

Uruguay

Update on the context and situation of children

In April 2022, the COVID-19 health emergency officially ended. As the in-person mode returned, all activities were gradually reactivated. Uruguay sought to ‘make up for lost time’ by accelerating government plans and programmes in the political, social and productive spheres. Its efforts included important policies and programmes aimed at guaranteeing the rights and well-being of children.

Uruguay continued its economic recovery. Average gross domestic product (GDP) between January and September grew by 6.7% compared to the same period the previous year. It is estimated at 5.3% for 2022 and forecasted to 2.8% in 2023[1].

However, gaps in access to employment continued to affect the younger population, women and people of African descent. In October 2022, the unemployment rate among people aged 14 to 29 was 27.1%. Unemployment among the Afrodescendent population was 12.6%, and among women it reached 8.9%[2].

Child poverty did not decrease: although monetary poverty levels have stabilized, one out of every five Uruguayan children continue to be poor. In the first half of 2022, monetary poverty for the entire population stood at 10.7% (similar to the 2021 average). However, poverty among children aged 0 to 5 stood at 22.5%, an increase of 1.5 percentage points compared to the second half of 2021 and 6.4 points compared to the first half of 2021. Monetary poverty levels continued to reflect structural inequities: the probability of being poor was greater for children and adolescents (19.4%), for people of African descent (19.3%), and for female-headed households (9.4% compared to 5.1% of male-headed households)[3]. Labour-market indicators also reflected these inequities.

New evidence indicated that there was food insecurity in Uruguay: in households with children aged 0 to 5 years, moderate or severe insecurity reached 21.5%[4]. The Uruguay’s National Institute of Statistics published the first official measure of food insecurity. In June 2022, 15% of households were moderately or severely food insecure. Moderate or severe food insecurity was higher in the departments bordering Brazil (16.9% of households) and in Montevideo and Canelones (15.7%). Of households in the lowest income quintile, 42.8% were moderately or severely insecure, and 9.5% were severely insecure. Through a telephone survey in October 2020, UNICEF also found that 17.4% of households with children and adolescents were affected by food insecurity.

In-person education attendance did not return to pre-pandemic levels. Administrative data[5] show that in 2021 primary school students attended 114 days of school, a significant improvement over the previous year, but still far from pre-pandemic levels of around 160 days. The attendance rate (days attended against the total number of school days) was 72.6%, more than 10 points below the pre-pandemic values.

In addition, despite almost universal connectivity in schools, the use of learning platforms was not uniform among students during the pandemic. UNICEF and Ceibal found that around 180,000 students (33% of the total) in primary and secondary school made little or no use of the CREA platform, which was the education system’s main learning tool in 2021[6]. Among the most excluded groups were those who had repeated years, were over-age, lacked adequate hardware (including children with disabilities), attended educational centres with which they felt little connection, or whose parents had a low socio-educational level.

Dropout rates from secondary education remained among the highest in LAC: three out of five

adolescents did not finish their compulsory education. The rate of students remaining in secondary education continued to stagnate in 2022 (the upward trend having ended in 2020).

The educational outcomes associated with passing or repeating a school year indicated an improvement. In 2021, 84.3% of students passed, compared with 80.7% in 2019; continuing a medium-term trend, but also reflecting a recent easing of requisites to move to the next school year.

To respond to these challenges and improve learning, in 2022, one of the largest educational reforms in the modern history of Uruguay was launched. The Educational Transformation reform for the preschool, primary and lower-secondary cycles and teacher training will be implemented from March 2023. An Integrated Basic Education Plan and new National Curriculum Reference Framework were approved. The framework, which is based on competencies, establishes learning progression and cycle-specific criteria for promotion. It sets out new curricula and programmes, which are currently being discussed at the national level. This strategy also seeks to capitalize on Ceibal's experience during the pandemic to strengthen teacher training and the potential of digital education.

