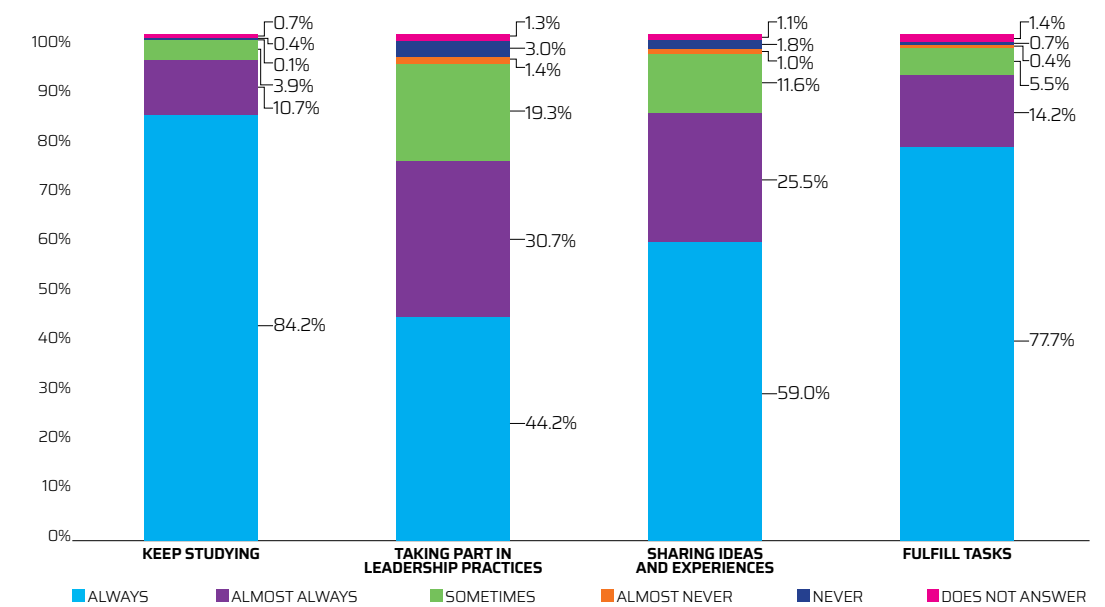
Prepared in-house

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The teachers are a key element in the teaching process. They play a crucial role by guiding and motivating those who are being trained throughout the musical learning process (Figure 4). The different participants who have contributed to this research highlighted the collaborative work between teachers, parents, representatives and community leaders.

FIGURE 4

CHART “DEVELOPMENT OF MOTIVATION FOR MUSIC EDUCATION IN THE CENTER,”
AS REPORTED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS



Prepared in-house

The holistic vision of El Sistema views music as a tool of comprehensive transformation. The academic-musical training program manages to develop in its students technical and musical skills at a level of excellence, in addition to strengthening fundamental socioemotional skills, forging solid identities and fostering a profound sense of belonging. The pedagogical model of El Sistema transcends music education. Beyond the mere teaching of instruments with elevated levels of excellence and of artistic achievements, it has managed to have a significant impact on multiple dimensions of the life of its students.

41



“One of the things I am most passionate about in El Sistema is that, beyond teaching us music, it gives us the ability to grow in many aspects of our lives and develop as human beings. You’re not just learning music — you’re learning fundamental values for life, such as camaraderie, patience, and the ability to coexist in harmony with others. It is truly special because you gain that learning from a young age, regardless of where you come from or who you are. El Sistema gives us the mindset that you always have to look forward and never limit yourself... We all have opportunities.”

Focus group with young leaders, Chacao II Center.

Chapter III

National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela

Transforming Lives

When we place an instrument in the hands of a child, and we include him in an orchestra, in a choir, we stimulate his self-esteem, emotional security, aesthetic taste, responsibility, concentration, discipline, study habits, perseverance when facing challenges, productivity and even his own professional ambition.
Maestro José Antonio Abreu

In Chapter II of this Second Notebook, we analyzed the characteristics of the pedagogical model of El Sistema. In addition to its innovative nature, the diversity of pedagogical spaces, the commitment of its teachers and programmatic diversity, we referred to the impact that all these components of the educational process have on the personal development of children, adolescents and youth. Along with this, we mentioned the paramount importance the education philosophy of El Sistema gives to social inclusion and to the construction of a culture of peace. These three elements are not independent, they interrelate in a constant manner, and each one contributes to the achievement of the others (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE CULTURE OF PEACE



Prepared in-house

We address social inclusion and building the culture of peace from a human development perspective. Referring to this takes us to social inclusion. In turn, this leads us to social development and to the culture of peace, and the latter back to human development. Here, in Chapter III, we report how El Sistema contributes to the personal development of its members. Thus, we begin the separation of these three elements, not with the intention of isolating them, but in terms of a clear and defined presentation of each one of these components.

What do We Understand by Human Development?

The human development approach is extremely broad. It transcends the merely economic and centers on expanding the opportunities and capacities of people so that they can live a full and dignified life. It implies generating conditions that allow individuals and communities to develop all their potential, access quality education, enjoy good health and participate actively in social, cultural and political life. It seeks that people can choose freely and have control over the decisions that affect their lives, in a framework of respect for human rights and social justice.

Human development has an integral approach that highlights the importance of generating opportunities and capacities that allow people a full life and of their own realization. Achim Steiner, who was administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), indicates that human development aspirations must go beyond achievements in matters of well-being to also allow that people feel more owners of their lives, less threatened and more empowered to act in the face of shared challenges.¹² In this section we center on the description of the opportunity that El Sistema offers its members for their personal growth, both in the artistic plane and in the emotional, ethical and social.

Music for Personal Transformation

Music is “the universal language that transforms lives,” it is a “vehicle of personal and community transformation, it inspires us to overcome limits and build a future of excellence and fraternity.” These words of Herich Sojo and Andrés David Ascanio embody an idea that comes to life in El Sistema, a space in which the person undergoes a profound transformation “changing the way of thinking and of seeing the world,” as stated by Lorena Lugo. El Sistema is an organization designed to immerse its members in music, but also to transcend it, transforming lives and communities to build a better country, as Eduardo Méndez mentioned.

