

Dominican Republic

Update on the context and situation of children

Changes in cooperation development need time. Long-term resilience is important, and the continuity and strengthening of efforts despite the pandemic and the change of Government have brought many results in 2022. The following programmes needed the entire period of the current CPD to show significant progress:

- The prevention of child marriage
- The Mothers and Babies in Good Care initiative
- The programme to improve foundational learning, CON BASE, and
- The disability and emergency cash transfers.

To achieve programme results that can be turned into public policy, high-level, evidence-based political advocacy is needed, as well as advocacy at middle-management level, coordinated technical assistance and even public advocacy is needed. It is essential to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that may arise for political advocacy and, in other instances, to create these scenarios. This strategy has been used in previous examples.

It is important that flagship UNICEF programmes, which have the potential to become public policy, involve public fundraising. During 2022, the MoE secured significant funding for the foundational learning enhancement programme, CON BASE, for its implementation at national level over the next three years. The social protection programme, SUPERATE, is funding a significant number of additional staff in municipalities where the implementation of the early union prevention programme has started. However, in other programmes where partners did not prioritize and secure the budget, even if it was not a significant amount, results were minimal.

Innovation, whether in new strategies such as Mother and Babies in Good Care, or in methodological approaches for the country, such as CON BASE, or in digital tools for the implementation of programmes, is very important to achieve successful results. If the development of these innovations is done jointly with our stakeholders, the period required for their acceptance is reduced. Additional effort and training will always be required when expanding such initiatives.

In 2022, UNICEF designed a technology tool, the early warning app, and completed the digital system for measuring child development, SIMEDID. It has begun the digital certification of school centres, which also includes a digital assessment system, and has strengthened the NUTRE-MUAC app for the treatment of malnutrition.

Strategic alliances with academia have proven to be a catalyst for innovation, such as with the University of the Basque Country for the digital certification of schools, with UNIBE for the design of SIMEDID and with FLACSO (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences) for the CON BASE programme.

UNICEF has been able to reach the most vulnerable population groups such as Venezuelan and Haitian migrants, undocumented individuals and population groups living in extreme poverty, thanks to its ability to mobilize civil society actors and to facilitate a tripartite alliance with Government institutions. In this way, it has been possible to vaccinate these population groups against COVID-19 and to offer them humanitarian assistance.

UNICEF and CONANI's joint evaluation of the national policy of violence prevention against children produced key inputs for the elaboration of a new policy on the subject.

Major contributions and drivers of results

One of the greatest achievements has been the strengthening of the education system. As a result of UNICEF advocacy and technical assistance, the Ministry of Education (MoE) approved foundational learning as a national priority. The *Building the Learning Base* (CON BASE) programme, promoted and supported by UNICEF, became a national policy to improve literacy and mathematics learning in the first grades of primary school.

Based on the evidence of poor learning levels in the first grades of primary school, and on the additional challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF in the past few years has advocated and technically assisted the MoE in the design and implementation of a pedagogical model, an innovation in this country, to improve the teaching of literacy and mathematics in the first grades of primary school.

UNICEF also technically supported the MoE in the production, layout, and printing of 633,894 guides and manuals, which were distributed to all students (446,943) and teachers (26,885) in the first cycle of primary education. Furthermore, with the support of UNICEF, 22 educational districts implemented CON BASE, benefiting 492 schools in which improvement plans are being carried out and monitored, reaching 70,562 students and 4,792 teachers. Additionally, the training of technicians from the remaining 100 educational districts has begun.

UNICEF continues to strengthen its public partnerships and has signed an agreement with the MoE and the National Institute for Teacher Education and Training to implement the CON BASE programme nationally over the next three years.

To prevent school dropouts, the MoE, with the support of UNICEF, has developed an early warning app that allows teachers to record the daily attendance of students and to have updated data to facilitate timely decision-making.

UNICEF contributed to the digital transformation of the educational community through the design of a certification of digital skills for educational centres. This certification includes the development of a multiplatform application to assess each educational centre's capacities for digitalization, to contribute to a national strategy for the integration of technology for learning and to provide a tool for making it operational.

It has also been a great achievement to reverse the alarming increase in the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. With the support of UNICEF, the health system was strengthened through the Mothers and Babies in Good Care initiative, which was included in the national plan *Zero Tolerance to Preventable Maternal and Neonatal Deaths* by the National Health Service (NHS). This initiative includes technical and financial assistance for monitoring compliance with the national care protocols, the preparation of continuous improvement plans, support for hospital quality control committees and advocacy with regional and national health authorities. It is important to highlight the excellent results obtained from the two accountability strategy meetings with the directors of prioritized hospitals and central authorities.