This year, the government also took strategic actions to improve the mental health of its population, particularly adolescents. Uruguay has the second-highest suicide rate among young people aged 15–24 in the region (20.9 suicides per 100,000 people in 2019). Data from the 2018 National Survey of Adolescents and Youth showed that 136,000 adolescents and young people (aged 12–29) had felt so sad or hopeless for two weeks in a row that they had stopped doing their usual activities, while 31,800 reported having thought about taking their own lives[7]. There is a marked gender differential: girls and women account for 80% of those who feel sad, but only 20% of those who take their own lives.

Violence against children and adolescents continued to be widespread and recurrent, with some data showing a significant increase. Of the cases of sexual abuse and rape reported by the Ministry of the Interior, 74% involved children and adolescents. Data from the Comprehensive System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents against Violence (SIPIAV) shows that 7,035 instances of violence were recorded in 2021, 43% more than in 2020, the previous high[8]. Although this statistic refers to detection and reporting and is not a measure of prevalence, such a sharp rise in a context of increased time at home due to the pandemic is very worrisome. In 74% of the situations detected, the violence is recurrent. In 9 out of 10 cases, the aggressors are direct family members or members of the household. Sexual abuse accounts for 20% of the cases detected.

[1] <https://www.bcu.gub.uy/Estadisticas-e-Indicadores/Paginas/Expectativas-Economicas.aspx>

[2] <https://www3.ine.gub.uy/boletin/Diferencial/Bolet%C3%ADn-diferencial-oct-2022.html>

[3] https://www3.ine.gub.uy/boletin/informe_pobreza_1er_semestre2022.html

[4] https://www.ine.gub.uy/web/guest/inicio/-/asset_publisher/qCQOi0UnXKap/content/primer-informe-nacional-de-prevalencia-de-inseguridad-alimentaria-en-hogares-20-1/maximized?_101_INSTANCE_qCQOi0UnXKap_redirect=%2F

[5] <https://www.anep.edu.uy/presupuestos-rendicion-balances/rendiciones-cuentas-2020-2024>

[6] <https://www.ceibal.edu.uy/puentesdigitales>

[7] <https://www.gub.uy/salud-mental-adolescente/bibliografia>

[8] <https://www.inau.gub.uy/sipiav/informes-de-gestion-sipiav>

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF contributed to strengthening national capacities to detect, address and redress situations of sexual violence against children and adolescents (Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 16; UNSDCF Goals 4.1 & 4.2; & Strategic Plan Goal Area 3).

Progress was made in generating reliable quantitative information on reports of sexual violence against children and its monitoring, and new evidence was generated on online violence. An agreement was reached with the Ministry of the Interior to review and systematize all reports of sexual violence against children and adolescents, and another was reached with the non-governmental organization (NGO) Foundation for Justice and the Law for the review of judicial files. In both cases, the work done will provide key inputs for the new system of indicators to be established in partnership with the Supreme Court of Justice. Additionally, UNICEF completed a study on Uruguay's adapted version of the WeProtect Global Alliance's Model National Response to online sexual violence, which will contribute to the Country Office's strategy for 2023.

UNICEF also worked to raise awareness and transform social norms to avoid sexual exploitation. For example, UNICEF formed an alliance with the Uruguayan Tyre Dealers Union, which covers the whole country, and relaunched the No hay excusas [No Excuses] campaign (see more details in Section 4 Lessons Learned and Innovations). Work also continued with the Ministry of Tourism to raise awareness among tour operators and provide technical assistance for the development of a new Code of Conduct, to be launched in 2023.

UNICEF supported the improvements of two strategic social programmes for children of women victims of gender-based violence. First, the pilot model of care for children of women survivors of gender-based violence with the Montevideo government was finalized; the lessons learned will be incorporated into new services for children led by local government. UNICEF also prepared recommendations for an approach to orphans of femicide, in collaboration with the Attorney General's Office, the SIPIAV, and the School of Psychology.

UNICEF also supported the development and adoption of a new National Plan for the Eradication of Commercial and Non-Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents (2023–2028), which was led by the National Committee for the Eradication of Commercial and Non-Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

Together with UNDP and UNFPA, UNICEF implemented a countrywide training programme for prosecutors on sexual violence against children and adolescents. It aims at improving judicial intervention and avoiding the re-victimization of survivors. The UNICEF virtual course, hosted on the Attorney General's Office website, also remained active.

