

Ecuador

Update on the context and situation of children

In 2021, the **gross domestic product (GDP) of Ecuador recovered by 4.2%**,^[1] which was less than the recovery worldwide (5.8%), in the Latin American and the Caribbean region (6.8%), and in the neighbouring countries of Colombia (10.6%) and Peru (13.3%).^[2] Estimated growth for Ecuador for 2022 is 2.9%.^[3] This limited economic growth has also been reflected in a limited recovery in employment.

As of September 2022, 35.4% of the economically active population (EAP) were in adequate employment. This represents an improvement compared to September 2020, when 30.8% were in adequate employment, but falls short of the 2019 pre-pandemic level of 38.5%.^[4] In addition, differences between men and women persist. In September 2022, 42% of the male EAP were in adequate employment, compared to 26.6% of women.^[5] Likewise, in urban areas of Ecuador, the level reached 44%, compared to 26.6% in rural areas.^[6]

In December 2019, 2020 and 2021, the income poverty rate stood at 25%, 33% and 27%, respectively, while the extreme income poverty rate was 8.9%, 15.4% and 10.4%, respectively.

Poverty has a greater impact on households with children or adolescents. **In December 2021, 32.9% of people living in households with children or adolescents were in a situation of income poverty,** compared with 9.7% of people in households without children and adolescents.^[7] Similarly, the National Survey on Household Well-being in the Face of the Pandemic (*Encuesta nacional sobre el bienestar de los hogares ante la pandemia de Covid-19 en el Ecuador*), carried out by UNICEF in June 2022, found that 70.5% of households with children or adolescents reported that their income was lower than before the pandemic. For households without children and adolescents, the level was 54.2%.^[8] The survey found that 46.5% of all households were moderately or severely food-insecure. Again, there were differences between households with children or adolescents (55.2% were moderately or severely food-insecure) and those without (35.5%), as well as between urban (39.2%) and rural (56%) households.

Neonatal, infant and child mortality rates for 2021 were 5.1, 8.0 and 9.8 per 1,000 live births, respectively. All these rates are below those of 2019 (before the pandemic).^[9] The maternal mortality ratio was 57.6 per 100,000 live births in 2020 and decreased to 43.5 in 2021. However, despite this decrease, the 2021 ratio was higher than the 2019 ratio of 37 per 100,000 live births.^[10] It is noteworthy that, up to week 30 of 2022, nine maternal deaths of Afro-Ecuadorian women had been registered; compared with only one maternal death in this group for the same period in 2019, 2020 and 2021.^[11]

Between January and August 2022, there were 48 homicides of children under 5 years of age, 10 of children aged 5–9 years old (twice as many as in the whole of 2021), 24 of adolescents aged 10–14 (three times more than in the whole of 2021), and 189 of adolescents aged 15–19 years (47% more than in the whole of 2021).^[12] **Violence in the country has made it necessary to close schools and temporarily suspend classes.** In Esmeraldas and Sucumbíos, on the border between Ecuador and Colombia, schools have been closed due to occupation by non-state armed groups. This problem puts the right to education at risk, since **Ecuador was one of the countries that took the longest to reopen schools for face-to-face education after the COVID-19 pandemic.** There have also been increased alerts of recruitment by non-state armed groups, especially of young males in the northern border area. There are no official figures because it is risky for teachers and members of the community to report such incidents.

On 13 June 2022, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) began a strike, asking the government to comply with 10 demands, including decreasing fuel costs, increasing employment opportunities and improving health and education. Several cities, including Quito, were paralysed for 18 days. The government and CONAIE, with the mediation of the Catholic Church, began a dialogue that led to the signing of several agreements. UNICEF, within its child protection mandate, assisted about 2,000 Indigenous children[13] whose families were participating in the protests, by providing water and sanitation, survival kits, blankets and baby kits, among other items. UNICEF also supported the establishment of three children’s centres to provide early childhood assistance.

A quarter (25.4%) of households with children or adolescents have a member who is thinking of migrating to another country. In May 2021, this figure stood at just 16.8%. [14] According to official records, this intention is being realized: in October 2022 alone, 8,487 Ecuadorian people crossed the Colombia–Panama border through the Darién Gap. **From January to December 2022, the number of Ecuadorians crossing the Darién Gap reached 29,356[15], of whom 237 were unaccompanied or separated children.**[16]

[1] Central Bank of Ecuador, <www.bce.fin.ec>.

