

Georgia

Update on the context and situation of children

Since the war in Ukraine began, 197,435 (28,908 (15%) children; 46% female and 54% male) Ukrainians entered Georgia, out of which 25,101 (13%) remained in Georgia. There are an estimated 6,400 (26%) Ukrainian children remaining in Georgia, of which 4,169 (64%) are school age. UNICEF responded to the emerging needs of Ukrainians in Georgia by facilitating coordination between the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and municipalities to simplify the regulations on enrolment procedures in public preschools for Ukrainian preschool-age children, and in strengthening the capacity of teachers/preschool educators to promote the integration of Ukrainian children in preschool and school settings. There are approximately 2,000 children enrolled in school, of which 1,400 are registered in the Ukrainian speaking sectors in Tbilisi and Batumi. UNICEF is also strengthening the institutional capacity of state agencies involved in the process of identification, referral and response of unaccompanied and separated children, as well as for social protection measures for migrant populations.

Analysis of multiple waves of the Real Time Monitoring Survey/Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Plus (RTM/MICS Plus), implemented in collaboration with Geostat, showed COVID-19 had major negative effects on Georgian households, especially families with children. Between 2020 and 2021, 44% of households lost employment, including 54% of households with children. While some of these people have undoubtedly found new employment over time, even brief periods of unemployment can have major negative effects on household finances. Moreover, many Georgian families had reduced incomes with seven out of every ten households (70.2%) losing part of their income during this period, including 80.4% of families with children. In Georgia, poverty similarly affects men and women however female-headed households are more likely to be poor than male-headed households; one in every four girls live in a poor household; and women with incomplete secondary education are three times more vulnerable to poverty than women with a higher education.[1]

To mitigate these effects, the Government introduced and/or expanded various social protection measures. Families with children benefited more than other households with 99% of households with children receiving at least one type of support. Women are more likely to benefit from the social protection system across the lifecycle, except during working age as they are more likely to work in the informal sector due to childcare and family responsibilities.[2] The expanded measures likely contributed to reducing poverty rates. In 2021, the share of population under absolute poverty line decreased from 21.3% (2020) to 17.5%. Similarly, the share of children (0-17 years of age) under absolute poverty line decreased from 26.4% (2020) to 22.7% (2021).

RTM/MICS Plus showed that COVID-19 has not necessarily had a greater effect on the most disadvantaged children. Rather, the most affected groups vary depending on the type of risk involved. For example, worsened sleep patterns were twice as common in urban areas as in rural areas. Drop in preschool attendance was more pronounced in urban areas and for the richest fifth of children than for rural areas and the poorest fifth of children. Kindergartens continued to close temporarily when teachers and/or pupils would test positive with the virus. At the same time, some parents were reluctant to send their children to preschool due fears of infection. As a result, pre-school attendance rate dropped sharply, while attendance rates started to recover, attendance is still considerably lower (66%) compared to the pre-pandemic period (80%).

Positive changes in educational performance were noted for the poorest fifth of children however, in the early months of the pandemic, 7% of children from the poorest fifth of households could not attend online lessons because they did not have internet connection.

The RTM/MICS Plus showed seven out of ten children aged 5-19 years systematically play video/computer games in Georgia. Boys and children living in urban areas are considerably more likely to play video/computer games than girls, with the average amount of time spent on gaming increasing considerably since the start of the pandemic for all groups of children. An extra hour spent on gaming more than doubles the odds of the child experiencing negative effects of gaming on social relations, including aggression towards peers, worsened mood and family relations, and health-damaging behaviour.

RTM/MICS Plus showed the alarming emotional state of children, with 14% of children feeling anxious, nervous or worried and 10% feeling very sad or depressed on a weekly basis. Only a quarter (27%) of family members of the children with reported mental health issues have ever thought about seeking professional assistance, and less than a half of these applied to a specialist for help.

A UN Women study "Violence Against Women/Girls (VAW/G) in Georgia" (2017) showed 19% of respondents reported that they had experienced sexual violence in childhood. In accordance with the Gender Action Plan, UNICEF is working with UN Women to address VAW/G.