UNICEF, with the NGO Gurises Unidos [Kids United], implemented the initiative Protective Environments against Sexual Exploitation in the border towns with Brazil of Chuy and Rivera. This initiative assesses the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents – taking into account the territory's characteristics –, the responses offered, and the actors involved in the approach strategies. Moreover, it includes actions to raise awareness and train institutional and community actors in these border towns on the problem. It seeks to help create a protective environment, with a network of local/regional actors that have an action plan as well as response and referral structures.

UNICEF contributed to consolidating digital innovation in the education system and facilitating the inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities (SDGs 4 & 10; UNSDCF Goal 3.1; & Strategic Plan Goal Area 2).

It helped identify new evidence and create programmes to increase the potential of digital learning. UNICEF Uruguay and the UNICEF Office of Innovation funded and supported Ceibal (state's Educational Innovation National Institution) to develop its Digital Bridges for Educational Equity initiative. Through this collaboration, a pioneering study was carried out, which identified the successes and barriers to the use of the main online learning tools students currently (and during the Pandemic) have. The study was presented to the highest authorities of the National Administration of

Public Education (ANEP), the Ministry of Education and Culture, the National Institute for Educational Evaluation (INEEd) and Ceibal. Using these inputs, five interventions were implemented to improve learning: **Valijas Viajeras** (inclusive solutions to enable students with disabilities to use Ceibal resources); a **Ceibal pilot programme of online English lessons** for secondary school students; **expansion of open educational resources** for learning; **reading promotion** and the *plataforma de lengua* (an online learning platform with Spanish language and literature content); and generation of a **new large-scale teacher training strategy** for the ANEP Educational Transformation reform. The first four interventions reached 2,700 teachers and 1,400 students in this first stage. By end 2022, more than 12,000 classroom teachers had already completed the training through the fifth strategy, which will reach all 49,000 teachers nationwide. All the interventions are being evaluated and CEIBAL explores the best way to scale them up to the whole system.

UNICEF contributed to Ceibal's internationalization strategy to become a regional digital learning hub to support LAC countries, in line with the proposals of the Transforming Education Summit 2022. Ceibal's 15 years of experience and the role it has played during the COVID-19 pandemic make it a public policy model for the region. For the first time, a comprehensive depository containing information about the Ceibal holistic model is being produced and made available online, so that other countries can learn more about Ceibal's experience and generate further exchanges. In 2022, Ceibal, in coordination with UNICEF, provided related support to El Salvador, Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic.

Inclusive education access and assessment initiatives were prioritized for the learning of all children with disabilities. As part of the Digital Bridges for Educational Equity initiative, 259 'digital ramps' were distributed to children with disabilities and 1,570 teachers were trained across all departments of the country. UNICEF also supported the Ministry of Social Development's use of audio-visual adverts to promote inclusive education for families. In addition, various educational authorities, with the support of the UNICEF Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO), developed an accessible digital reading book entitled *Yo soy Zorrito [I am Zorrito]* for pupils in the first year of primary school. ANEP and Ceibal's main inclusive education teams were trained on the 'universal design for learning' approach and on how to develop inclusive books. A promising innovation is the work done with ANEP to create the accessible basic cycle accreditation test (AcreditaCB), with which young people with a hearing or visual disability can now be evaluated and gain accreditation for the first three years of secondary school. In addition, together with INEEEd, UNICEF is conducting a study to close the information gap regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in the regular school system. .

UNICEF helped put adolescent mental health at the centre of the public agenda (SDG 3; UNSDCF Goals 3.2 & 4.2; & Strategic Plan Goal Areas 1 & 3).

Multiple instruments were developed to prevent adolescent suicide, reduce the risk of suicide attempts among adolescents, and support adolescents and their families to identify and respond to mental health issues. Some concrete examples were: the implementation of the national initiative for Adolescent Mental Health Ni Silencio Ni Tabú / #nisilencionitabú [Neither silence nor taboo] with the National Youth Institute (INJU); the development of the adolescent suicide postvention guide ['postvention' being a therapeutic intervention conducted after a suicide]; training on the subject for the teams of the State Health Services Administration; and training in mental health for more than 1,000 staff at the children 24-hour stay homes ran by the Uruguay Institute for Children and Adolescents (INAU).