The MMR was reduced by 52% in the 23 public hospitals supported by UNICEF, in which 80% of all births take place, representing a 43% reduction across public health services in the country. Neonatal mortality remained at 21.5 per 1,000 live births.

UNICEF supported the implementation of the *Kangaroo Mother* (KMC) programme in six additional hospitals, an increase from 4 to 22 during this Country Programme Document (CPD), which benefited

more than 22,000 premature and low-weight babies. Health professionals have been strengthened with the Care for Child Development approach, which supported parents in acquiring the skills to stimulate the brain development of their babies.

With more than 100 representatives of Government, non-government institutions, universities, the medical college, scientific societies, legislators and the private sector, a Forum on Primary Health Care was held to present the results of the study: Costing on the strengthening of the first level of care. It is estimated that by 2023 the necessary investment would be barely 0.05% of GDP.

Due to the increase in the number of cholera cases in Haiti, and to the identification of the first cases in the Dominican Republic, UNICEF, jointly with its partners and the MoH, supported the production of educational material and community training in the areas where these cases occurred. Additionally, oral rehydration sachets and zinc tablets have been purchased.

UNICEF continued to support the strengthening of the country's capacities to promote development for every child. Within the framework of the tripartite agreement promoted by UNICEF with the National Institute for Comprehensive Early Childhood Care (INAPI) and Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE), the Dominican Child Development Measurement System (SIMEDID) was presented. The system, which has a development assessment test and a digital tool, facilitates a quick valuation of the development situation of children who participate in INAPI services.

The Dominican Government has awarded the system the second place in the national innovation awards. Additionally, several scientific publications have been generated from the system design process and the preliminary data that it has produced.

During 2022, the INAPI Home Visit Monitoring System, developed with UNICEF support, has been implemented at the national level. Using this system, over 5,000 workers who assist more than 140,000 families can follow up with them on agreements made and incidents occurring during each visit, including information on 10 parenting indicators. This data enables decision-making at local, regional, and national levels to improve interventions with families.

As part of the business for result strategy, the Business Forum was organized with the attendance of the First Lady, the Minister of Labour, and the President of CONEP (National Entrepreneur Association). It focused on sharing best practices in family-friendly policies and children's rights and in friendly marketing and advertising. In 2022, paternity leave for civil servants was extended to 15 days and other flexibility measures to promote responsible parenthood were introduced.

After four years of local evidence-based advocacy by UNICEF, the social protection programme, SUPERATE, with UNICEF technical assistance, launched the National Fund for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities, which includes a special cash transfer for families who have children with disabilities.

With technical assistance from UNICEF, the Government measured public investment in children in 2021. Despite the adverse macroeconomic context, between 2016 and 2021 there was an increase in this investment from 5.1% to 5.7% of GDP.

UNICEF supported the National Statistics Office (NSO) in the preparation, based on the ENHOGAR-MICS 2019 survey data set, of three deep-dive thematic analyses on child labour, children with disabilities and early unions. Additionally, UNICEF jointly led with the NSO a five-month course on the production of inclusive and gender statistics and two workshops relating to disabilities and early childhood development measurement.

To promote journalism that supports children's rights, UNICEF implemented workshops for media

personnel on subjects such as child protection, social behaviour changes and the correct use of data.

UNICEF, Plan International, the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI) and the First Lady's office held an international seminar, concluding with a public expression of commitment by CONANI to lead a comprehensive sector review for the identification of the main gaps and obstacles preventing the development of a comprehensive child protection system, according to UNICEF guidelines. After the event, the above-mentioned review was held by UNICEF and CONANI. The review's findings were confirmed by recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, following a country Mission, and by the results of an external evaluation, supported jointly by UNICEF and CONANI, of the national road map on violence against children (2015–2020).

The evaluation highlighted the pertinence and coherence of the plan, however, noted the negative impact caused by the lack of political support needed to approve the legal ban of violence against children (VAC) in families, as well as funding allocated to prevent and respond to VAC, and the baseline to monitor progress.

In relation to the right to an identity, the greatest progress has been the recent enactment of the law on civil acts. UNICEF advocated, together with several allies, for the approval of this law. The new law eliminates the judicial process for late registration, increases deadlines for timely registration, ensures that both parents may register a child regardless of their marital status and establishes the electronic civil registry. The reform will allow for greater agility and security to ensure universal access to civil documentation for all children, especially for those already falling behind.

In November 2022, UNICEF formalized the Adolescent and Youth Advisory Council, *Altavoz*, comprising adolescents and young people aged 14–24.

The CPD was submitted based on programme rationale, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and it will be presented to the UNICEF Board in February 2023.

