

## Guatemala

### Update on the context and situation of children

2023 was the fourth and last year of Guatemala's current administration, as the new executive, legislative and municipal governments took office in January 2024.

In the second quarter of 2023, Guatemala's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) recorded year-on-year growth of 3.8% (versus 4.5% in the second quarter of 2022). The influx of remittances reached US\$ 14.8 billion as of September – 10.9% higher than in 2022. Inflationary pace slowed from its maximum value in February, reaching 4.69% in September 2023.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, 68% of children and adolescents in the country live in poor households, restricting their access to essential services to ensure adequate health and well-being. The rate of child poverty is higher than that for the population in general (59%), which clearly shows the magnitude of deprivation to which children and adolescents are exposed, affecting their full development.

The 2020 World Bank Human Capital Index for Guatemala reached 0.46 (with 1 being the maximum value), representing the second lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean after Haiti, and 124th out of 173 countries in the world. UNICEF Guatemala calculations based on official data show that only half of Guatemalan children aged 0–5 are on course to meet expected development outcomes, highlighting profound disparities related to socioeconomic, indigenous and urban/rural status.

Based on UNICEF's estimations, public spending for children reached 3.5% of GDP in 2023. An increase to at least 7.7% of GDP by 2030 is needed in Guatemala to ensure universal access to health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and social protection to support families in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty, and promote prevention and response to violence against children.

Although a decreasing trend has been observed, maternal and child mortality remain high, with a national Maternal Mortality Rate of 108 per 100,000 live births at national level (compared with an average of 70.7 in Central America) and an Infant Mortality Rate of 26 per 1,000 live births (19.8 in Central America).

Chronic malnutrition still affects 46.5% of children under 5, and 23,316 cases of acute malnutrition and 51 related deaths were registered in the first 45 weeks of 2023 among children aged 0–5. Rates of overweight and obesity also show an increasing trend, especially among adolescents and young people. According to the latest information available from the National Maternal and Child Health Survey (ENSMI, 2014–2015), 18% of adolescents aged 15–19 are overweight, and 4% are obese.

On WASH, 74% of households have access to water through a pipe network (84.7% in urban areas and 59.2% in rural areas), while only 49% of households have access to a drainage network (73.6% urban and 18.7% rural). According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that only 56% of the population uses drinking water services safely and that only 19.5% of domestic wastewater flows are treated safely. Also, according to data from the Ministry of Education, around 5,600 schools do not have access to water.

Immunization coverage was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it continued to fall in 2023.

While coverage of the third dose of the Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus vaccine (DPT3) reached 80% in 2022, national coverage of the second DPT booster reached only 64.9% in December 2023.

Coverage of the third Polio vaccine decreased from 76% in 2022 to 71.4% in 2023, while coverage of the first dose of the Measles, Rubella and Mumps (Parotitis) vaccine also fell from 84% in 2022 to 75.3% in 2023.

Violence against children has not decreased, as the Public Prosecutor's Office (Procuraduría General de la Nación) reported around 24,000 child victims of violence in 2022. Guatemala does not currently have a law explicitly prohibiting corporal punishment in the home. In 2022, 14,591 complaints of physical abuse of children and adolescents were received by the Attorney General's Office (Ministerio Público). Rates of sexual violence in Guatemala are also alarming, and the country registered 82 daily

births from mothers aged 10–17.

Around 2.7 million children and adolescents (aged 0–18) were out of school in 2023, most of them of pre-primary- and secondary-age. Although gross coverage of primary education reaches 110.2%, challenges still persist in terms of educational quality as, based on data from the Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study in 2019, 84% of sixth-graders do not reach minimum proficiency levels in reading, a percentage that climbs to 93% in mathematics.

On social protection, even though 68% of children and adolescents in the country live in poor households, coverage of social programmes is limited. For instance, the conditional cash transfer programme ‘Bono Social’ for families in poverty and extreme poverty, covers only 81,540 households.

The number of children and adults on the move transiting through Guatemala on their way to the United States of America, including many family units and unaccompanied children, increased in 2023. In addition, between 2020 and 2023, more than 23,000 unaccompanied Guatemalan children have been returned to the country from Mexico and the United States.

Guatemala is the most vulnerable Latin American country to natural phenomena and climate change, according to the INFORM risk index, with a score of 8.3.

## Major contributions and drivers of results

### *Health and nutrition*

To prevent and treat all forms of malnutrition, UNICEF implemented social and behaviour change communication strategies, reaching 457,599 people through radio announcements, 14,270 parents and caregivers through counselling activities and 11,002 women through mobile messaging in 2023.