Ni Silencio Ni Tabú raised awareness nationally on adolescent mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, enabling effective involvement and active participation of adolescents countrywide making visible what they think, what they feel and what they propose. The initiative was implemented with 460 interventions in schools around the country for 14,000 adolescents. It included capacity building

through the development of a conceptual framework and a toolkit for facilitators, 24 training sessions on toolkit use for 1,000 technicians (see video summary); a guide for implementing awareness-raising workshops, and workshop materials.

UNICEF strengthened evidence and advocacy in favour of child and adolescent mental health to make the issue a priority for public spending. UNICEF and the National Youth Institute prepared a situation analysis of the psychosocial well-being and mental health of adolescents and young people using data from the National Youth Survey. In addition, in conjunction with the Presidency of the Republic and the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation, UNICEF organized an international exchange with experts in the field, to draw on their successful experiences across the globe. Experiences from Uruguay, Australia, England, Spain and the United States were discussed. The recommendations that emerged from this event formed the basis for developing a National Strategy and a new National Adolescent Mental Health Programme that UNICEF will support in 2023. As a key outcome of this event, the UNICEF Representative met with the President of the Republic, who highlighted the relevance of the initiative, and expressed the possibility of making adolescent mental health a priority to be included in the upcoming national budget discussions.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of the Environment to incorporate children's rights in *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)* and adolescent participation in climate policies (SDG 13; UNSDCF Goals 1.1 & 2.1; & Strategic Plan Goal Area 4).

UNICEF and the Ministry of Environment, with the participation of UNICEF LACRO, organized the first national seminar on the perspective of children and adolescents in climate change and environment policies. In addition, an innovative strategy for adolescent participation was launched, to prepare adolescents to contribute to the NDC discussion. Seven workshops were organized for adolescents and young people, aged 14 to 22, from all over the country, experts in climate change and in human rights, as well as members of the National Climate Change Response System. In the final phase of the strategy, the adolescents presented their seven commitments and seven demands to the government; the Minister of the Environment, the Undersecretary of the Environment, and the National Director of Climate Change were actively involved in this phase. Young participants also presented the results at the *Diálogos sobre el Futuro* [Dialogues on the Future], organized by the UN Country Team and held in the national parliament and attended by the Vice President of Uruguay, legislators and other stakeholders. This process is included as a case study in the UNICEF report *Child-Sensitive Climate Policies for Every Child. How Nationally Determined Contributions can be more inclusive and rights-based for children and young people and ensure child-critical social services are climate and disaster resilient*. The second NDC, presented last December to the UNFCCC, recognises that children bear a disproportionate share of the burden imposed by climate change and includes commitments to increase child-sensitivity of climate policies and to devise a permanent participation scheme for young people in the climate policies group.

UNICEF continued to support care systems for children in early childhood and their families (SDGs 1; 2, 3 & 10; UNSDCF Goals 3.2 & 4.2; Strategic Plan Goal Areas 1, 2 & 5).

UNICEF helped reactivate inter-institutional mechanisms where early-childhood policies and plans are defined. For instances, this effort led to updating a child development screening tool to be used in all 900 public and private early-childhood centres providing education for children aged 0 to 3 years nationwide. Criteria for evaluating and monitoring child development were thereby standardized across the institutions providing early-childhood services.

UNICEF facilitated the initial training of 100% of specialists working in the early-childhood care units of the State Health Services Administration, in the use of care protocols related to child

developmental disorders. This initiative aims to standardize the criteria for the care of children with any kind of disorder within the public health system, which provides care to the most vulnerable people. The second phase of this training will take place in 2023.