Despite a worsening situation for many children, the Government continues to demonstrate its commitment to improving the situation of children and adolescents in Georgia. The Government approved the National Human Rights Strategy which is now with Parliament for approval. Furthermore, the Government continues to implement the recently enacted Code on the Rights of the Child (2020). The National Education and Science Strategy and the corresponding work plan were approved, with the strategy focusing on enhancing the quality and relevance of education, ensuring equity, inclusion and diversity and improving governance, financing and accountability modalities. The Government approved two action plans, one on addressing violence against women and girls, and another for Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. Moreover, the Government introduced new and expanded social protection measures for children including increasing child benefits which will start from June 2023.

[1] UN Women. 2021. Country Gender Equality Profile of Georgia.

[2] Ibid.

Major contributions and drivers of results

2.1 Cross-sectoral results

A society wide approach to creating a child rights culture

UNICEF is focused on creating a child rights culture in Georgia by engaging with different actors, Government, academia, religious leaders, business, community groups, media, civil society organizations, parents and children, on protecting and promoting child rights. This included the establishment of new partnerships with 12 municipalities and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) as well as expansion of existing partnerships with the Parliament, academia and religious leaders.

UNICEF responded to the emerging needs of displaced Ukrainians in Georgia

Following the start of the war in Ukraine and the corresponding arrival of Ukrainians in Georgia, UNICEF facilitated coordination between the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and municipalities to simplify the regulations on enrolment procedures in public preschools for Ukrainian preschool-age children. UNICEF also supported MoES in strengthening the capacity of teachers/preschool educators to promote the integration of Ukrainian children in preschool and school

settings. UNICEF initiated the strengthening of institutional capacity of state agencies involved in the process of identification, referral and response of unaccompanied and separated children. Together with the Government, UNICEF initiated arrangements to support Ukrainian children to deal with hardship caused by the winter season through the provision of a one-time child cash benefit.

A Business Advisory Council for Children was launched

UNICEF, in partnership with leading business sector representatives, launched a Business Advisory Council for Children – an innovative platform aiming to support the realization of children’s rights in the context of the workplace, the marketplace and the community. Two meetings of the BACC were held, along with the first meetings for two of the established working groups: one on young people’s skills development and the other on accessibility of health and social services. Plans of actions for each of the working groups are under development which will contribute to the realization of UNICEF’s programmatic priorities.

70,000 adolescents with improved awareness in media literacy

UNICEF conducted a series of trainings to build the skills of young people and teachers on media literacy and addressing disinformation, especially in relation to COVID-19. Digital content about disinformation was released through youth digital platforms reaching 70,000 young people. In partnership with the Communication Commission and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, the process of integrating media literacy into formal education has started.

Over 2 million people reached through communication and advocacy

UNICEF continued being a reliable source of information reaching around 2 million people through social and traditional media, and face-to-face activities. More than 100 multimedia stories were produced and 1,000 media stories generated with UNICEF presented as a leading voice on child rights.

2.2 Every child survives and thrives

Cold chain equipment for vaccines replaced in 35% of rural primary healthcare (PHC) facilities

More than one-third (345) of rural PHC clinics in Georgia proper and all 29 medical institutions and PHC clinics in Abkhazia have been provided with upgraded cold chain equipment. In addition, a walk-in cold room was installed at the central level. UNICEF delivered the cold chain equipment to facilitate safe and timely child routine immunization as well as COVID-19 immunization.

Behavioural insights and community engagement used to reach 400,000 people with COVID-19 and routine vaccination messaging

UNICEF reached over 400,000 school personnel, healthcare workers, religious leaders, parents and children to address vaccine hesitancy, disinformation campaigns, and lack of trust in vaccines. Through its extensive risk communication and community engagement efforts, UNICEF contributed to increasing the number of teachers vaccinated against COVID-19 from 9% in August 2021 to 76% in January 2022 and vaccination of healthcare workers (84% of doctors, 68% of nurses, 58% of sanitary workers, and 70% of health administrative/technical staff, as of July 2022). UNICEF’s activities contributed to increasing vaccination coverage in the country from 28.7% (fully vaccinated >18 years) in October 2021 to 45.5% as of January 2022.