Through the communication campaign ‘Give your diet a twist’, UNICEF and the Government of Guatemala reached 27,242 people. UNICEF also strengthened the capacity of 593 religious leaders, 2,258 traditional birth attendants, 8,430 health workers and 2,487 ‘Agents of Change’ on breastfeeding and prevention of malnutrition. UNICEF also worked with the Ministry of Labor to advocate for the establishment of lactation rooms, to promote and facilitate breastfeeding in the workplace. In 2023, 75 companies engaged in this initiative and 7 companies and four governmental institutions were recognized as breastfeeding-friendly. Through UNICEF’s advocacy efforts, the Ministry of Health assigned US\$6.4 million to implement comprehensive nutrition and health programmes.

UNICEF strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of Health (MOH) to roll out the COVID-19 and routine immunization programmes in 2023, including the training of 339 health-care workers and technical staff on cold chain. To increase vaccine coverage, UNICEF implemented a community participation methodology in 79 communities and provided technical assistance during the vaccination week in the Americas, reaching another 420 communities. In addition, UNICEF launched an art festival and a communication campaign on HIV prevention for adolescents, with the participation of 190 adolescents. UNICEF also provided health services to people on the move in Chiquimula, carrying out 893 medical appointments.

### *Education*

UNICEF has undertaken significant efforts to strengthen the expansion of coverage of early education in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. This has been carried out through the creation of 96 new Community Centres for Comprehensive Child Development (CECODII, in Spanish) for a total of 529 centres implemented since 2021. This is accompanied by the training of 50 managers and 3,256 educators as well as provision of the technical equipment necessary for their efficient operation. Recently, 500 of the 529 CECODIIs and trained personnel were successfully transferred to the Ministry of Education, thus ensuring that 13,799 boys and girls who previously received early education from UNICEF continue to benefit from the national institutions.

Currently, UNICEF is meeting its commitments by providing care in 39 CECODIIs, directly benefiting 1,300 boys and girls aged 0–4 years, 276 community educators, 243 nursing mothers and 82 pregnant women. In addition, around 5,000 community leaders, parents and community members receive information about the importance of early education in child development. Likewise, technical

assistance was provided for the training of itinerant managers in charge of implementing the ‘Acompañame a Crecer’ methodology in the CECODIIs, with the purpose of guaranteeing educational quality in each component.

UNICEF has also supported the procurement and distribution of 1,400 early childhood development (ECD) kits for jointly implemented CECODIIs, providing essential materials that facilitate the creation of appropriate activities for the comprehensive development of children.

UNICEF Guatemala in coordination with the Ministry of Education, with the support of USAID, has managed to support the rehabilitation of basic WASH infrastructure in 172 rural schools and promote improvements in hygiene practices, providing 23,003 girls and boys with access to appropriate learning environments where they can reach their maximum potential.

UNICEF supported Ministry of Education in the establishment and operation of 46 Non-Formal Education Centers (CEEX in Spanish) in nine municipalities of Guatemala. CEEXs offer flexible education opportunities for adolescents to complete their basic level studies and develop transferable skills. 6,563 young people benefitted from the CEEX in 2023, being 3,925 of them adolescent girls (59%).

In terms of skills development, UNICEF also supported the MoE in the establishment of 7 Field Technical Schools for School Feeding (ETCAEs in Spanish) and 11 Virtual Learning Environments (EVA in Spanish), as well as in the implementation of the UPSHIFT-based "The Entrepreneurship Challenge", which allows adolescent girls to develop skills related to innovation and social entrepreneurship. "The Entrepreneurship Challenge" resulted in the establishment of 100 businesses such as: poultry farms, bakeries, sewing shops, embroidery, sale of traditional costumes, greenhouses, social bookstores, carpentry, barbershops, sales of food and smoothies, egg sales, which will allow the development in their communities.

#### *Child protection*

The model of protective environments for children at community and municipal levels was consolidated, with 55% of the municipalities in the country now possessing municipal offices for child protection. Specialized services of prevention and response to sexual violence against children were provided in the most affected departments in the country, in collaboration with the government and civil society organizations. On primary prevention, UNICEF developed a communication strategy for social and behavioural change (SBC), educating and reflecting with communities on the societal norms around sexual violence against children and adolescents. On secondary prevention, UNICEF focused on the validation and implementation of tools to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors regarding sexual violence, at school and community levels. On tertiary prevention, psychosocial care with specialized approaches for the recovery of child and adolescent victims of sexual violence was provided in four departments with higher case demand.