The statements of these members of the executive leaders of El Sistema, who feel that working to transform the life of children and youth people also transforms them,

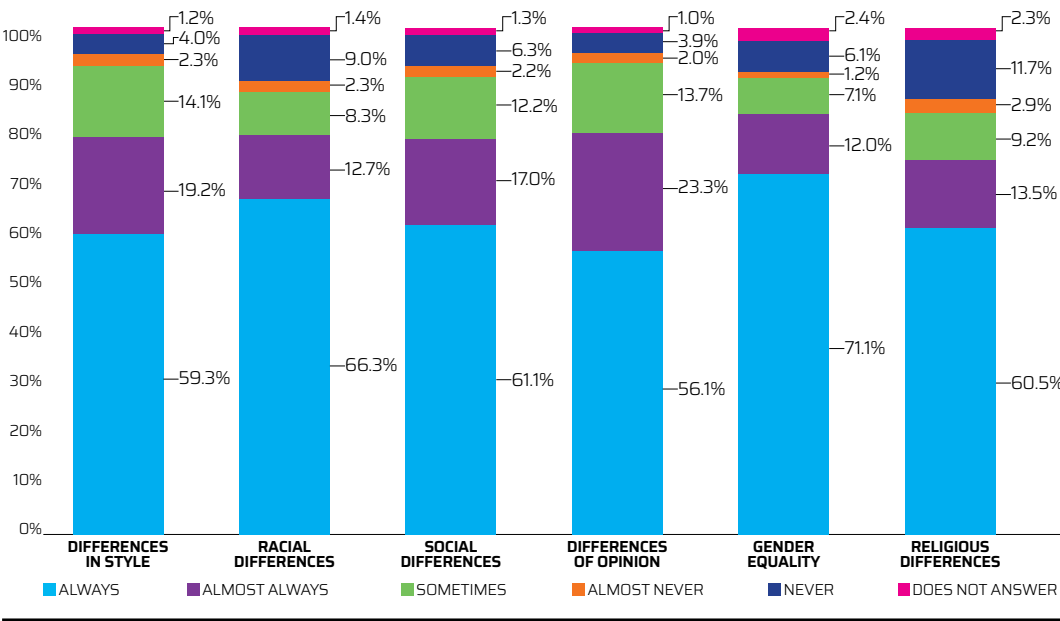
¹² Steiner, A. (2024). “Prologue”. In *Overcoming Stagnation. Report on Human Development. 2023-2024*, page 7

invite us to ask ourselves what the change consists of, what the young leaders, the boys and girls, the teachers, even the people of the community in which the centers are located observe in this respect.

Personal Empowerment and Community Connection

Collective musical practice within the framework of El Sistema has transformed children and youth from disadvantaged environments, providing them with tools for their comprehensive development and personal empowerment. The results of the surveys highlight that fostering respect for differences inherent to the music education program of El Sistema has a profound impact on the integral development of its members. The environment of acceptance and valuation of diversity motivates children and young people to appreciate racial, social, religious, gender, opinion, style diversity (Figure 6), allowing them to modify behaviors of rejection and exclusion.

FIGURE 6
CHART “PROMOTING RESPECT FOR DIFFERENCES,” AS REPORTED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS



Prepared in-house

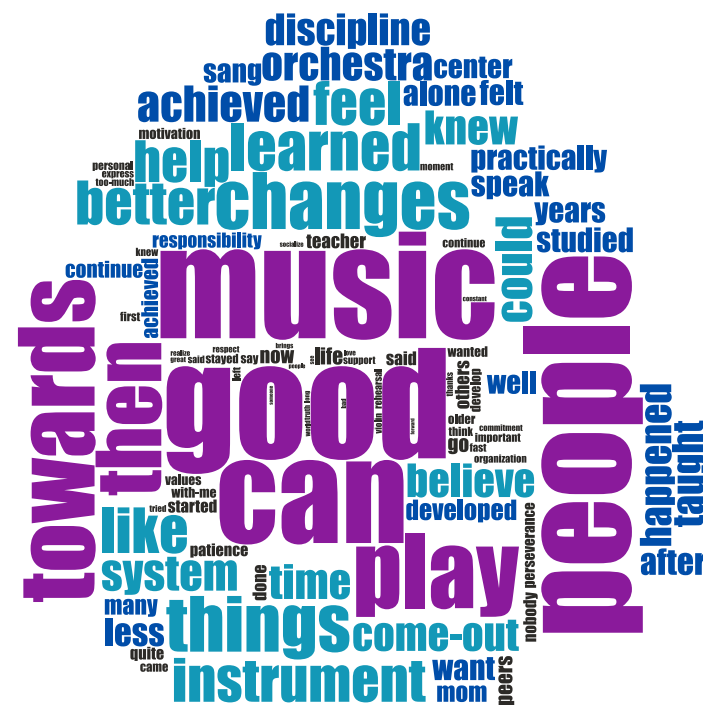
In the same way, the participation of the young leaders of the study shows that a significant achievement is a comprehensive development, through constant practice and effort, throughout the education process. They state that their time at El Sistema has allowed them to experience important personal growth and development of capacities to face and overcome challenges, as far as self-confidence and self-knowledge is

concerned. The work of the centers of El Sistema transcends the merely artistic to have an effect on their personal development as individuals committed to inclusion and the construction of a culture of peace.

Young people do not only develop technical and musical skills, coupled to socioemotional skills, such as teamwork, discipline, responsibility and commitment. They also live through an important process of individual transformation. Concepts such as “confidence,” “security,” “self-knowledge,” “patience,” “perseverance” and “overcoming” of challenges are recurrent (Figure 7), which clearly evidences that El Sistema provides them tools to enhance their personal and emotional growth.

FIGURE 7

WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY: "PERSONAL CHANGE," YOUNG LEADERS FOCUS GROUPS

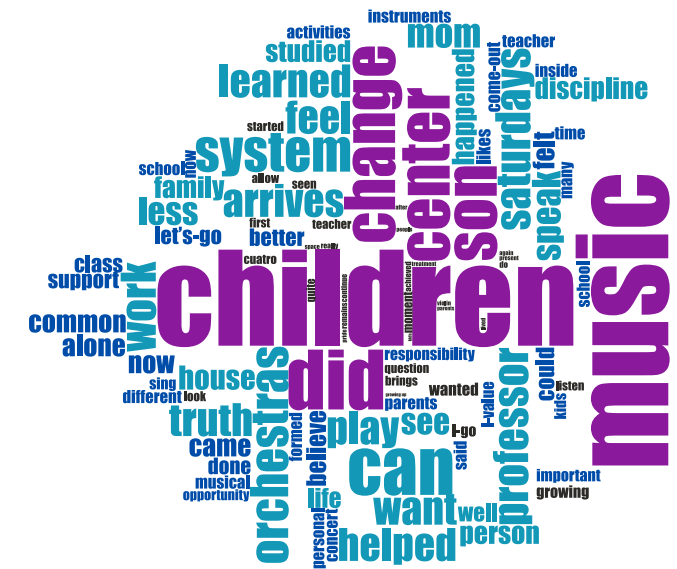


Prepared in-house

When young people in vulnerable situations are welcomed into El Sistema's centers, they are offered constructive alternatives through music (Figure 8). The center provides a supportive environment that promotes personal growth. These new possibilities bring on one hand, empowerment and a stronger connection to the community; and on the other, a sense of identity and belonging.