[2] World Bank, ‘GDP growth (annual %) - Ecuador’, <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=EC>>.

[3] International Monetary Fund. World Economic Outlook database: October 2022

[4] Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, ‘Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo’, Quito, 2021.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] United Nations Children’s Fund, based on Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, ‘Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo’, Quito, December 2021.

[8] United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Encuesta nacional sobre el bienestar de los hogares ante la pandemia de Covid-19 en el Ecuador’, UNICEF, Quito, June 2022.

[9] Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, Estadísticas Vitales, Registro Estadísticos de Defunciones Generales de 2021. Septiembre 2022.

[10] Ibid.

[11] United Nations Children’s Fund, United Nations Population Fund and Universidad de Cuenca, ‘Análisis de Mortalidad - LactaLAB’ (Mortality Analysis - LactaLAB), Cuenca, 2022.

[12] Ministry of the Interior, ‘Indicadores de seguridad ciudadana’ (Public safety indicators). Homicidios Intencionales. Data available at Indicadores de Seguridad Ciudadana (ministeriodegobierno.gob.ec).

[13] This estimate is based on the number of people reported spending the night in two resting places: Universidad Central del Ecuador and Universidad Politécnica Salesiana.

[14] United Nations Children’s Fund, ‘Encuesta nacional sobre el bienestar de los hogares ante la pandemia de Covid-19 en el Ecuador’, UNICEF, Quito, May 2021 and June 2022.

[15]

https://www.migracion.gob.pa/images/img2022/PDF/IRREGULARES_POR_DARIEN_DICIEMBRE_2022.pdf

[16] UNICEF Panama Country Office’s reports.

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF contributed to the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation

Framework (UNSDCF) 2022–2026,[1] and will lead the results group on the rule of law, strong institutions and social cohesion. With support from the UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office, the UNICEF Ecuador Country Office developed its Country Programme Document 2023–2026, drawing on consultations with adolescents, civil society and the government. It includes recommendations from the gender review, the Country Programme Evaluation and the evaluation of UNICEF’s response to the Venezuela migration crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the migration crisis continue to create a complex humanitarian context in the country. UNICEF’s response has shifted towards a humanitarian–development nexus approach, prioritizing critical humanitarian needs and long-term challenges that will continue to affect Ecuador in the coming years.

Every child, including adolescents, survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies (supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 and 3; UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 1; National Development Plan Objective 6; UNSDCF Area 1)

UNICEF continues to coordinate with the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to contribute to the achievement of the national goal of reducing the prevalence of childhood stunting. These agencies provided technical assistance to government institutions to implement the national policy to prevent stunting.

UNICEF also provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Public Health, the Ecuador Grows Without Child Malnutrition Technical Secretariat (STECSDI) and the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion for the design and implementation of the 2022 First National Social and Behaviour Change Strategy for the Reduction of Child Stunting and Chronic Childhood Malnutrition. The strategy promotes individual, family and social practices, encourages support networks and promotes coordination among the different actors. It was promoted by a communication campaign involving the iconic UNICEF character Maximo, who played a significant role in increasing childhood immunization in the 1990s, which resulted in the eradication of measles. The campaign, promoted through television, radio and outdoor advertising, reached 3,530,469 people, according to data provided by STECSDI, and reached 5,246,133 people through UNICEF Ecuador’s social media channels.

UNICEF is a strategic partner in the development and implementation of the government’s National Strategy to Prevent Stunting. The goal of the strategy, which is a national priority, is to reduce stunting by 6% in children under 2 years.[2] The Ministry of Public Health has adopted and implemented at national level three models that were designed and piloted with UNICEF’s support: (1) a community epidemiological surveillance strategy; (2) intersectoral and inter-institutional coordination at the local level; and (3) a methodology to increase spending efficiency at primary health-care level.

These models are being applied in 728 priority parishes (the smallest administrative division), 221 municipalities and 1,278 primary health-care facilities, reaching 280,057 children under 2 years and 132,064 pregnant women. An alliance with the CAF Development Bank of Latin America included national implementation of the methodology mentioned above as a condition for the disbursement of financial credits to Ecuador.

