

Argentina

Update on the context and situation of children

Argentina is an upper-middle-income country with gross national income (GNI) per capita of US\$10,050 and a Human Development Index of 0.842 in 2021 (ranked 47th out of 189 countries). It is a federal country with a centralized State developing norms and policies, while relevant social and child-related competencies are decentralized at subnational levels.

The country faces fiscal constraints and economic, social and political uncertainty. At the political level, both the ruling coalition (Frente de Todos) and main opposition coalition (Juntos por el Cambio) displayed internal tensions regarding key political and economic public policy decisions and around 2023 candidatures, impacting the government's capacity to implement public policies. Extreme right-wing parties have emerged, trying to capture young voters disenchanted with traditional parties. There will be an election in 2023, which poses both a challenge in terms of continuity of workplans and an opportunity to put children's rights at the centre of the public debate.

Regarding the economic context, after Argentina's real gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by 0.6% on average on average between 2011 and 2020 (annual booms and busts between 2011 and 2018, and a recession between 2018 and 2020, with a 9.9% fall in 2020), it recovered in 2021 and 2022 (10.2% growth in 2021 and 5.3% expected in 2022). Public investment to counteract the crisis led to a primary fiscal deficit of 3% in 2021 that is expected to decrease to 2.5% in 2022 and 1.9% in 2023, as established in the agreement with the International Monetary Fund. The local currency lost 70% of its value against the US dollar in 2022, and inflation accelerated from 50.9% in 2021 to 94.8% by December 2022. The unemployment rate decreased to 6.9% in the second trimester of 2022, the lowest since 2015.

As of June 2022, 51.5% of children and adolescents lived in monetary poverty, and 42.5% experienced non-monetary poverty (EPH-INDEC). Food insecurity represents a challenge: in 2022, 13.2% children under 18 years experienced extreme poverty (households with incomes below the cost of the basic food basket), around one million skipped a meal daily, 36% of households with children stopped buying some food items due to income constraints, and quarter stated they had become indebted to buy food (UNICEF, 2022).

Even if the social protection system has high coverage (90%), there are still around 1 million children without coverage. Also, the mechanism for updating the monetary amount of family allowances provided for by the law is insufficient to ensure that the purchasing power of child-related allowances is maintained when inflation is high, hence constraining its capacity to alleviate poverty. In addition, delays in updating salary thresholds determining access to contributory family allowances, relative to accelerating inflation rates that imply continuous salary increases, led to over 600,000 children dropping out of the system in 2022. *Prestación Alimentar* (the main cash transfer aimed at reinforcing families' income to buy food items) still lacks an automatic mechanism to sustain its purchasing power.

Early childhood development services are insufficient, particularly for younger children: only 19% of children aged 0-3 had access to childcare and education services in 2019-2020. In addition, only half of workers have access to maternity/paternity leave, due to an unequal system that fails to consider all families and care-related needs. In 2022, the Executive Branch submitted to Congress the Care in Equality Bill to address these challenges, but no progress was made at legislative level. According to UNICEF 6th Rapid Survey (June 2022), young children struggled the most to recover from negative socio-emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic: 38% of households with children up to 5 reported

modifications in their food habits, 35% in sleeping habits and 17% in communication problems.

Despite progress in secondary school enrolment, only 58% of adolescents managed to complete school in 2021 (fewer than half in lower-income population group). Regarding learning achievements, 71% of last-year high-school students showed basic knowledge or less in Math and 38% in Language. The adolescent mortality rate for 2020 was 3.7 per 10,000 inhabitants and is higher for males (4.8 for males and 2.5 for females). The adolescent suicide rate remained stable between 2014 and 2019 (6.5 per 100,000 population) and is still a concern. Although more females attempt suicide, males are more likely to die.

In 2020, according to the most recent information available, 10% of births involved adolescents aged 10–19. Further, 7 out of 10 pregnancies in adolescents aged 15–19 years and 8 out of 10 in girls under 15 years were unintended. In the latter group, the majority results from sexual abuse and rape and carries more significant health risks.