FIGURE 8

WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY: "IMPACT OF THE 'CENTER' ON SOCIAL INCLUSION," MIXED FOCUS GROUPS



Prepared in-house

Children and young people come to understand music as a fundamental part of their being and personal identity. They not only learn to play an instrument, but also develop personal, social, and emotional skills such as discipline, teamwork, and self confidence. This empowers them and gives them tools to overcome barriers and build stronger relationships with their peers and the community.

One of the most valuable aspects of El Sistema is its human development approach, which goes beyond music education. The program has shown to have a significant impact on the integral development of children and young people.

Feelings of empowerment, self confidence, and gratitude show how El Sistema has provided them with transformative opportunities that broaden their horizons and future possibilities. El Sistema has contributed to the development of fundamental socio emotional skills and competencies in children and youth: responsibility, self confidence, gratitude, empowerment, self awareness, patience, perseverance, overcoming challenges, and respect for diversity.

The promotion of discipline, teamwork, and human connection becomes a set of tools for strengthening their communities. Collective musical practice within El Sistema allows children and young people to reinforce values such as empathy and respect for diversity, as well as their sense of identity and belonging

El Sistema has succeeded in helping young people develop not just musical talents, but also become integral, empowered individuals who are aware of their transformative potential within their communities and society.



“Cultural diversity has enabled an openness that shows El Sistema goes beyond the classical paradigm. There are different programs that highlight diverse cultures. Young people are also given the opportunity to explore and discover other art forms within music itself, which they may find meaningful. I have personally noticed that El Sistema has sparked an interest in learning about different cultures, their origins, and their history, alongside the music. All of this is experienced through the different programs: Alma Llanera, Afro-Caribbean, and Venezuelan music.”

Mixed focus group, 23 de Enero Center.

Chapter IV
**National System of Youth
and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela**

Collective Musical Practice for Social Inclusion

El Sistema was created precisely to bring to every corner of the country -and to all Venezuelan children, without any distinction - the message and lived experience that music allows us to encounter the beauty of being in all its dimensions, transforming the collective experience into the sublime spiritual elevation of the human being.
Maestro José Antonio Abreu

We are five years away from the end of the term set to attain the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹³ We can affirm that El Sistema, with its innovative pedagogical model that promotes personal development and social inclusion, contributes significantly to the achievement of these goals. Above all, its effectiveness stands out in relation to the first of the seventeen objectives agreed upon by the Organization.

In this Chapter IV, we refer to four of the Agenda’s goals that are understood in the same way in the objectives of El Sistema: ending poverty in all its forms, ensuring healthy lives and promoting well being, guaranteeing inclusive and equitable quality education, and achieving gender equality. The firm starting point for advancing toward these goals is the principle of social inclusion.

Social Inclusion

The principle of social inclusion refers to ensuring that broad sectors of the population—regardless of their background, socioeconomic status, or ideology—can fully participate in community life and benefit from public policies. It also means that all people should be able to take part in a meaningful activity such as musical practice, which contributes to their well-being and to their mental and spiritual health. It involves creating equal opportunities and removing barriers that prevent the participation and development of vulnerable or marginalized groups. Its aim is for all people to have a voice, be heard, and actively contribute to building a fairer and more integrated society.

¹³ United Nations. (2015). *Transforming Our World. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

One of the criteria for choosing El Sistema centers for this study is precisely social inclusion. We observe that each center seeks to include children and young people in the musical experience, offering music education to all communities without exclusion, especially those that are underserved. Social inclusion implies that musical, artistic, and human education must reach diverse social strata, particularly those with limited economic resources.

Musical Practice and Democratization of Access to Music Education

El Sistema presents itself as a model of public policy focused on social inclusion through the collective practice of music.¹⁴ In the words of Herich Sojo, music is a catalyst for inclusion. Students and teachers also find that music promotes the inclusion of children and young people from diverse backgrounds and social conditions.

The organization of music education around community-based centers has proven to be an effective model for democratizing access to music education and achieving a comprehensive impact on the populations it serves. The centers emerge as the main generators of opportunities for their members (Figure 9), who develop a positive perception of their own possibilities, which in turn contributes to building expectations of social equality and, therefore, to overcoming conditions of poverty.

FIGURE 9

WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY: "OPPORTUNITY FOR ACCESS CREATED BY THE CENTERS,"
MIXED FOCUS GROUPS



14 Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. (s.f.). *Tocar, cantar y luchar 2025*. Prepared in-house

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It is worth mentioning that offering free training programs underscores El Sistema's commitment to inclusion and equal opportunities, which—as we will see in Chapter V—ultimately contributes to paving the way toward building a fairer and more equitable society.¹⁵

What do respondents, interviewees, and focus group participants mean when they speak of children and young people from diverse backgrounds? The emphasis on vulnerable groups is significant—that is, on those who are particularly exposed to exclusion and therefore to limitations in their personal development. Factors such as gender or age; social, ethnic, cultural, or religious background; as well as disability, often lead to exclusion. El Sistema's educational strategy has made it possible to reach these vulnerable populations, offering them opportunities for personal, educational, and artistic development.

Attention to Vulnerability and Cultural Diversity

Music education can be a powerful driver of social inclusion, as it opens spaces for participation, expression, and transformation among disadvantaged groups. El Sistema's pedagogical model, far from conceiving music training as a privilege for a select few, seeks to reach children, and young people from all socioeconomic contexts, regardless of their background. This premise of inclusion is reflected in the very structure of El Sistema, organized around centers located in communities throughout the country, which play a crucial role in the full integration of their members.

A key aspect of its inclusive approach is the attention El Sistema gives to various traditionally vulnerable populations. According to executive leaders of the institution interviewed for this study, in addition to orchestral and choral training programs, El Sistema offers specific initiatives to children and young people with disabilities, individuals being held in penitentiary centers, and hospitalized patients. In doing so, it offers these disadvantaged groups spaces for participation, expression, and transformation.