UNICEF also worked with the national programme Uruguay Crece Contigo [Uruguay Grows with You] and the Canelones-based 1000 Días de Igualdad [1,000 Days of Equality] programme to improve their efficiency and protection goals. It continued its support for the Ministry of Social Development's Uruguay Crece Contigo programme, helping to consolidate the national telecare model for families in a vulnerable situation. It collaborated with the Canelones government to expand and consolidate the 1000 Días de Igualdad programme, with the objective of designing a comprehensive early-childhood protection system for the entire department. This initiative, also supported by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), rolled-out the 'birth payment' for pregnant women and children born in the department. This scheme, which is intended to be universal, has already reached approximately 40% of its target public. Those reached so far are largely the most vulnerable families in the department.

UNICEF promoted meaningful participation of adolescents in public policies that affect them: on education, climate change and mental health (SDGs 3, 4 & 13; UNSDCF Goals 1.1, 2.1 & 3.1; Strategic Plan Goal Areas 1, 2 & 4).

UNICEF facilitated the creation of structured mechanisms for training, dialogue and exchange for adolescents that contributed to important national dialogues. These focused on policy design and awareness-raising methodologies, which aimed to give adolescents a leading role and empower them through opportunities to reflect on these issues. The 13 principles for reimagining education, the seven commitments and seven demands for climate action and *Hablar de lo que nos pasa [Talking About What's Going On With Us]*, a collective message on adolescent mental health (see the example in this video), were shared in several spaces for intergenerational dialogue and advocacy with authorities and government officials, and broadcast more widely on World Children's Day.

The INJU-UNICEF programme to design and lead social projects that generate change in young people's communities was also strengthened. The second edition of the National Youth Institute initiative Jóvenes a Todo Cambio [Youth for Change] was launched. Aimed at adolescents and young people aged 14 to 29 years, it sought to strengthen and promote their capacity for advocacy, participation and leadership.

In the area of emergencies, UNICEF consolidated its strategic alliance with the National Emergency System to incorporate a cross-cutting approach towards children in preparedness and response actions. Under this alliance, the *Guide for the Inclusion of Children in Disaster Risk Reduction* was produced, which helps incorporate criteria for child and adolescent care into the comprehensive management of risks and emergencies. It also shows how to give greater visibility to these groups' particularities and needs in the plans, policies and programmes of comprehensive risk management at the national and territorial levels. Educational and reading material kits were developed and are being delivered in each of the country's 19 departments to promote active play and create healthy social interactions with children and adolescents during emergencies.

Finally, UNICEF continued to receive support from Uruguayans to protect children's rights: in 2022 nearly 5 out of every 100 adults donate monthly to UNICEF. Thanks to those 138,000 individuals, Uruguay remained the second-largest donor country globally in relation to its population, with the third-largest absolute number of donors in the LAC region.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In the aftermath of covid-19 Pandemic, the need to strengthen UNICEF strategic alliances with key actors was identified to accelerate results for the most vulnerable children. UNICEF worked with institutions of the executive branch around specific public policies; and with the legislative branch, to advocate for the comprehensive and special protection of children's rights. With the National Human Rights Institution, it emphasized the surveillance and monitoring of children's rights, and promoted the deinstitutionalization of children, while with civil society, academia, the private sector, the UN and international cooperation, it expanded collaboration agreements to generate models, evidence, awareness and mobilization around the rights of children and adolescents.

A strategic example is the Government partnership and Communication for Development (C4D) strategy around Mental Health. A round table for inter-institutional cooperation on adolescent mental health was formed and brought together 11 public institutions, to implement the new initiative in the country's 19 departments. Ni Silencio Ni Tabú, led by the INJU and UNICEF, with the support of the Ministry of Public Health, developed a nationwide awareness-raising strategy on adolescent mental health. Adolescents' active participation was prominent at various stages.

Due to its success, the Ni Silencio Ni Tabú campaign was chosen by the President as a 'public good' and was broadcast at prime time and during the Soccer World Cup time. As part of the Ni Silencio Ni Tabú initiative, a communication and C4D campaign was also launched with messages and awareness-raising materials that supported the activities in the departments. This strategic alliance was supported by the President and the Vice President of the Republic, which led to an advert supported by and featuring UNICEF brand being included in a 'public good' campaign and broadcast on the main television and radio channels for the first time (quantified in media advertising of US\$ 446,868, 945 times on television and 14,208 times on radio).