In addition, UNICEF is an ally of the Ministry of Public Health in the implementation of policies aimed at reducing and preventing maternal and neonatal deaths and mother-to-child HIV transmission, and protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding. UNICEF also supports the Ministry of Public Health in the certification of mother- and child-friendly health facilities. While UNICEF supported five, two such health facilities were certified in 2022, which supported about 10,740 deliveries per year in priority health establishments.

With aid from the Government of Japan, among others, UNICEF supported the national government in procuring cold chain equipment to improve the conservation of vaccines in hard-to-reach areas. This indirectly benefited around 3 million people, including 350,000 children under 5 years. Additionally, UNICEF supported Ministry of Public Health vaccination teams, reaching 38,924 people. These efforts not only contributed to COVID-19 vaccination coverage but also improved the weakened coverage of regular vaccination regimes for children under 5 years.

Every child, including adolescents, learns and acquires skills for the future (supports SDG 4; UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 2; National Development Plan Objective 7; UNSDCF Area 1)

During the pandemic, schools in Ecuador were closed for two years, leaving 4,314,777 pre-primary, primary and secondary students with limited opportunities to continue their education.[3] UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education to develop strategies to address this educational crisis and focused on critical needs related to educational losses.

The strategy to reach children and adolescents who are outside the education system (252,000, according to UNICEF estimates) or at risk of dropping out consists of prioritizing school support programmes for students who have fallen behind. UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education to implement an educational catch-up and acceleration programme. This programme is aimed mainly at students, including migrant students, in higher general basic education and upper high school who require an accelerated path to re-enrol in the education system and complete their studies. It operates in 20 provinces and has benefited approximately 4,365 students.

UNICEF and the National Institute for Educational Evaluation are supporting the Ministry of Education to develop an evaluation of holistic learning in 70 schools in the 4 most vulnerable educational districts. The aim is to help the Ministry design an education policy to recover lost learning for all students.

In Ecuador, only 3 in 10 children have access to early education services. UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion in the development of early childhood education models to expand the coverage of educational services in Esmeraldas and Guayaquil. These models, benefiting 39,351 vulnerable children, will be expanded to reach children aged 0–5 years in rural areas. Furthermore, UNICEF is supporting the implementation of an early childhood development programme for pregnant adolescents and mothers who have dropped out of school in three cities. The objective is to reintegrate them into the education system.

Following dialogues between the government and CONAIE, the parties agreed to restore the autonomy of the intercultural bilingual education system. UNICEF supported a study of the implementation of the intercultural bilingual education model in Ecuador. Results from the study will help to identify gaps and support the design of strategies to improve access to and quality of education for children belonging to 18 Indigenous peoples.

Since 2021, with the support of the Education Cannot Wait Global Fund, UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are implementing the Multi-Year Resilience Programme results framework. This covers 70 schools in the 7 provinces with the largest Venezuelan populations in Ecuador, benefiting more than 98,000 Venezuelan children. UNICEF focuses on the inclusion of children who are outside the education system.

Every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices (supports SDGs 5 and 16; UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 3; National Development Plan Objective 9; UNSDCF Area 4)

UNICEF is supporting the National Assembly to draft a new Children's Code, which will establish a revamped child protection system, in compliance with international human rights standards. UNICEF

is preparing models of child protection systems to be presented and discussed in the Assembly.

UNICEF has led the process for the approval and implementation of the Protocol for Special Attention to Children and Adolescents in Contexts of Human Mobility. The protocol guarantees the entry and protection of children in the country, regardless of their documentation or migration status. It has so far benefited approximately 130,000 children on the move.

UNICEF has led the working subgroup on child protection as part of the Response to the Venezuelan Migration Emergency (R4V) platform. In response to the migration crisis, in coordination with local governments and in alliance with civil society organizations, UNICEF has implemented support spaces in Tulcán, Manta and Esmeraldas to assist children on the move and host communities, with a focus on integration. The spaces have benefited 48,000 people, including children (65%), parents, caregivers and public servants. This initiative has been identified as a positive example by the Quito Process – an intergovernmental space that addresses States' responses to the Venezuelan migratory emergency. In addition, UNICEF has provided legal assistance (protection and migratory regularization) to 11,000 people, and psychosocial support for 20,000, with a focus on 3,000 children with special protection needs (including unaccompanied and separated children).