Likewise, students and teachers who participated in the surveys affirm that El Sistema serves as a platform for social inclusion by providing opportunities for development and coexistence to children and young people from diverse backgrounds. This view is echoed by participants in the mixed focus groups, who affirm that the centers have succeeded in democratizing access to music education by engaging people from different socioeconomic contexts—a key factor of equity and inclusion.

15 Méndez, E. (2025).
Una mirada hacia el futuro

In addition to opening its doors to various population segments, El Sistema diversifies the academic, artistic, and musical offerings. New formats and musical genres are incorporated. Alongside classical music, students study traditional musical expressions, Afro Venezuelan rhythms, and popular and contemporary genres. This means that people with diverse cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to receive training under the principles of excellence, personal growth, and social responsibility that guide El Sistema.

Gender Mainstreaming

El Sistema maintains an undeniable commitment to inclusion and gender equity. In this regard, the document *Diagnóstico de la transversalización del enfoque de género en El Sistema*¹⁶ (Diagnostic of Gender Mainstreaming in El Sistema) reviews top leadership composition, distribution of director and other positions, recruitment, promotion and selection processes, salary policies, and work-life balance measures.

The study evidences a gender mainstreaming effort. There is relative parity in leadership positions, while challenges remain in increasing women's participation in certain key technical and operational roles. This reflects the institution's commitment to promoting equal opportunities and breaking down gender stereotypes.

Regarding gender-disaggregated data for leadership positions, the study's main conclusion is that although women's participation is high in support units, it is not as strong in key organizational units, with men predominating among Directors of Orchestral and Choral Management (60%), Directors of the Academic Lutherie Center (66%), and Academic Music Sector Directors (63%).

Other important data provided by the study include the following: gender parity among top authorities is 1:1. In director positions, the distribution is almost even—54% men and 46% women. In technical and administrative roles, women have higher participation rates—67.1% and 43.8% respectively—but their presence decreases significantly in operational positions (28%), due to the physical demands of tasks such as moving instruments and music stands.

What has been described above serves as a lesson for the executive board members who are renewing their commitment to gender equity and intensifying their gender mainstreaming efforts to mainstream throughout the organizational structure and processes. So much so that they believe this model can inspire other institutions to effectively integrate a gender perspective.

¹⁶ Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar. (2019). *Diagnóstico de la transversalización del enfoque de género en El Sistema*



El Sistema has succeeded in democratizing access to opportunities for integral development through music. Examples of this include the free and universal participation in its programs and its commitment to gender equity.

By democratizing access to music education—regardless of the socioeconomic conditions or background of its participants—El Sistema has reached traditionally vulnerable populations, becoming a driver of social mobility.

Its organization around centers has proven to be an effective model for democratizing access to music education and achieving a comprehensive impact on the populations it serves.

Social inclusion, and the opportunities it creates for an integral personal development, is a key element of El Sistema's contribution to fostering youth leadership and the empowerment of communities. The young participants become agents of change and key players in social transformation, alongside their families and communities, which are themselves integrated into the inclusive education process.



“I believe the center came to Santa Cruz to make a difference — for the children, for the young people, and for society here in Santa Cruz del Este. El Sistema changes lives, not only those of the children, but also of their families. The kids come and go to the center talking to one another, carrying their instruments, so many of them arriving happily to their classes, where they are taught responsibility, values, everything a child should have. It is about nurturing all those values that every child should have — not only within Santa Cruz, but throughout the world.”

Mixed focus group, Santa Cruz del Este Center.

Chapter V

National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela

Music Education to Bring About Social Change and the Culture of Peace

Education, as synthesis of wisdom and knowledge, is the path towards a more perfect, aware, noble, and fair society.

Maestro José Antonio Abreu

El Sistema ignites, through collective musical practice, the engine of personal development and social inclusion, which results in the integral formation of children and young people from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable populations. If we consider that its education process is grounded in the concept of ‘education in values,’ as discussed in Chapter II, we can understand how El Sistema enables its members to contribute to social transformation in terms of integration, cohesion, justice, and social peace.

Social integration goes beyond mere inclusion; it involves the creation of bonds, interactions, and a genuine sense of belonging among individuals and groups of diverse backgrounds within the community and society at large. It entails the creation of spaces and mechanisms that facilitate encounter, dialogue, and coexistence among people and communities of diverse origins and characteristics. It also seeks to ensure that different sectors of the population can relate to one another, interact, and build a collective identity, thereby strengthening social cohesion.

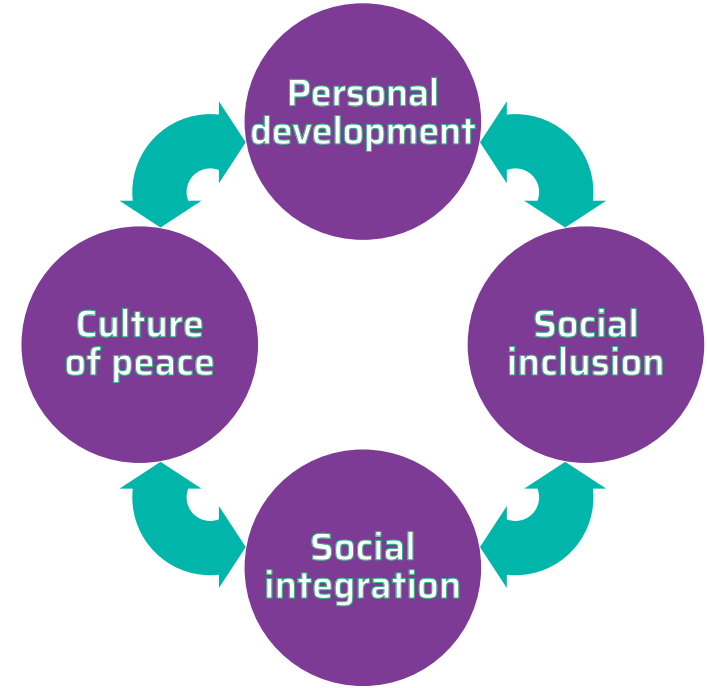
Social inclusion is possible when it takes place within an environment of integration, in which all members of the group are treated with respect, share common goals and interests, and experience a sense of belonging. In turn, social integration is possible when the individuals who make up the group—regardless of their personal characteristics—are fully incorporated into collective dynamics under egalitarian conditions.