Supportive supervision for primary healthcare (PHC) doctors established

UNICEF strengthened the capacities of rural PHC doctors by applying supportive supervision mechanisms. The supportive supervision was led by two mentors specialized in the clinical care standards related to COVID-19 and provided by 32 specially trained PHC practice facilitators, with each facilitator supporting an average of 30 rural ambulatories. The selected facilitators were trained on the application of standardized instruments helping to audit case management and provide targeted support to the service providers at the rural ambulatories, where most services are provided to women and children.

Birth registry is strengthened to support perinatal health monitoring

UNICEF is supporting the strengthening of the Birth Registry through the development of perinatal service quality indicators to support ongoing monitoring of perinatal health and the readiness for validation of the elimination of mother-to child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

UNICEF advocacy contributes to Government commitment for school nutrition programme

UNICEF's high level and strong advocacy contributed to maintaining the Government's commitment to the school nutrition programme. UNICEF contributed to establishing a solid ground for the introduction of the school nutrition programme by: (i) assessing the acceptance of the programme among the general public and defining the level of financial contribution families are ready to make out of pocket; (ii) developing school nutrition standards that covers infrastructural and sanitary-hygiene related issues; (iii) preparing a short training course for school managers on the standards; (iv) carrying out a feasibility study in one region selected by Government; and (v) actively engaging with the Agrarian Committee of the Parliament on the introduction of EU funded project "From Farm to Fork" to complement school students' lunch boxes with locally produced fruits and vegetables.

2.3 Every child learns

Education and Science Strategy approved

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) in the development and finalization of the National Education and Science Strategy (2022 – 2030) and the corresponding work plan for (2022 – 2024). The Strategy is centered on three strategic directions to enhance quality and relevance of education, ensure equity, inclusion and diversity in education and improve governance, financing and accountability modalities. The Government's commitment to education was reiterated during the global Transforming Education Summit, including its commitment for safe learning.

Preschool authorization system initiated

UNICEF supported MoES and its affiliated agency, the National Center for Education Quality Enhancement (NCEQE), to launch the preschool authorization system. NCEQE, with UNICEF support, developed the Authorization Regulation, which provides the procedures for the preschool authorization process, and created an electronic platform for managing the processes, including sharing documents and assessment reports among involved parties. All preschools have been electronically registered in the system.

In-service training for teachers is further decentralized

UNICEF supported the decentralization of teacher in-service training by initiating training programmes through the Child Rights Centers of seven state universities. There were 25 university lecturers/lead facilitators trained on various subject areas of teacher pre-education programmes who then delivered the same training to 315 teachers of 105 public schools. In addition, UNICEF and

Estonian experts supported the capacity building of 700 teachers and 100 school administrators from 100 model schools across the country, along with the provision of coaching to 500 teachers and 100 school administrators, contributing to improved knowledge in modern, child-centred pedagogy including methodologies for distance teaching and learning.

Inclusive and quality education reform

With the support of the Norwegian Government, MoES, in cooperation with UNICEF and the Norwegian state organisation Statped, initiated an inclusive education system reform aimed at transforming special schools into resource centers/knowledge hubs to support all public schools with improved capacity and services for inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities. The new model is being further elaborated through guidelines/action plans and a series of capacity development sessions for 120 national counterparts including stakeholders representing resource and public schools.

Moreover, UNICEF provided technical support to MoES and selected municipalities in the design of informal education programmes for children with SEN and disabilities, with model after school programmes initiated in 35 public schools supporting 500 vulnerable children in learning and recreation for their academic, emotional, and physical development. UNICEF is also supporting MoES to strengthen functional application of resource rooms at 10 public schools, introducing effective transition practices from general to vocational/higher education level, in partnership with 20 state and private vocational education institutions, and establishing school-based parent clubs.

Violence prevention mechanism introduced in 200 schools

UNICEF supported MoES in developing and introducing a violence prevention toolkit and internal supervision mechanisms in 200 model schools; with the support of 240 trained school social workers and psychologists and 1,043 teachers.