Significant improvements in adolescents' socio-emotional well-being were recorded as of June 2022: from 33% adolescents reporting feeling anguished and 25% scared in May 2021, to 12% and 4%, respectively.

Despite the legal framework on violence and the fact that, according to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019-2020, 97.4% of parents/caregivers state that children should not be physically punished, 59.4% of children under age 15 experience violent parenting practices (52% psychological aggression, 35% physical aggression, and 7% severe physical punishment). Also, 11% of women aged 18-49 reported suffering sexual abuse during their childhood. In June 2022, 5.2% of women living in households with children were physically or verbally assaulted.

15,431 children and adolescents separated from their home through an exceptional protection measure, with violence and maltreatment in the household the main reason cited by most provinces. Of these children, 6,400 were with kinship family and 9,031 in residential and foster families.

The national juvenile justice continues to be inconsistent with international standards, leaving room for judges' discretionary interventions. In December 2021, there were a total of 4,437 adolescents and youths in penal facilities: 1,852 were adolescents up to 17 years of age in juvenile penal facilities, 2,477 were youths over 18 years old whose criminal offence occurred before they reached the age of majority, and there were another 108 whose age could not be established.

Major contributions and drivers of results

In 2022, UNICEF Argentina continued contributing to the goal to ensure that all children and adolescents exercise their rights and reach their full potential, with no one left behind, through evidence generation, technical assistance, capacity development, advocacy and territorial strategies.

UNICEF acted as a leading advocate for the reduction of child poverty and inequalities at the highest level of public policymaking. For example, in October the Country Office (CO) produced an analysis of the 2023 budget, with a focus on children and adolescents, and presented it to the Commission of Family, Childhood and Youth of the National Chamber of Deputies. The analysis identified several cuts in crucial national programmes for children and had a wide media impact, thus moving the debate from Parliament to public opinion. After intense debates, the Lower House's Budget and Finance Commission introduced modifications to the proposed Budget Law, including a ARS241 billion budget expansion for policies targeting children: an 8.9% increase from the original

budget that fully reversed the originally projected 8% reduction in the budget for children. The bill with modifications was approved by both Houses and is expected to be implemented in 2023.

The cross-sectoral local governance initiative **Municipality United for Children and Adolescents (MUNA)** has been consolidated with the participation and coordination of all sectors of the UNICEF CO to reach 80 municipalities in 9 provinces, exceeding the planned target for the year, and already showing a maturity process and institutionalization of the initiative. MUNA is expected to be fully consolidated to position UNICEF's territorial work in 2023, aiming to have a direct impact at local level and generating multiple alliances with national and subnational stakeholders. Through this initiative, the CO will continue reinforcing the local capacities of those responsible for subnational services for children, generating a greater level of meaningful adolescent participation, and improving the situation of children and their families in the territories where they live. The end goal is to reach 250 municipalities by the end of 2025.

UNICEF supported the implementation of a **comprehensive early childhood strategy** at the national and provincial levels. UNICEF contributed to: (1) strengthening the regulatory framework to ensure nurturing care from the beginning of life, reduction of infant mortality, and improvements in legislation on parental leave; (2) improving local governance to facilitate intersectoral coordination through support to workplans created in Córdoba, Entre Ríos and Salta in 2021 (SDG Fund), and expanded to Jujuy, reaching 20 local governments; (3) promoting access to inclusive, sufficient, equitable and quality health, nutrition, care and early education services by improving providers' capacities, information systems, infrastructure and supplies; (4) supporting the development of the regulation to timely implement the Healthy Food Promotion Law, a strategy for which the CO won the Inspire Awards 2022; and (5) strengthening gender-transformative parenting programmes through evidence generation and development of a guide for front-line workers and a toolkit for families and communities.