UNICEF has addressed violence against children – one of its priorities in Ecuador – through a focus on assistance at institutional level and prevention at community level. In the area of assistance, UNICEF has supported the introduction of an online course which will be mandatory for all judiciary officials. This will strengthen the capacity of judges, prosecutors and public defendants to respond to cases of sexual violence against children and women. In 2022, UNICEF also supported the Constitutional Court to develop a toolkit on the implementation of international and national standards about human mobility, children and adolescents, and gender-based violence. Additionally, strategies to promote positive masculinities at the community level, including information on sexual and reproductive rights of girls, boys and adolescents, were implemented.

With support from the Z Zurich Foundation and the Global Coalition for Youth Mental Wellbeing, the UNICEF Ecuador Country Office is contributing to efforts to prevent violence against children. It does so by organizing activities to promote mental health in adolescents and caregivers in the areas with high rates of violence: Esmeraldas, Manta and Tulcán. These are also cities with a high number of refugees and migrants.

UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and Plan International are conducting research on forced early unions and child marriage to advocate for policies and programmes aimed at eliminating this practice.

Every child, including adolescents, has access to safe and equitable water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment (supports SDGs 6 and 13; UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 4; National Development Plan Objectives 12 and 13; UNSDCF Area 2)

In support of the safe return of children and adolescents to face-to-face classes, UNICEF assisted 10 peri-urban schools with 11,992 students, including 650 migrant children, in improving their WASH basic services and physical accessibility (ramps, grab rails, for instance) for children with disabilities. This support was part of the Education Cannot Wait programme.

UNICEF supported the improvement of highly vulnerable education and health care facilities in the Cayambe municipality, to mitigate the risks of a COVID-19 outbreak and to reach basic service level. This benefited 31 rural schools, ECD centers and health care facilities and 12 water systems reaching 26,311 people, including 18,664 children and adolescents.

UNICEF supported the National Institute of Statistics and Census in implementing the National Survey

on Child Malnutrition by providing the resources required for water quality testing (residual chlorine and E. coli), training and technical assistance.

UNICEF has strengthened the participation of adolescents and young people to address the climate crises through several initiatives. Together with adolescents and young people, UNICEF developed a climate action toolkit based on the regional toolkit for young climate activists, and translated it into the Kichwa language to make it accessible to Indigenous communities in the Amazon basin. Ecuador's Fourth National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) included children's and adolescents' perspectives, produced with UNICEF support. UNICEF also supported the development of the National Adaptation Plan by providing an online course on children, gender and climate change. In partnership with YOUNGO (the youth constituency of UNFCCC), UNICEF developed a capacity-building strategy for youth organizations engaged in climate action. UNICEF also worked with the Ministry of Environment and Water to ensure that the perspectives of children and adolescents are included in the next Nationally Determined Contributions.

Every child, including adolescents, has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty (supports SDG 1; UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 5; National Development Plan Objective 5; UNSDCF Area 1)

UNICEF has concentrated its efforts on supporting the Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2017 observation on resource allocation, in particular its request for the State to "allocate resources for the rights of all children, including for the eradication of multidimensional poverty in early childhood, eradication of child malnutrition, comprehensive protection of children, and actions to tackle violence against children".

UNICEF is supporting the National Assembly to devise a methodology to monitor the execution of the national budget, with a particular focus on the public resources invested in children and their families.

UNICEF recently re-established its collaboration with the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, working to help strengthen the technical analysis of the quality and efficiency of public expenditures. The objective of the partnership is to improve budget allocation for children and, in the long term, to reduce child poverty and inequalities.

Since 2020, UNICEF has periodically monitored the situation of children and their families through rapid telephone surveys. Evidence from 2022 shows that families with children continue to face challenges and deprivations two years after the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF has used the results to support the launch of the #ChildrenFirst advocacy strategy described below.

UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP continued to implement a cash-based intervention that began in 2020. The programme targets vulnerable migrant and refugee families with children who have settled in the country and have no access to national cash-based programmes. The programme has reached more than 1,400 families, with a total of 5,500 beneficiaries, 60% of whom are children and adolescents.

Adolescent and youth participation

Through the DreamLAB project, with UNDP, UNICEF provided skills training for 444 participants from 5 municipalities. As part of the training, adolescents developed projects to solve local challenges identified by local communities, focusing on mental health, the environment and climate change, among other issues. Each project benefited at least 400 people.