2.4 Every child is protected from violence and exploitation

Integrated service for child victims of sexual violence operationalized

With the support of the Government of Estonia, an integrated service for child victims of sexual abuse started functioning in March 2022, providing services to 92 children to date, 84 of which were girls. The service uses an innovative approach whereby justice and other systems work collaboratively to avoid re-victimization and re-traumatization of child victims of sexual abuse and supports their rehabilitation. UNICEF built the capacity of 167 justice and child protection professionals in evidence-based rehabilitation approaches and interviewing methodology to work with child victims of sexual abuse. Dialogue with the judiciary was initiated to support the application of child-friendly approaches and establishment of common practice. A plan for replicating the model in West Georgia was developed and agreed with partner and donor organizations.

Children moved from residential to family-type care

Family-type care has been provided to an additional 66 children following the closure of another institution. As a result of UNICEF's intensive advocacy efforts, a large -scale institution for children with disabilities - Tbilisi Infant House - was closed and children were moved to family-type care settings in small group homes. In addition, many children from a large-scale institution in Western Georgia were reintegrated or placed in family-based care. A model of professional supervision and monitoring for specialized family-type services intended for children with severe and profound disabilities was developed and an assessment and monitoring model for children moved from large-

scale institutions was finalized and handed over to the State Care Agency.

Capacities of justice and child protection professionals strengthened

UNICEF supported the application of child-friendly approaches through capacity building of 523 justice and child protection professionals on interviewing child victims and witnesses, involvement of 264 specialists in multidisciplinary discussions, developing guidelines for upgrading the quality of diversion services, enhancing the Juvenile Referral Center in provision of services for children under the minimum age of criminal responsibility, preparing a concept of restorative practices and mediation in schools, and supporting the implementation of the Code on the Rights of the Child related to separation of a child from the family as a measure of last resort.

Parent's ABCs developed, reaching 334,900 parents on positive parenting approaches

Positive parenting resources, Parents ABC, were developed and shared in print and digital formats. UNICEF reached 334,900 people on positive parenting approaches, importance of positive upbringing methods and strategies for emotional wellbeing and effective communication to contribute to improving non-violent methods of child disciplining.

2.5 Every child lives in a safe and clean environment

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene improved for over 8,000 children

With support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, UNICEF improved water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in 9 schools in Abkhazia benefiting 2,983 children (1,471 girls and 1,512 boys).

With support from USAID, 5,000 children in Guria region have improved access to safe water following the installation of water filtration systems in 31 schools, 1 preschool, 2 daycare centres and 3 hospitals. These systems are preventing waterborne diseases as well as the spread of infection, including COVID-19. There were 220 adolescents trained on WASH advocacy tools and methods, with 32 safe water advocacy campaigns and events carried out in selected communities and reaching 9,380 adolescents, community members and municipal leaders.

UNICEF supported hygiene promotion interventions reached 47,214 adolescents (27,415 girls and 20,069 boys)

With financial support from USAID, hygiene promotion interventions were carried out in 65 municipalities through the training of 4,012 adolescents and the active engagement of 41,483 adolescents, in partnership with Helping Hand and the Civil Society Development Center. UNICEF worked with 951 adolescents as "HealthPreneurs", in targeted rural municipalities. The HealthPreneurs mobilized adolescents and trained them on mental and emotional transformation, healthy lifestyle and hygiene, leadership, and creative and entrepreneur thinking, with 157 adolescents presenting innovative business ideas on safe hygiene and healthy lifestyle. In addition, 768 scouts in Adjara region were trained and participated in various hygiene promotion activities and children's rights on safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

Environmental Health (Lead) Surveillance System designed and to be launched

With financial support from the Clarios Foundation, UNICEF commissioned the design of an Environment Health (Lead) Surveillance System to monitor lead levels in the blood of children as well as to track the sources of lead exposure. Although the system will initially focus on lead, it will later

expand to track and monitor other heavy metals/ pollutants. Consensus has been built to go ahead with implementing the surveillance system which will be gradually launched starting in 2023. Moreover, UNICEF continued supporting the capacity building of staff of the Chemical Risk Factor Research Laboratory, which was established in 2021 with support from various donors.