UNICEF contributed to bringing adolescents' main challenges to the centre of the public agenda with the first edition of Plan A: the Annual Meeting for Adolescents Agenda, which brought together 60 adolescents and 150 key stakeholders and authorities from all over the country for an intergenerational dialogue based on a positioning document on adolescents' rights and challenges in Argentina. The meeting had 1,000 viewers on streaming, and an estimated reach of 3,661,040 social media accounts. Moreover, to mitigate learning loss, UNICEF expanded innovative education initiatives to guarantee quality learning and transferable and digital skills, including for those adolescents living in remote rural areas, delivering educational opportunities for 43,200 adolescents in vulnerable settings. The UNICEF CO contributed to adolescent sexual, reproductive and mental health by expanding advisory health services in urban and rural secondary schools in 3 priority provinces (Chaco, Jujuy and Salta) reaching more than 28,000 adolescents, and developed evidence on the investment case for adolescent health.

Active adolescent participation was promoted through initiatives and campaigns with youth organizations, focusing on climate change, digital citizenship, mental health and online risks. Some milestones in relation to climate change include: space in 'Espíritu Verde' LollaPalooza; dialogue between 300 young people and 14 members of congress about the law on wetlands within the framework of World Youth Day (#TuVozPorlosHumedales); and support to youth organization of the regional (R-COY) and local (L-COY) climate change summits, and the participation of five young people from allied organizations in COP27.

New strategies were developed to achieve results in preventing violence against children (VAC) and gender-based violence and guaranteeing access to protection and justice services. A significant contribution to raising awareness for VAC prevention and promoting the 'Helpline 102' was the #Queganeelbuentrato national campaign, implemented in collaboration with the Argentine

Broadcasters Association (ATA, with 24 television stations clustered and 90% of the TV audience reached) and the National Child Protection Secretariat (SENAF). The campaign was declared of interest by the City of Buenos Aires Legislature and mentioned as a reference campaign to create an institutionalized national campaign for awareness and prevention of child abuse by the National Congress.

To strengthen the protection system, UNICEF supported SENAF and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) within the Spotlight initiative to ensure legal assistance and comprehensive protection to child victims of sexual abuse nationwide: the legal advice service for child victims was adopted as public policy by Resolution 471/2022 in May 2022. In parallel, territorial intersectoral working groups to promote inter-institutional coordination mechanisms for different sectors, such as education, health, child protection, gender and the judiciary, were established in all provinces of the country. To date, the service has been extended to 23 provinces. Furthermore, UNICEF revitalized the Network of Judges Committed to Children's Rights, bringing together the highest judicial authorities of all provinces, by organizing its fifth meeting (the first after the pandemic) to discuss data collection in juvenile justice and to improve intersectoral mechanisms for child victims. Thirty magistrates attended and signed a joint agreement to promote children's rights in judicial practices.

Given the **persisting effects of COVID-19**, the UNICEF CO effectively reinforced the **nexus between humanitarian actions and development**, contributing to overcoming the setbacks in access to education and health. The CO was a key player in guaranteeing **in-person schooling from the beginning of 2022**, participating actively in the Federal Council of Ministries of Education and Health with the President's participation. In August, the sixth rapid survey on the socio-emotional effects of COVID-19 on children was implemented, providing information on the situation of children following the pandemic. Two main concerns stood out: the persistence of challenges regarding insufficient income, and the impact on children's food insecurity and nutrition. Advocacy messages were built around these priorities and reached more than 33 million people through traditional and social media. The CO continued to support the Ministry of Health to strengthen essential health services, particularly to recover the coverage of the national childhood vaccination calendar. To mitigate learning loss, UNICEF expanded innovative technological solutions and digital education initiatives to guarantee access to education and quality learning. Furthermore, the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools programme supported by ECHO guaranteed access to water and hygiene services and promoted good practices for prevention of COVID-19 infection, hand and menstrual hygiene empowering students and isolated indigenous communities.