Inclusion and integration are fundamental to building a ‘culture of peace.’ This involves bringing up citizens with the capacity to contribute to the ethical and harmonious development of society, promoting values, attitudes, and behaviors that foster solidarity, tolerance, and peaceful conflict resolution. It entails creating environments and social dynamics that enable dialogue, respect for diversity, and the building of peaceful relationships among individuals and groups. A culture of

peace is grounded in education, community participation, and the development of civic competencies that foster coexistence and non-violence.

Once again, we are faced with a cycle made up of interdependent factors that influence and shape one another. Integral education and personal development are possible when social inclusion is achieved; inclusion leads to social integration, which in turn is the foundation of a culture of peace (Figure 10). These are branches of a single delta that flows into the sea of human development, understood as the realization of every person’s potential across multiple dimensions.

FIGURE 10
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL INCLUSION, SOCIAL INTEGRATION,
AND THE CULTURE OF PEACE



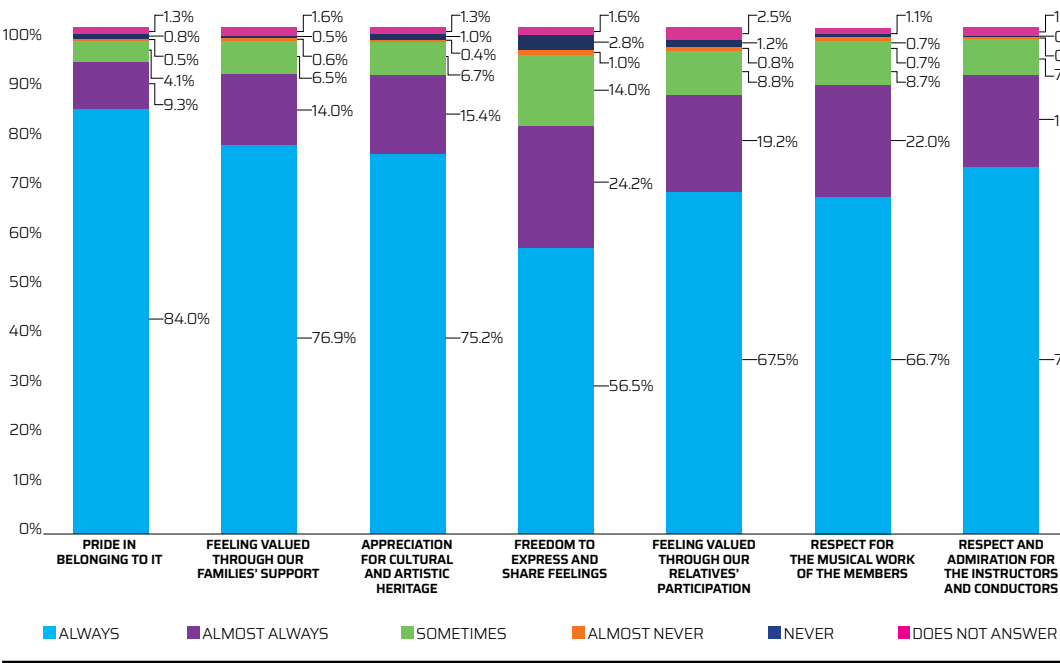
Prepared in-house

A Sense of Belonging

Through training education in music and values, El Sistema creates an environment of acceptance, tolerance, and harmonious coexistence. Its pedagogical model supports holistic development and promotes identity and belonging throughout the program. The strengthening of members’ self-esteem and confidence leads to commitment, rootedness, and active engagement with the institution. The bonds formed with El Sistema, together with the pride of belonging to the community, turn each person into a potential agent of change in their environment.

Figure 11 illustrates how El Sistema has been successful in fostering a strong bond and sense of identity among its members, as well as with their center and with the whole program. This deep sense of identity and belonging is essential for the integration of students and teachers and, consequently, for the building of a cohesive and harmonious community.

FIGURE 11
CHART “IDENTITY AND A SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG STUDENTS AND TEACHERS THAT ARE MEMBERS OF THE CENTER,” AS REPORTED BY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS



Prepared in-house

El Sistema has succeeded in transcending its strictly artistic and musical focus, becoming a platform for inclusion and integration that generates a keen sense of identity and belonging among its members. This is why young leaders within El Sistema perceive themselves as part of a collective musical identity that fosters a sense of belonging and commitment. They also see themselves as citizens committed to social inclusion and the construction of a culture of peace. They feel a deep attachment to the ‘great family’ that El Sistema represents and view themselves as ambassadors of its values and philosophy.

When examining the word cloud generated from the analysis of the category ‘Sense of Identity and Belonging’ (Figure 12), we observe that terms such as ‘family,’ ‘community,’ ‘commitment,’ and ‘ambassadors’ reveal that young leaders feel they are an integral part of a broad support network and of the philosophy promoted by El Sistema.

**WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY: "SENSE OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING,"
YOUNG LEADERS FOCUS GROUPS**



FIGURE 13

WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY: "SENSE OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING," MIXED FOCUS GROUPS



We observe that the El Sistema centers selected for this study operate in collaboration with educational institutions, local governments, and civil society organizations. Integration into the education program and into the institution's overall functioning entails a significant interrelationship in which all sectors contribute their strengths and, in turn, receive a wealth of benefits.

Participants in the mixed focus group found that family and community commitment is evident; that there is a strong connection among centers allowing them to transcend what is merely academic and become true communities that foster shared responsibility and mutual support. This interpretation becomes evident from Figure 14.

Prepared in-house

WORD CLOUD, CATEGORY: "IMPACT OF THE CENTER ON THE CULTURE OF PEACE," MIXED FOCUS GROUP



El Sistema has an impact on communities; it is an agent of change that strengthens social cohesion and the culture of peace. The centers of El Sistema have become true spaces of integration, bringing out in participants and their families a powerful sense of identity, belonging, and institutional rootedness. Thus, music becomes a universal language that brings diverse people together uniting them around the construction of fairer and more inclusive communities.

A wide-angle photograph of a large orchestra performing on a stage inside a massive arena. The stage is covered with a large black cloth. The orchestra members are dressed in formal attire, and many are holding up their instruments or batons. Above the stage, a large, complex metal truss system supports numerous large black speakers and stage lights. The arena's high ceiling and structural beams are visible in the background. In the foreground, the heads and shoulders of the audience are visible, looking towards the stage.



“We are like a seed bank that can spread throughout the world. Why do I say this as a parent who belongs to the center? Because you take a seed, you plant it, and the same tree will grow — the same ceiba (silk-cotton tree). It will grow here, it will grow in Japan, it will grow in Finland, it will grow in Brazil. What does El Sistema change in us Venezuelans? The warmth, the togetherness, the quality. It would be extraordinary for it to be applied worldwide, so that others may have that same academic formation.”