2.6 Every child has an equitable chance in life

Evidence generation informs social programming

UNICEF, in partnership with the National Statistics Office of Georgia, conducted the Child Welfare Survey, embedding this survey as a module into the Household Income and Expenditure Survey. The module includes the child deprivation index, a measure of multi-dimensional poverty, which is widely used across EU member states, and will allow new types of data to be generated to inform child-sensitive social protection measures. In addition, UNICEF carried out a study on goods and services required for inclusion of children with disabilities with active participation of the disability community. The findings will be used to optimize and better target the package of social protection measures for children with disabilities.

Government introduces expanded social protection measures for children

UNICEF supported evidence contributed to the introduction of expanded social protection measures for children. The Government introduced a 50% increase to the child cash benefit and improved coverage by increasing the eligibility threshold, improving coverage from 213,583 in 2021 to 229,633 in 2022 (7.5% increase).

Municipal capacity strengthened on social programming

UNICEF expanded its engagement with municipalities, including more intensive involvement with ten pilot municipalities to support their new role as defined by the Code on the Rights of the Child. These municipalities were supported to develop capacity in needs-based, child-centered approaches to social programming, including conducting community social needs assessment, development of new social programmes for children, and improved budgeting, costing and monitoring of social programmes for children. In addition, two municipalities acquired candidacy status as Child Friendly Cities (CFC) after adopting CFC strategies and action plans.

UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

UNICEF continues to engage different actors including Government, academia, religious leaders, business, community groups, media, civil society organizations, parents and children, on protecting and promoting child rights. UNICEF aims to unite all actors around one core vision with children at its center as a means to deliver holistic and sustainable impacts for children.

UNICEF supported the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Child Rights Protection to improve oversight on the implementation of the Code on the Rights of the Child, and enhancing children's participation in decision-making processes. UNICEF supported the Council to strengthen its capacity through trainings of Parliamentarians on child rights, and development of relevant methodology, tools, and indicators for the effective monitoring of the implementation process.

UNICEF launched partnerships with municipalities by signing of a symbolic pledge with mayors of 10 municipalities to develop social programmes tailored to the needs of the children and families, in collaboration with the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs.

Mayors, deputy mayors, and respective staff of municipalities have been actively involved, and two additional municipalities subsequently joined this initiative.

UNICEF strengthened its cooperation with the State Agency for Religious Issues and nine religious denominations to enhance their capacity on child rights and the role of religious leaders in promoting child rights.

UNICEF engaged nine state universities to strengthen their Child Rights Centres which are moving the child rights agenda forward in academia and professional groups and empowering communities to become child rights advocates. UNICEF partnered with Batumi State University to host the First International Conference on Early Childhood Education and Samtskhe-Javakheti State University for the Third International Conference on Incorporation of Child Rights into Educational Programmes.

UNICEF engaged with independent state agencies, such as GeoStat and the Public Defender's Office to support data collection and analysis on children and the system of independent monitoring of child rights.

Partnerships with business sector has been strengthened through the launch of a Business Advisory Council for Children – an innovative platform aiming to support the realization of children's rights in the context of the workplace, the marketplace and the community. Based on the global partnership, a three-year Memorandum was signed with ICC aimed at mobilizing support for children.

UNICEF expanded its partnership with the Government of the United States to foster peacebuilding and peaceful solutions while supporting conflict-affected communities. Moreover, the partnership with the Government of Bulgaria was continued to support out of school children and children at risk of dropping out of school.

Coordination amongst UN agencies is conducted through the UN Country Team and its various working groups. UNICEF works with other UN agencies through the development of joint programmes and monitoring, including UN Women to develop a new partnership to address VAW/G and expand data on women and children with disabilities. Moreover, UNICEF participates in a number of national coordination groups, led by various Government ministries, departments and agencies.