U-Report Ecuador has reached 38,214 people, including 6,000 young migrants. In 2022, U-Report carried out 12 surveys, including one that was implemented with the Ministry of Education and another with the Human Rights Secretariat on violence and diversity. The former found that 66% of adolescents and youth believe it is necessary to change the education curriculum as a result of the impact of the pandemic.[4] The latter revealed that 40% know someone who has experienced

harassment, assault or discrimination because of their sexual identity or orientation.[5] These results contributed to the Secretary of Human Rights's National Action Plan for LGBTQ+ groups.

With UNHCR and IOM, the U-report subregional initiative for migrants has provided information to 6,757 people on rights and services available at provincial level for children and adolescents on the move.

[1] United Nations, 'Marco de Cooperación de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo Sostenible Ecuador 2022–2026' (Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023–2026), Quito, 25 August 2022, <<https://ecuador.un.org/es/196423-marco-de-cooperacion-de-las-naciones-unidas-para-el-desarrollo-sostenible-ecuador-2022-2026>>, accessed 6 January 2023.

[2] Government of Ecuador, 'Plan de Creación de Oportunidades 2021-2025', Quito, 2021, <www.planificacion.gob.ec/plan-de-creacion-de-oportunidades-2021-2025/>, accessed 6 January 2023.

[3] Ministry of Education, 'Datos Abiertos del Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador', <<https://educacion.gob.ec/datos-abiertos>>, accessed 20 December 2022.

[4] Total respondents: 31,666.

[5] Total respondents: 29,295.

SDGs Fund

UNDP, WFP and UNICEF are part of the United Nations Financing the Sustainable Development Goals in Ecuador and Targeting Child Stunting joint programme, introduced in 2021. The United Nations agencies supported the development of methodologies and instruments to align planning and budgeting, aiming to increase resources and improve efficiency.

Response to migrants and refugees

Since 2021, with the support of the Education Cannot Wait Global Fund and the Government of Canada, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNHCR have been implementing the Multi-Year Resilience Programme results framework in the five Ecuadorian provinces with the largest Venezuelan populations. The programme has benefited more than 60,000 Venezuelan students in the education system.

UNICEF continues to support the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, led by the UNHCR and IOM. UNICEF leads the coordination groups on education and child protection. In coordination with UNHCR and WFP, and under the auspices of the United Nations Common Cash Statement, UNICEF implemented unconditional cash transfers for Venezuelan families with children. This was recognized as a good practice by the Venezuela Outflow evaluation.

Alliances with public and private donors

Due to the support of the US Government's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, the Government of Canada, the European Union's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Education Cannot Wait Fund, UNICEF was able to implement the multipurpose cash transfer programme; enable child-friendly spaces, access to WASH services and emergency kits; provide legal support; and increase access to education for children on the move.

The support of the Government of Japan and the European Union's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations allowed UNICEF to support the Ministry of Public Health's COVID-19 response, through the provision of supplies, including equipment for cold chain system with support from the Government of Japan, , community-based epidemiological surveillance, and health and nutrition services for children and pregnant women.

UNICEF also works with the following implementing partners: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS); Centro de Desarrollo y Autogestión; Corporación Agencia Adventista de Desarrollo y Recursos Asistenciales del Ecuador (ADRA); Sociedad Ecuatoriana de Salud Pública; Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI) Ecuador; Vicariato Apostólico de Esmeraldas; Danielle Children's Fund; Idea Dignidad; Plan Ecuador; Lunita Lunera; Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO); and Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, among others.

The private sector and foundations have also supported UNICEF's education, WASH and child protection programmes. Among them are: Z Zurich Foundation; Diners Club Ecuador; Banco General Rumiñahui; Banco Pichincha; Cooperativa Cooprogreso; Wavin Plastigama; Edesa; Familia Sancela; Sociedad Deportiva Aucas; and Ecuavisa.

Finally, 60,885 individual Ecuadorian donors have provided significant support to UNICEF.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

The 2019–2022 Country Programme evaluation made recommendations such as: (1) improving coordination between national and local levels; and (2) strengthening UNICEF’s public and private alliances to improve advocacy efforts to advance the rights of children. The implementation of the new Country Programme Document 2023–2026 is an opportunity for UNICEF to improve coordination between national work and local needs, strengthen its alliances and play a brokering role in support of children.