Mixed focus group, La Comandancia Center.



Chapter VI

National System of Youth and Children Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela

An Inspiring Role Model

*I can never say mission accomplished.
I am on a lifelong commitment. For me,
then, there is no mission accomplished.
The mission is an endless process...
until God wills it.
Maestro José Antonio Abreu*

El Sistema's education project—its program based on collective musical practice as a strategy for human development and social inclusion, and its clear orientation toward social integration and transformation in the pursuit of a culture of peace—has proven successful in the Venezuelan context. Consequently, it is possible to consider El Sistema as a model that can be replicated in other contexts that have their own social realities. In other words, it stands as an inspiring example of social transformation through music, one that transcends the borders of Venezuela.

National and International Expansion

El Sistema aims to strengthen its administrative management and planning practices to ensure long-term sustainability and efficiency. At the same time, it envisions its expansion—both internationally, to promote its model worldwide, and nationally, to broaden its impact in Venezuela. From the interviews conducted with the executive board members it is evident they share a vision in this regard: on the one hand, growing in numbers, with the objective of continuing to increase enrollment and the number of centers; on the other, geographic growth, with the objective of further expanding El Sistema’s international presence. The goal is to achieve sustainable expansion that allows the model to reach more communities in Venezuela and more countries around the world.

El Sistema’s forward-looking vision is also described in “*Una mirada hacia el futuro*”¹⁷. Its focus is placed on artistic projection and on the continued growth of the project. Artistic projection refers to El Sistema’s intention to promote the performance of its talented young musicians, both in the country and abroad, positioning them as global references and true ambassadors of the ‘Venezuelan musical miracle.’ Project growth refers to its goal of doubling enrollment in the country and expanding the model internationally through partnerships and the use of technology.

With regard to numerical growth at national level, one of the strategies and lines of action proposed by El Sistema’s leadership is curriculum diversification and engaging new audiences. This includes developing such initiatives as the ‘Vive el Sistema Fest,’ conceived primarily to broaden El Sistema’s reach beyond classical music, thereby attracting new segments of the population.

International tours, meanwhile, have been an effective catalyst for the global projection of Venezuelan talent. Both excellence and diversity, according to Eduardo Méndez, have been key drivers of the model’s international visibility. Mayra León, in turn, emphasizes that loyalty and a constant drive for improvement have strengthened El Sistema as a great Venezuelan family, an ambassador of the country’s values and identity around the world.

Turning to geographic growth, institutional leaders—guided by Maestro Abreu’s vision—are committed to the ambitious process of El Sistema’s internationalization. In interviews with the research team, they describe it as creating a global network of programs that share the same philosophy and methodology. The aim is to foster integration, mutual learning, and alignment of principles internationally in order to consolidate a worldwide network of programs inspired by El Sistema’s model.

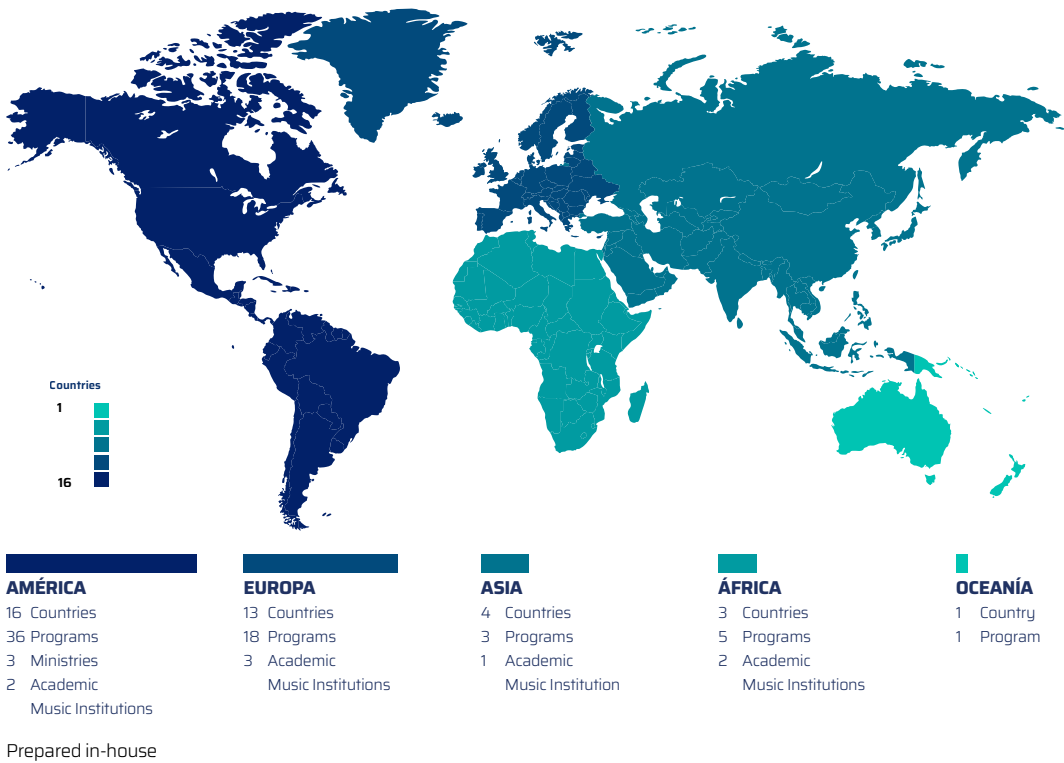
In this regard, the many cooperation agreements signed evidence the effort made to establish global partnerships and collaborations, while facilitating knowledge creation and exchange of knowledge and best practices. Evidence of this is that, over the past ten years, El Sistema’s music education model has experienced remarkable international expansion. It is now present in forty-two countries across five continents (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and Oceania), with a total of seventy-nine cooperation agreements and formal alliances entered into with programs and institutions in various countries, as well as more than fifty-five affiliated programs that operate without a formal agreement. (Figure 17).

The countries with the most agreements are:

- 1. America: United States (11), Argentina (7), Peru (5), Brazil (4), Mexico (3)
- 2. Europe: Spain (4), Italy (4), France (3)
- 3. Africa: Tunisia (3), Angola (3)

FIGURE 17
EL SISTEMA IN THE WORLD

COUNTRIES AND PROGRAMS INSPIRED BY EL SISTEMA THAT HAVE ENTERED INTO A SIGNED ALLIANCE



We see that El Sistema plays a significant leadership role in the Latin American region, where countries such as Argentina, Peru, and Brazil have been pioneers in adopting and implementing its model.