Strategic work with other UN agencies was consolidated, particularly around migrant children and adolescents, and on monitoring mental health services and alternative options. Families with children and adolescents in extremely vulnerable situations continued to enter through the northern border, but the vast majority of them then moved on to Montevideo. IOM and UNICEF launched a service for migrant children and adolescents in Montevideo that seeks to provide them with psycho-emotional support, offer social and educational services for children and adolescents going through the migration process, and generate knowledge – to be shared with public policymakers – on the best ways to support the psycho-emotional development of migrant children and adolescents.

With PAHO and the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, UNICEF carried out a broad consultation process with all stakeholders with competence in mental health and children, to develop quality and rights-based standards for monitoring mental health services for children and adolescents. The standards presented will be used to monitor and manage adolescent mental health services. In addition, joint cooperation was initiated with PAHO and INAU to further the design of alternatives to mental health hospitalization, and to detention.

Continuing to lead on the agendas that adolescents have identified as priorities: mental health and climate change. In 2022, UNICEF worked more intensively than initially planned in the Country Programme of Cooperation 2021–2025, on two emerging themes: mental health and climate change. The pandemic exacerbated and highlighted the growing challenges surrounding mental health, particularly among adolescents and young people. Although the public debate initially focused on suicide rates, UNICEF brought a broader approach to psychosocial well-being and mental health, based on international evidence and experience. With regard to climate change, the drafting of the second NDC was a key opportunity to promote the incorporation of children and adolescents into environmental and climate change policies. A survey conducted by UNICEF showed that, in most cases, these groups had not previously been considered. On both themes, the Office reacted quickly to emerging opportunities and made valuable contributions.

Prioritizing the reduction of child poverty in 2023 and beyond. Although Uruguay's economy recovered in 2022, official data clearly show that monetary poverty did not decrease and that, moreover, it was accompanied by a significant degree of food insecurity. Despite the expansion of social protection policies, poverty continued to be concentrated among children and adolescents. Sadly, this trend has persisted for a long time and throughout the different phases of economic cycles. It is therefore necessary to place the issue on the public agenda and, in collaboration with the government and other relevant actors, develop a new approach to help change this structural feature of Uruguayan society. Given that child poverty is particularly acute in the outlying neighbourhoods of Montevideo and in the departments bordering Brazil, UNICEF will maintain the support it currently provides to inter-institutional spaces that work on children's priorities in these territories. For example, by facilitating analyses on the situation of children and adolescents and child-centered intersectoral planning and promoting adolescent participation in these spaces.

Programmatic innovation with potential to accelerate results at scale for children in the region. Through the Digital Bridges for Educational Equity initiative, funded by the UNICEF Office of Innovation, the strategic alliance with two state institutions has been strengthened: Ceibal, dedicated to innovation in education, and ANEP, in charge of implementing educational policies. This alliance supported an ambitious strategy of professional development for all teachers in the country, which was key to the widespread adoption of technologies in education. At the international level, as a result of this alliance and close coordination with UNICEF LAC regional office and headquarters, there is now an opportunity for UNICEF to form an alliance with Ceibal and the Inter-American Development Bank, thereby potentially expanding the reach of the project's results to the region. In addition, Ceibal's President played a significant part in the United Nations' Transforming Education Summit, where one of the calls to actions was to assure "quality public digital learning for all". There is thus an excellent platform for Ceibal's innovations and the results of the Digital Bridges for Educational Equity initiative to expand to more countries and reach more children.

The multiplier potential of innovation with the private sector: partnership with a business network to raise awareness about the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. UNICEF and the Uruguayan Tyre Dealers Union consolidated their strategic alliance. In a new phase of the alliance, to raise awareness about the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, the *No hay excusas* campaign was disseminated to garages and tyre repair shops owned by union members across the entire country. In a highly male-dominated sector, workshops were implemented that sparked quality conversations with workers, raising awareness and transforming beliefs and attitudes towards this problem. In a second stage, the campaign was taken to customers and the community, while messages were amplified through materials placed in shops. This pilot experience is now being systematized and is expected to be scaled up to other unions in 2023.