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Lessons learned:

- UNICEF continues to work with all stakeholders, regardless of political or religious affiliation. As a trusted and impartial partner, UNICEF was able to convene and facilitate constructive dialogue between parties, despite a polarized political environment.
- A child rights culture requires involvement of the entire society, including government officials, professionals working with children, community/religious leaders and academia, non-governmental organizations, donors and private sector. Stakeholders should be engaged early in programmes and should have targeted areas whereby they can learn, influence and enact change to benefit children.
- Interagency cooperation is a challenge and, therefore, involvement of high-level coordination mechanisms – the Inter-agency Commission on the Implementation of the CRC - helped to facilitate discussions and activate stakeholders. Moreover, focus on the best interests of the child at the heart of discussions allowed diverse stakeholders to unite around a common agenda, opening new pathways to bring various stakeholders together to engage on human and child rights.
- Cooperation with the executive branch of the Government, judiciary, local municipalities and the Parliament is imperative for the protection of children's rights. It is important that coordination continues to be strengthened and links between these agencies as well as community, civil society and academia are improved.
- While many social responsibilities have moved from the central to local level, respective changes in normative acts have not been introduced; as a result, municipalities experience considerable

difficulties to provide needed support to vulnerable citizens, including to Ukrainians currently residing in Georgia.

- A tailored approach to engaging different municipalities has been more effective, including careful targeting of decision-makers/management staff based on each municipality's unique context, active engagement of high-level management and grouping municipalities for coordination/capacity building activities by certain similar characteristics, which enabled experience exchange and knowledge sharing between the municipalities facing similar challenges.
- The actions implemented throughout the year were very complex, executed by multiple partners in a rapidly changing environment with significant changes in governance. It is important to engage a wide range of stakeholders, at varying levels, to help maintain momentum while new capacities are being built.
- Deployment of staff for the Ukrainian emergency response provided training and skills development for staff to better prepare for emergency responses locally.
- Integrating data collection into the existing household surveys improves sustainability as well as allows for further analyses and disaggregation of child-related data by different social-economic variables.
- Social and behaviour change campaigns need to have measurable indicators identified at the beginning of the intervention, with baseline data collected, to allow for assessing the impact of the campaign.
- Lessons on how to better reflect on the Gender Action Plan should be taken forward including how to encourage engagement of fathers in children's development and upbringing; as well as to strengthen the use of disaggregated data.

Innovations:

- For emergency preparedness, alternative office facilities were previously rented so the space could be used if needed. A new approach is being used whereby UNICEF utilizes its existing partnerships with universities and upgrades identified space within the university premise which will be made available to UNICEF if/when an emergency appears. In the meantime, the space is utilized by the universities for classes and other learning initiatives.
- Introduction of restorative practices and mediation along with the strengthening of the social workforce in schools aims to establish practices and mechanisms for peaceful resolution of conflicts, which will contribute to the prevention of violence among and towards children in the schools and to the wellbeing of children and their families.
- The integrated service for child victims of sexual abuse uses an approach whereby justice and other systems work collaboratively to avoid re-victimization and re-traumatization of child victims of sexual abuse and supports their rehabilitation, thus putting child's best interests in the very heart of investigative process.
- The study on goods and services required for participation of children with disabilities is an innovative pilot study that supports generation of detailed data on the additional support needs for inclusion and the extra costs for households. The methodology and findings were actively discussed with the disability community and relevant state actors to ensure ownership and acceptance, and shared with other countries to learn and apply similar models.
- The development of the web-portal for disability statistics will increase the use of such statistics as well as improve evidence-based decision-making. The portal will also contribute to the production of new statistical data on people/children with disabilities
- The National Birth Registry was used only for surveillance and research, however, by adding perinatal service quality indicators, the Registry supports ongoing perinatal service quality monitoring.
- The water filtration system installed in Guria region is a new way to filter and sanitize water, at a competitive cost, and does not require electricity and chemicals. This allows for immediate water safety for children while advocacy continues for water quality to be addressed at the systemic level.
- The proposed environmental health (lead) surveillance system offers a novel method of

microvolume capillary blood collection for lead testing, which is less stressful and invasive for children and also, does not require complicated storage and transportation logistics.

- The supportive supervision mechanism for PHC doctors applies international practices while at the same time innovating for country and health system context, types and levels of supervisors and supervised healthcare workers, the array of supervisory mechanisms, availability of platforms and etc.

- RTM/MICS Plus is a longitudinal, representative household survey tool with interviews conducted over the phone. It is designed to use the households from the MICS as its sample frame. While MICS Plus does not replace MICS, it provides opportunities for different data collection modalities measured with high frequency, which can be useful for emerging issues such as crisis monitoring. Georgia is among the first three countries globally utilizing MICS Plus.