¹⁷ Méndez, E. (2025). *Una mirada hacia el futuro*

The global spread of the model may further motivate other countries to follow this example and establish similar programs, contributing to the creation of an increasingly consolidated ‘Global System of Orchestras.’

Several key factors have driven the diffusion, expansion, visibility, and international projection of El Sistema, positioning it as a successful music education model. First, its innovative methodology—its pedagogical approach based on collective learning through the orchestra and choir—has proven effective and replicable in various contexts. A second factor is the model’s adaptability, which allows it to be adjusted to the socioeconomic and cultural realities of different countries without compromising musical excellence. A third key factor is the positive impact El Sistema has on the personal and social development of its members, beyond the strictly musical dimension. Fourth, the tours and performances of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra in major European venues have contributed to positioning El Sistema on the global stage.

This successful internationalization has potential benefits for El Sistema itself, as it contributes to strengthening the original model. Additionally, through the exchange of experiences and best practices with programs implemented in other countries, there is continuous feedback and improvement of the foundational project developed in Venezuela. The success of global expansion generates greater recognition and prestige for the national program.

World Congresses

Special mention must be made of the World Congresses, designed as key spaces for consolidating El Sistema’s position as a global reference in music education for social transformation. *El Sistema. Avances y perspectivas de integración musical*¹⁸ highlights the international expansion of El Sistema as result of having held two World Congresses, the first in 2021 and the second in 2023.

More than sixty music programs from around the world participated in the First World Congress of El Sistema¹⁹. The event brought together international specialists and researchers on the social impact of music, along with internationally renowned composers and orchestra conductors. Topics covered included the philosophy of El Sistema, its organization, and its artistic and social approach; concert and rehearsal practices; composition and creation; collective practice and its impact on social inclusion and citizenship building; its policies for safeguarding children and adolescents; fundraising; and associativity. The agenda included virtual presentations by specialists, thematic working groups, and the signing of memoranda of understanding among programs.

Some particularly important statements were made during El Sistema First World Congress, as follows:

- Musical art is an emerging dimension that interconnects a universal artistic and cultural agenda.
- Collective music-making is the conceptual foundation of Maestro Abreu’s thinking and the philosophical and organizational basis of El Sistema.
- The center is the organizational model that inspires El Sistema programs around the world and is a ‘space for creating a culture, a model, and a School of Social Life.’
- El Sistema is intended for every child and young person, and for society as a whole, as the motto ‘Music for all’ guides El Sistema’s actions toward developing skills, talent, motivation, and social awareness.
- Collective music-making is a concrete methodology and praxis that drives personal transformation.
- The strategic alliances El Sistema has established with international organizations such as UNICEF and UNDP, as well as with multilateral banks, have driven its expansion and sustainability.
- Strengthening South-South cooperation is essential for expanding the model globally.

Eighty-eight music programs from forty-three countries, all inspired by El Sistema, participated in the Second World Congress²⁰ The topics covered ranged from academic and social issues to research and artistic matters. The Congress featured the participation of fifteen international speakers and four national speakers, with representatives from five continents. The agenda was structured around presentations, forums, lectures, working groups, concerts, and visits to centers, and it also included the signing of cooperation agreements between programs.

Among its main conclusions and statements, the following stand out:

- El Sistema is an ideology of collective strength that unites those committed to the greater good of children and youth.
- Music and education share related categories in human development grounded in ethics and aesthetics.
- The center is the backbone of El Sistema, a place where academic and artistic exchange drives socialization processes.
- Collective music-making is a methodology that drives personal transformation.
- El Sistema is consolidated as a ‘UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador’ to promote the rights of children and adolescents; and the dream of Maestro Abreu is renewed, as he envisioned “El Sistema interconnecting countries around the world.”

²⁰ Second World Congress of El Sistema. September 18 -22, 2023. International speakers and their institution: Enrique Márquez, Global Leaders Institute, United States; Xavier Bouvier, Haute École de Musique de Genève, Switzerland; Karen Cueva, Carnegie Hall, Weill Music Institute, United States; Thibault Vieux, Paris Conservatory of Music and Dance, France; Mark Churchill, New England Conservatory of Music, United States; Eric Booth, Juilliard, Stanford University, NYU, United States; Franka Verhagen, Dream Orchestra, Switzerland. Motto or summary phrase: “Consolidating, grandiosely, a new symphonic-choral art that will shine beyond its merely aesthetic dimension as a sign of extraordinary human development and renewed moral awareness, a temple of beauty and truth, paradise of love and hope for every children in the world”. See <https://elsistema.org.ve/noticias/el-ii-congreso-mundial-de-el-sistema-sumara-experiencias-musicales-de-40-paises/>

¹⁸ Fundación Simón Bolívar. (2023). *El Sistema, avances y perspectivas de integración musical*

¹⁹ First World Congress of El Sistema. September 28, 29 and 30, 2021. International speakers and their institution: Enrique Márquez, Global Leaders Institute, United States; Xavier Bouvier, Haute École de Musique de Genève, Switzerland; Karen Cueva, Carnegie Hall, Weill Music Institute, United States; Thibault Vieux, Paris Conservatory of Music and Dance, France; Mark Churchill, New England Conservatory of Music, United States. Motto or summary phrase: “Playing and singing together we build realities”. See <https://congresomundialelsistema.org.ve/organizacion/i-congreso-mundial-el-sistema/>

Strategic Alliances

As we will emphasize in the following section, El Sistema is committed to the fulfillment of the SDGs. One of these is ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ (SDG 17). Indeed, international cooperation agreements open the door to the exchange of resources, knowledge, and experiences, as well as to new sources of financing, thereby strengthening the sustainability of El Sistema.

An example of strategic alliance is the one between El Sistema and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), under which both institutions contribute to the promotion of the rights of children and youth, incorporating this approach into training experiences. UNDP is also a strategic partner, through the implementation of cooperation projects that broaden El Sistema’s expansion, as is also the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), through its ongoing support to the National Center for Social Action through Music²¹, El Sistema’s headquarters for the development of “academic programs and training for orchestra conductors, performers, and music specialists, as well as for promoting the international projection of our orchestras and musicians”.²²

The executive board members interviewed also acknowledge the diversification and expansion of funding sources. While they recognize the importance of state support and the status of El Sistema’s Mass Music Education Program as a public policy, they also emphasize the need to consolidate long-term partnerships and financing commitments with a diverse range of public and private actors, as well as international cooperation agencies.