Aligned with the **Gender Action Plan 2022–2025**, UNICEF Country Office developed a Gender Strategy Note to guide integration of gender across programmes. This guided ACO actions to reduce gender inequities in critical issues such as socialization, care, gender-based violence, access to services, and information. For instance, the CO contributed to promoting better distribution of care tasks within the family, advocated for a change in legislation on parental leave (including a costing exercise), expanded advisory health services, and promoted comprehensive sexual education in schools. Additionally, the CO advocated for reducing STEM gaps by generating key evidence of good practices of STEM skills for girls. Since the majority of victims of violence are girls, UNICEF supported the MoJ by expanding free legal representation of children nationwide, improving coordination between sectors and levels of government, encouraging victim complaints through specialized childcare lines, and building capacities for front-line child protection workers. At the same time, considering the bias against boys, UNICEF strengthened networks with the main stakeholders in the juvenile justice system to improve information and response in a gender-based approach, for instance through the disaggregation by gender of the report on children in conflict with the law.

UNICEF progressed in mobilization, engagement and commitment for children's rights. Despite a complex context, both locally (an annual inflation rate of 94.8% and increased child

poverty) and globally (the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine conflict and a growing number of emergencies), the CO was able to influence and mobilize civil society, media, digital platforms, the private sector, donors and decision makers on critical issues for children rights, such as the return to face-to-face classes, the reductions in government budget allocations for children, and support for international crises such as Ukraine. More than 1.67 million **online supporters** and 243,000 **pledge donors**, along with 497 **businesses** participating in Business for Results initiatives, demonstrated that Argentinian society trusts UNICEF and its commitment to children's rights. In 2022, 15,015 stories about children's rights mentioning UNICEF were published in **traditional media** – an increase of 32.6% compared to 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic (when all key performance indicators were unusually high due to the situation). Furthermore, in 2022 the CO doubled its media presence, with 32 op-eds signed by the representative, the deputy and programme specialists. Regarding **social media**, @UNICEFArgentina reached 191,577,798 accounts – an increase of 22.5% compared to 2019.

Regarding **private sector engagement**, in 2022 the CO engaged with 497 companies and business associations in Argentina to raise their awareness of and commitment to children's and adolescents' rights. In October, more than 200 business representatives participated in the second forum titled 'Business for Children and Adolescents 2025', where UNICEF presented the Country Programme Document (CPD) goals in areas where companies can contribute alongside UNICEF. The report 'Business for Children and Adolescents 2025' was produced with concrete proposals on how business can contribute to the five CPD outcomes related to family-friendly policies, skills for life for adolescents, promotion of healthy environments, and other topics.

In 2022, the UNICEF CO **fundraising** income grew by 33% in local currency and reached approximately US\$20 million, with 85% of total revenue coming from monthly pledge donors. All major alliances with corporate partners were renewed, new partnerships were built, and more significant contributions were renegotiated to cope with the growing inflation. With key influencers' support, US\$2 million was raised from two major donors and the Armenian Fund. More than 9,000 legacy hand-raisers (individuals who indicated the potential intention to include UNICEF in their wills) were registered, and US\$130,000 was raised through legacies in the year. Through special events such as the 'Un Sol para los Chicos' telethon and the second concert for UNICEF at Teatro Colón, US\$2.4 million was raised.

Enabling strategies such as coordination externally with other United Nations agencies, allies, counterparts and implementing partners; and internally among various office units; the improvement of the planning, monitoring and reporting cycle; and the application of cross-sectoral programmatic approaches and values such as gender, environmental sustainability, emergency preparedness, and monitoring and evaluation boosted **programme effectiveness**.

Quality, timely **support services** in terms of human resources, procurement, administration and finance were provided, enabling the CO to achieve its planned results both in terms of programmes and fundraising. **Staff well-being** has been a top priority. The Senior Management Team, in collaboration with the Local Staff Association (LSA) and supported by the Country Management Team, worked tirelessly to promote a positive workplace culture. Besides the Global Staff Survey and the Pulse Survey run by UNICEF, the CO, through the LSA, conducted local surveys that complement the global ones and further deepen information on specific issues. In 2022, the CO developed a comprehensive work climate plan with the support of the LSA and an external consultant, with clear activities and SMART indicators. The plan included many activities related to work-life balance, efficiency and effectiveness, standards of conduct, information and knowledge exchange, performance management and diversity. The overwhelming majority of the activities were well received by the staff. The level of participation was very good, particularly in the activities related to coaching and mentoring. Despite being very ambitious, 89% of the plan was implemented. During the regional human resources network meeting, the plan was presented as a regional best practice, given

that it involved the entire office and empowered each staff member and team to choose the activities that best met their needs.