To improve coordination between the national and local levels

With the new Country Programme Document, UNICEF has the opportunity to revamp its field presence strategy. In 2023, UNICEF will reinforce its presence in the following provinces:

- Esmeraldas, a coastal province along the border with Colombia, which has seen a rapid rise in violence against children associated with organized crime. In 2020, 80 murders were reported, compared with 325 murders in the first eight months of 2022.[1]
- Sucumbios, a province in the Amazon basin on the Colombian border. Here, UNICEF will focus on violence, human mobility and reaching the most vulnerable Indigenous children and women in the Amazon basin.
- Chimborazo, a province in the central highlands, where 38% of the population are Indigenous, [2] and 48.8% of children under 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition (the highest incidence in the country).[3]
- Pichincha and Guayas, home to 44% of the total population of Ecuador. Here UNICEF will work to support upstream strategies to reinforce the capacities of local authorities to design and implement public policies with a child perspective.

To strengthen public and private alliances to advance the rights of children: #ChildrenFirst strategy

Public finance for children should play a key role in Ecuador’s agenda to ensure that the country’s limited public resources are allocated to strategic, relevant policies and invested efficiently. Alternative financing must guarantee basic services and make them more efficient and effective. Budget processes, although technical, are first and foremost political processes, shaped by the power dynamics between stakeholders. Given its mandate and brokering role, UNICEF can focus all actors on the common goal of putting children first. Alliances with actors from different sectors (including economic, social, academic and media spheres) can raise awareness of the need to prioritize investment in children, especially the very young. UNICEF has begun work to build or strengthen bridges with these sectors, as described below.

According to the Latinobarómetro survey in 2020, 59.5% of people trust the Church, while only 9.4% think they can trust most other people.[4] As a result of the civil unrest in June 2022, Ecuadorian society became further fragmented, with discrimination and racism contributing to polarization. In addition, the impact on children and adolescents of more than two years of school closures requires transformative action involving all sectors of society. Following recommendations in the 2019–2022 Country Programme evaluation, UNICEF launched an ambitious advocacy strategy to bring people and sectors together to work for children in Ecuador. The #ChildrenFirst strategy advocates for a more equitable, prosperous, and peaceful country that will be possible only if social actors prioritize children and if authorities allocate more funds and invest more efficiently in children. With a focus on evidence, alliances, campaigning, celebrities, media and special events, it is a long-term strategy that UNICEF will develop throughout the new Country Programme Document 2023–2026 cycle.

Within the framework of World Children’s Day and the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of

the Child, UNICEF presented information about the situation of children,[5] and invited 100 actors from children's rights civil society organizations, the private sector, the diplomatic corps, the media and adolescent girls' groups to join the initiative. UNICEF will continue to promote the initiative in 2023 to other relevant actors, such as Indigenous groups, academics and young people. UNICEF invited the President of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to visit Ecuador to help advocate with women's rights organizations to include children's issues (such as orphans of femicide, children affected by violence against women) in their agendas, and with bilateral donors to include children in their portfolios.

The #ChildrenFirst communications material included a jingle,[6] produced with local singers, which reached 5.9 million people through news media, 2.4 million through social media and 1.7 million people through TV, radio and outdoor advertising. On 8 December 2022, UNICEF hosted a special event for more than 400 people.[7]

Under the #ChildrenFirst initiative, UNICEF will support:

- the private sector to adopt family-friendly policies
- academia to conduct research on children's issues
- civil society to monitor the situation of children
- Indigenous groups and feminist movements to include children's issues in their agendas
- journalists and opinion leaders to disseminate messages about the situation of children.

It will also aim to attract donors and lobby national and local authorities to improve services and increase investment.

[1] Ministry of the Interior, 'Indicadores de seguridad ciudadana' (Public safety indicators), <www.ministeriodegobierno.gob.ec>, accessed 14 December 2022.

[2] Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2010 Census.

[3] Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos. Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Nutrición, 2012.

[4] Latinobarómetro, <www.latinobarometro.org/lat.jsp>, accessed 21 December 2022.

[5] See <https://youtu.be/Ma_C1ocm7UE?list=PLakcj23MsCSgJ1B3117s2ya87gfZcuzPB>, accessed 6 January 2023.

[6] See <www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj-4l4tL-Ws&list=PLakcj23MsCSgJ1B3117s2ya87gfZcuzPB>, accessed 6 January 2023.

[7] See <www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uM3S5SpyV8>, accessed 6 January 2023.