Strengthening of systems for risk prevention, mitigation, and emergency response

UNICEF, UNDP, and WFP coordinated their technical assistance to continue strengthening the capacities of the social protection system to respond to emergencies and shocks with the definition of the standard operating procedure to activate the temporary emergency cash transfer. This coordinated work facilitated the response of the social protection system with cash transfers for 35,000 households affected by Hurricane Fiona that hit the country in September 2022.

Thanks to the technical cooperation of the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) and the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office (LACRO), the Multi-Hazard Contingency Plan of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sectoral Group of the Dominican Republic (GASH-DR) was developed, based on the model contingency plan developed by LACRO, which was adapted to the context of this country. The objectives and activities for preparedness, response and recovery from environmental, climate and health hazards in the country were formulated.

Since November 2022, UNICEF has been strengthening the resilience of the education system to disasters with emergency preparedness interventions, under the guidelines of the Safe School initiative.

Emergency response

The passage of Hurricane Fiona in September 2022 affected the eastern region of the country, and 1,613,558 people were reported as not having access to drinking water. UNICEF, together with its implementing partners, and coordinating with other UN agencies, supported the response to the affected families with the delivery of 700 basic and menstrual hygiene kits, 7,000 gallons of water for human consumption, and 75 tanks of 500-gallon water for the establishment of 35 communal water supply points.

Support was also provided to the social protection programme, SUPERATE, to collect data so that it could arrange cash transfers from the Emergency Bonus plan to the most affected vulnerable families.

Programmatic adjustments arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

The sixth round of the SEIA survey was implemented and successfully transferred to the Government.

In order to leave no one behind, UNICEF, together with the MoH, led the vaccination strategy against COVID-19, which was aimed at migrants and population groups without legal documentation, people living in areas difficult to access and those affected by extreme poverty. With the support of INSALUD, the Dominican Red Cross, Maternal and Child Pastoral and 77 community organizations, the RCCE-SBC strategy Every Person Counts was implemented, based on consultations with communities and listening to vulnerable groups to identify barriers, fears and rumours that inhibit their decision to be vaccinated.

Educational material in Spanish and Creole was produced to counter doubts, myths, and rumours about the COVID-19 vaccine. Through the community operations, and the house-to-house vaccination strategy, 62,991 people were reached.

As food security remains precarious since the pandemic, UNICEF jointly with NHS, has continued the programme for the reduction of acute malnutrition; 35,125 children and 7,772 pregnant women have been evaluated and ready-to-use therapeutic food has been administered to 19% of the children and 15.4% of the pregnant and lactating mothers who presented with acute malnutrition or who were at risk.

To contribute to the recovery of the learning process in the face of the prolonged closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF technically supported the design of a guide with activities to be carried out with students, together with guidelines for its implementation. This reached 157,784 students in public schools from the third grade at the primary level and provided guidelines for reinforcement activities at the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year.

Gender approach

UNICEF has prioritized gender-responsive and child rights programming in the Mothers and Babies in Good Care initiative. The *Technical Guidelines for Maternal and Neonatal Care with a Gender and Human Rights Perspective*, which was launched in 2022 by ministerial resolution, improved the monitoring tool for humanization, especially the dignified and respectful treatment of women, reinforcing their right to confidentiality and privacy and to be free from violence and abuse in health services.

New evidence was produced for the promotion of basic and menstrual hygiene, which contributed to understanding the myths, fears and perceptions of intimidation caused by menstruation among adolescents. These elements, plus those related to basic hygiene, were the basis for the design of the +Hygiene + Health strategy and UNICEF advocacy for the menstrual health of adolescent girls.

To support the Dominican Government in the implementation of the national policy for the prevention of early unions, UNICEF activities focused on:

- Support for the SUPERATE social protection programme, with continuity of the programme for the prevention of early unions in three municipalities and its expansion to six more municipalities. The programme includes a strategy for the empowerment of girls and adolescents and sensitization of mothers, fathers, and community leaders, as well as a strategy for the promotion of positive masculinity.
- Support for the MoE to expand the implementation of the awareness-raising sessions, reaching 30,127 high school students.

- Capacity-building in addressing the prevention of early unions with 811 public officials from MoE, CONANI, SUPERATE and the Ministry of Women (MoW).
- Continuation of the digital communication campaign *Dueñas de su Futuro* (Women Owners of their Future), which showed an organic growth of 94.3% since December 2021.

UNICEF collaborated with the MoW to develop a protocol on how to provide temporary accommodation in the 14 safe houses for women and child survivors of GBV. The document incorporates a victim-centred, child-friendly, and culturally sensitive perspective, highlighting the needs of migrant women and their children, including the need for safeguarding.

On the legal front, UNICEF collaborated with the MoW to identify unfulfilled international commitments indispensable to the achievement of gender equality and results against GBV and to suggest recommendations to overcome the legal obstacles identified.