The CO maintained up-to-date and well-functioning **governance and systems**. The annual risk assessment exercise early in the year provided critical input for preparing a risk-informed rolling workplan. The CO's key performance indicators, monitored monthly by the Country Management Team, were updated to include new local indicators, which allowed timely adjustment of implementation and had a positive impact on operational and programmatic effectiveness. At the same time, with the aim of removing complexity, standardization and enhancing the user experience, new tools were introduced, several processes were simplified, and the key performance indicators dashboard was redesigned to be more user-friendly. Additionally, intuitive dashboards were developed to provide management with **quality data for informed decision-making**. Technical support and training in **budget planning**, allocation, review and adjustment were provided. In support of the full return to the office, **new office space** allocation was adopted to improve teams' interactions, while all workstations were equipped with a plug-and-play system for greater productivity. The **supply plan** was updated, procurement processes became more efficient, and workshops on standard operating procedures and terms of reference were delivered to all relevant staff. Major progress was made towards compliance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard; the final steps to reach full compliance will be implemented during the first semester of 2023.

A functional team on **sustainability** was created to coordinate the existing volunteer Green Team actions that encourage waste reduction through reuse, recycling and waste separation. The CO submitted its inputs through the Environmental Footprint and Accessibility Assessment Tool, and a consultancy in ongoing to help define the CO's comprehensive plan for sustainability in 2023.

The volatile and complex economic environment – with an annual inflation rate of nearly 100% (the highest in 30 years), a hike in interest rates, a significant currency devaluation and a shortage of US dollars – has been the major challenge for the UNICEF CO in 2022. First, for its impact on families' and children's economic conditions; second, for the difficulty of fundraising in this economic context; and third, for the complexity of preventing a loss of purchasing power when making investments.

In 2023, UNICEF will redouble its efforts to position the children's agenda in a context marked by an election year, domestic economic volatility, and an uncertain global context.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2022, UNICEF strengthened and promoted many alliances with different kinds of partners. Within the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), UNICEF played a crucial role in different **joint programmes** and strategies to leverage results for children. As the Social Development Dimension leader within the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, UNICEF promoted Argentina's achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets through Spotlight, the SDG Fund, the Gran Chaco Americano Strategy and Generation Unlimited, and on climate change and the care agenda, among others. Additionally, UNICEF led the Local Staff Salary Committee and participated in several **United Nations coordination mechanisms** such as UNCT, PMT, OMT, BCO, the M&E group and the Gender group.

Alliances with government at the national and provincial levels, and with non-governmental and

grass-roots organizations, was reinforced based on the needs of the current CPD and the lessons learned from audit recommendations and the Gran Chaco Real Time Assessment.

In 2022, the **implementing partners' portfolio was expanded**, gaining diversity and deepening presence in the field: more than 30 new Programme Documents and Memorandums of Understanding were signed. Our partners and allies supported many intersectoral initiatives, such as MUNA, provincial early childhood development strategies, Plan A for adolescents, gender-based early child- and family-care practices, and the #AIHaterNiCabida and #QueGaneElBuenTrato campaigns, among others.

UNICEF Argentina is fostering new partnerships to implement the **territorial focus of the CPD**, with a clear prioritization of provinces, emphasis on strengthening the management capabilities of municipal counterparts, and supporting direct community cooperation through grass-roots organizations. Multisectoral plans with the five priority **provinces** (Buenos Aires, Salta, Santa Fe, Jujuy and Chaco) were agreed; provincial and local governments, provincial universities and provincial and local civil society and non-governmental organizations are working together under the MUNA initiative. In addition, a partnership with the **grass-roots organization** La Poderosa, started during the pandemic, is opening the door for new alliances with this valuable type of organization.

Alliances with representatives of the legislature enabled evidence-based advocacy activities to influence decision makers from different parties, as in the case of the 2023 national budget process mentioned above, in which congressmen and -women reversed cuts in allocations for children, based on the analysis presented by UNICEF.