El Sistema and the Sustainable Development Goals

A final aspect of the internationalization of El Sistema highlighted in this *Segundo Cuaderno de Desarrollo Humano* (Second Human Development Notebook) is that this comprehensive model of social inclusion is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to be implemented ‘by all countries and stakeholders through a collaborative partnership.’ As noted in Chapter IV, the programs and strategies of El Sistema, grounded in its resilient nature, have the capacity to sustain results associated with the SDGs ‘No Poverty’ (SDG 1), ‘Good Health and Well-Being’ (SDG 3), ‘Quality Education’ (SDG 4), and ‘Gender Equality’ (SDG 5).

Furthermore, the document *Vinculación de El Sistema como política de inclusión social en el cumplimiento de la Agenda 2030 y ODS*²³ identifies and analyzes El Sistema’s main contributions to the achievement of those SDGs in which it has a direct impact. In addition to those already mentioned, it includes ‘Decent Work and



Economic Growth’ (SDG 8), ‘Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure’ (SDG 9), ‘Reduced Inequalities’ (SDG 10), ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions’ (SDG 16), and ‘Partnerships for the Goals’ (SDG 17), the latter discussed in the previous section. The analysis highlights how El Sistema contributes to the achievement of these SDGs through its various programs and strategies: free music education, creating infrastructure and lutherie workshops, promoting gender equality, and strengthening international partnerships. Let us look at some of these aspects in greater detail.

El Sistema’s strategies for expansion and sustainability are linked to SDGs 8 and 9. The program’s continuous and exponential growth has spread across the whole country. The significant demand generated—not only for musical instruments but also for accessories—has made it necessary to strengthen and expand the Academic Lutherie Program, a socio-productive space for the maintenance, repair, and construction of musical instruments. This program provides training for qualified personnel who can then enter the labor market and contribute to the country’s economic growth. In addition, plans have been made to create a musical instrument factory, an innovative initiative intended to meet the demand for instruments among El Sistema’s children and adolescents.

Throughout the preceding chapters, we have seen that El Sistema’s program of personal development, inclusion, and social integration serves as a significant means for reducing inequalities, as outlined in SDG 10. The program seeks—and has succeeded in providing mass access to music education; but not only to training in this

²¹ Fundación Musical Simón Bolívar. (2022). “Vinculación de El Sistema con los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible”. En: *El Sistema en cifras*

²² Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles de Venezuela. 2012. *Centro de Acción Social por la Música*

²³ Sistema Nacional de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. (s.f.). *Vinculación de El Sistema como política de inclusión social en el cumplimiento de la Agenda 2030 y ODS*

art form, but also to equal conditions of participation, where all members benefit from developing life skills and from the adoption of values that help them grow as individuals and become collective agents of community transformation.

As discussed in Chapter V, El Sistema's comprehensive approach, encompassing multiple social dimensions, also contributes to the culture of peace in the country. Engagement in and commitment to musical training has a positive impact on reducing violence in the most vulnerable social groups, creating a space for encounters, exchange of ideas, learning, interaction, and knowledge. This is linked to SDG 16 on 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions'.

El Sistema maintains an ambitious forward looking vision, focused on consolidating and scaling its well established and internationally recognized model of social transformation. One of its goals is to continue expanding its coverage and increasing its transformative impact on communities across many regions of Venezuela.

El Sistema is a worldwide reference. This is evidenced by its growing recognition and visibility as a transformative program that transcends Venezuela's borders; the formation of global networks; the organization of World Congresses as spaces for reflection, exchange, and cooperation; its strategic alliances with international organizations such as UNICEF, UNDP, and multilateral banks; and its alignment with the SDGs.

El Sistema's pedagogical philosophy can serve as a foundation for the design of projects that may be replicated in other contexts, adapting them to specific realities and needs. Among its highest aspirations is to continue inspiring and guiding similar initiatives around the world and to contribute to building a fairer and more inclusive society. This is undoubtedly a real possibility, as it is guided by the principles of non-discrimination, equal opportunity, and universal access to music education. Equally central is the idea of making music together, collectively, to foster values such as teamwork, solidarity, discipline, and a sense of belonging—in short, to ensure the human foundation that supports social transformation and a culture of peace.





Conclusions

At the end of our journey in this research on El Sistema's 2016–2025 decade, we understand that the conclusion of this report can only be a proposal for continuation. We are convinced that presenting the breakthroughs and achievements of El Sistema — its impact on human development, social transformation, and the culture of peace, helps sustain or awaken a positive appreciation of the institution. Such appreciation may translate into interest, support, and engagement from various entities, as well as into the strengthening of public policies focused on children and youth.

To conduct our study, we gathered a vast amount of information on the trajectory and characteristics of El Sistema. The documents reviewed; the contributions of the executive leaders during interviews; the testimonials, perceptions, and opinions shared on surveys by students and teachers; and those expressed by young leaders, members, representatives, institutional staff, and communities in focus groups all reflected a highly positive evaluation. Across all these voices, El Sistema emerged as a role model of inclusion, equity, and social integration through music education.

In summary, our findings highlight the lessons learned by all those who, in one way or another, take part in, sustain, or benefit from the personal development activities

that El Sistema promotes through its pedagogical model. They underscore the evidence of the impact of music education not only as artistic training but as a pathway to integral human development, social inclusion and integration, collective participation and shared responsibility, and, consequently, social transformation and a culture of peace. Based on a solid philosophical foundation and its decentralized structure, El Sistema presents itself as an institution that is resilient, can adapt to the circumstances, has international projection, and can form strategic alliances

The proposal for continuity mentioned at the beginning of this conclusion leads us to put forward several recommendations to advance the various elements that position El Sistema as a successful initiative of significant impact, such as the following:

- Developing strategies and mechanisms that will enable El Sistema to adapt to and effectively address challenges, ensuring the sustainability of the model;
- Exploring opportunities for the expansion of El Sistema, increasing the number of centers, ensembles, and participants;
- Integrating key elements, such as the promotion of sustainable development and digital transformation;
- Developing institutional capacity-building strategies to continue strengthening El Sistema, ensuring its operation, achievements, and continuity over time;
- Encouraging the systematization and documentation of El Sistema's strategies, methodologies, and lessons learned, in order to facilitate their replicability in other contexts.

To conclude, we would like to reiterate that this study acquires particular relevance in the Latin American context, where there are shared challenges regarding social inclusion and the construction of a culture of peace. Its findings can offer valuable lessons and insights from Venezuela for other countries in the region.



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