UNICEF strengthened work on GBV and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) by training eight civil society organizations and two public institutions in GBV risk mitigation and PSEA case referrals and training 146 front-line workers to identify, and respond to, sexual exploitation and abuse.

Interventions to prevent and support children with disabilities

The MoE, with the technical assistance of UNICEF, and the support of the University of Murcia (Spain), is promoting an innovative process for the design and validation of a national inclusive education model, with special emphasis on autism and cognitive disability.

After four years of local evidence-based advocacy and technical assistance by UNICEF, in December 2022 the Government launched the National Fund for Children and Adolescents with Disabilities as part of the social protection programme, SUPERATE.

The Kangaroo Mother Care programme includes services for the prevention of blindness and deafness of premature and low-weight babies.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

Together with WFP and UNCHR, UNICEF strengthened the humanitarian assistance response to population groups affected by Hurricane Fiona. The partnership with the Dominican Red Cross was essential for a quick response.

Jointly with INSALUD, a consortium of 98 NGOs, the Dominican Red Cross and Maternal and Child Pastoral enabled UNICEF to assist the most vulnerable population groups with COVID-19 vaccinations and humanitarian assistance, especially for migrants and for those affected by Hurricane Fiona, and with prevention against the cholera epidemic.

The joint work of UNICEF with PAHO/WHO, UNCHR and *Médicos del Mundo*, coordinating with MoH and institutions operating water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, was essential for the cholera response.

UNICEF, jointly with UNDP and WFP, strengthened shock-responsive social protection and its articulation with civil protection to accelerate the response to Hurricane Fiona.

With FAO and WFP, UNICEF implemented the joint programme Integrated UN to support the Dominican Republic in mitigating the impact of food crisis.

The acute malnutrition treatment programme has been expanded with the support of 168 INAIPI childcare centres and 21 NGOs.

UNICEF together with UNDP, SIUBEN, MEPyD and INSALUD implemented the SEIA survey and strengthened the Government ownership of the project.

UNFPA, Plan International and Save the Children continued to be important UNICEF allies for preventing early unions.

UNICEF and UNHCR collaborated to increase legal identity, and UNICEF collaborated with its National Congress allies to push for the approval of the new law to eliminate bottlenecks in improving access to birth registration.

UNICEF partnered with INAIPI and MoE to identify children without birth registration attending their services and for referring cases to be registered.

UNICEF continued its very close collaboration with UNHCR and IOM in offering humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan and Haitian migrants and supporting children to access education, legal documentation, and protection services. There is a joint presence at two official border points with Haiti.

The MoE is the main public partner of UNICEF, with which it has signed an agreement for the implementation of CON BASE for the next three years.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency initiated a strategic partnership with UNICEF to finance the prevention of early unions. The Generalitat Valenciana, the Diputación de Málaga and the Ayuntamiento de Gijón continued to support this initiative.

A donation from the Government of Japan is strengthening the vaccination cold chain.

The European Union, through ECHO, finances UNICEF humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable children and for disaster preparedness.

The United States refugee and migrant programme financed UNICEF's support for Venezuelan migrant children.

Working on Business for Results, 202 businesses were engaged in different initiatives, of which 21 were donor companies, 61 offered their core business in kind, 29 companies disseminated communication campaigns, 88 committed themselves to better policies in support of children, 3 Business Foundations were implementing partners for the acute malnutrition programme and another one is supporting the early warning app.

The Business Advisory Council continued to fully support UNICEF, and the Youth Advisory Council started its support in 2022.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Changes in development cooperation need time. The importance of long-term resilience, not abandoning programmes when progress is not seen, and the continuity and strengthening of efforts despite the pandemic and the change of Government, have borne much fruit this year. The following programmes needed the entire period of the current CPD to show significant progress:

a) The prevention of child marriage,

- b) The Mothers and Babies in Good Care Initiative,
- c) The programme to improve foundational learning, CON BASE, and
- d) The disability and emergency bonuses.

To achieve programme results that could be turned into public policy, it is necessary high-level evidence-based political advocacy, advocacy at the middle-management level and technical assistance, in a coordinated manner, and, on some issues, public advocacy. It is necessary to be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that may arise to do political advocacy, and, on other occasions, to create these scenarios. This strategy has been used in the previous examples.

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Innovation, whether in innovative strategies, such as Mother and Babies in Good Care, or in methodological innovations for the country, such as CON BASE Program, or in innovation of digital tools for the implementation of programmes, is very important to achieve successful results. If the development of these innovations is done jointly with the counterparts, the period required for their acceptance is reduced. Additional effort and training will always be required when expanding the initiatives.

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