A strategic partnership with the **judiciary** sets the foundations for data collection and strengthening intersectoral mechanisms to protect child victims. The alliance with the Federal Board of Supreme Courts in particular, established in 2022, is catalysing the content of policies and improving coordination with SENAF, the central executive institution for child protection.

Alliances with **youth organizations** were vital to guarantee adolescent participation and raise their voices on many different topics of concern. At the same time, considering businesses are key stakeholders in achieving programme results, the UNICEF CO promoted an extended alliance with **497 companies and business associations**. In addition, **academic** partners contributed to rigorous evidence generation for political advocacy. Finally, alliances with **media and digital platforms** contributed to increasing the reach of UNICEF communication and fundraising campaigns, and a more rights-base treatment of child-related news.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

The effects of Argentina's complex economic situation on children (high and persistent levels of child poverty and persistent food insecurity, among others) made it necessary for the Country Office to implement a well-coordinated, simultaneous and mutually reinforcing two-prongs strategy. On one hand, to boost alliances with the government at the provincial and municipal levels and with non-governmental and grassroots organizations to expand UNICEF's capacity to reach the most vulnerable children, particularly those living in slums and in isolated and excluded areas. From this year's experience, the office learned the urgent need to further expand UNICEF's collaboration with other community organizations, to diversify alliances and promote more territorial work. On the other, to continue implementing ambitious evidence-based advocacy work on public finance for children, social protection and child poverty to inform the public debate and advocate with key stakeholder to influence public-policies. In particular, the action implemented to revert a significant cutback on the budget directed to children for 2023 showed, as in many other situations in previous years, that the CO

has a significant potential to achieve results for children based on the generation on robust data to inform and influence public policy decisions.

Also, the complex economic situation generated the need to innovate to achieve planned resource mobilisation targets. For instance, the CO diversified its prospecting channels, implemented new retention activities to reduce attrition, and strengthened its digital channels. Additionally, an ‘automatic opt-in upgrade model’ was tested in telemarketing, face to face and digital campaigns, obtaining a 40% acceptance rate.

The context implied operational challenges too, especially in procurement and finance. To protect reserves and control inflation, the government imposed various measures, from capital controls to import restrictions on non-essential goods and regulated prices. Additionally, many companies required their clients to make prompt, advance or progressive payments. This situation demanded innovative solutions backed by well-crafted risk management, for instance the introduction of specific risk control measures such as checking vendors’ records and credit ratings for those below the Supply Division verification threshold, having smaller and more periodic deliverables requiring more minor advances or progress payments, and more regular and stringent verification of progress and quality of partial and final deliverables prior to payments.

The Real Time Assessment of UNICEF’s Response in the Gran Chaco region highlighted the importance of UNICEF’s territorial work, such as the MUNA initiative or early childhood working tables, to address unequal access to social services. An integrated, intersectoral approach that considers the socio-cultural context of local communities and reinforces local organization capacity for implementation is critical. Having disaggregated data at local level about vulnerabilities is necessary for effective response. The evaluation recommended ACO to broaden its local-level partners, especially those which can promote the fulfilment of violated rights the government has difficulties to reinstate. Moreover, it proposed to prioritize the Gran Chaco area in program planning, work more on climate change and access to water and sanitation, and incorporate the intercultural lens in education programs.

Evidence-based consensus, trust and passion were the main requirements to build commitment and mobilize different audiences for the cause of children. It did not matter if UNICEF was working with celebrities, journalists, the private sector or decision makers; they all agreed that children’s rights are a top priority and genuinely believe in UNICEF as the organization to lead the change towards a better world for them. As an example, in 2022 the CO focused on its celebrity strategy to create content based on their own experiences; this strategy amplified UNICEF’s reach and impact.

The fact that 2023 will be an election year may threaten national and local government commitment to maintaining critical policies. It also implies risks and challenges regarding public exposure and unintended political utilization of UNICEF’s brand and views. However, it also offers an opportunity, if well managed, to keep children’s rights at the centre of the public debate.