Institutional capacities of the Judiciary were enhanced in matters related to specialized child justice, adolescents in conflict with the law, and child protection. UNICEF also provided psychosocial aid, humanitarian assistance (water, showers, differentiated sanitation, shelter, food, family contact restoration, and information/orientation mechanisms), nutrition services and primary health care support to children, adolescents, and their families on the move. UNICEF also created guidelines, conducted training and facilitated reflection spaces for technical teams from the government and civil society.

#### *WASH and climate resilience*

UNICEF implemented the Sustainable Total Sanitation and Hygiene Programme (SAHTOSO) methodology, reaching 162,106 people in 393 communities. Three municipalities were certified as open defecation free (ODF) and having basic sanitation. In addition, families installed 18,369 sinks and 1,996 toilets in their homes. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Health to update the national water and sanitation policy. UNICEF supported the capacity strengthening of 28 municipal-level water and sanitation offices and conducted 6 diagnoses. To support people on the move, 64,200 people were provided with hygiene kits and WASH facilities. In addition, a national market-based WASH platform was created to involve the private sector.

In 2023, UNICEF promoted mechanisms to involve children, adolescents and youth in decision-making processes, including the creation of the ‘Eco Agents’ platform. UNICEF established effective

working relationships with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN), advocating for child sensitive climate change, water and environment programmes. UNICEF contributed to effective multi-sectoral engagement and linkages, including with the private sector through the Business and Community Resilience approach, to improve emergency response and build resilient environments for children. This support included the implementation of 10 workshops on ‘emergency preparedness and response’ directed to local businesses and other local stakeholders, including organizations of persons with disabilities.

#### *Social protection*

With support from the European Union, UNICEF finalized the process of strengthening capacities and tools aimed at local governments that were part of the public finance improvement plan developed jointly with municipal governments. Twenty-two diagnoses and public finance improvement plans were completed in the prioritized municipalities, which were officially presented and handed over to the respective municipal authorities. This experience enabled on-site training workshops to be held in 18 municipalities, training 283 municipal officials and technicians in the first phase. In the second phase, 5 training workshops were held with the participation of 123 participants, with nearly 84 hours of effective training given by UNICEF staff, the National Institute of Public Administration and the Ministry of Public Finances. At the end of this process, participants from 14 municipalities received certificates and diplomas. UNICEF also initiated a rapprochement with the new municipal authorities elected in the 2023 elections, with the aim of providing technical assistance in child-and malnutrition-sensitive budget management and public finance for children during the transition process.

Following completion of the ‘Investing in Children’ costing analysis in May 2023, UNICEF made an official presentation of the document at a public event with representatives from different sectors of society. The results showed that public investment in children and adolescents needs to increase from 3.5% of GDP in 2023 to 7.7% of GDP in 2030, in order to cover 100% of children and adolescents and achieve the SDGs. Dissemination of the analysis included discussion with presidential candidates and teams from the political parties leading in voting intentions. During the World Children’s Day commemoration event, UNICEF continued to disseminate the study to the event’s attendees, including representatives of the diplomatic corps, civil society organizations, the private sector, and donors. Through technical assistance from UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Development (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, MIDES) initiated the institutionalization of the digital social register (Ficha de Evaluación de Condiciones Socioeconómicas, FECS) approved by Ministerial Agreement. The importance of the digital FECS lies in the possibility of using a single record for MIDES interventions, which will help improve the quality of socio-economic information on families, reduce inclusion times, expand the coverage of social programmes, and improve attention to beneficiaries. In partnership with the World Bank, UNICEF finalized the IT development of the CCT programme “Bono Social” and started validation testing together with technical teams from MIDES.

As host of the CashCap-NORCAP roll-out, UNICEF supported the establishment of a working group between humanitarian and governmental actors within the Cash Working Group structure, implementing a participatory methodology to undertake an analysis of the normative framework for cash transfers in response to emergencies through the social protection system. The results will allow for advocacy with the new authorities on the reform of the existing regulatory framework to promote a more efficient social protection system in humanitarian situations.

UNICEF provided technical assistance for the updating of the Public Policy on Early Childhood in 2023 and is currently implementing advocacy efforts with the new authorities aimed at the ensuring adoption of the policy in 2024.

#### *Cross-sectoral activities*

In 2023 a comprehensive advocacy and communication strategy was launched to put children on top of the social and political agenda and promote the urgent need to increase investment in children within the framework of the electoral process. The strategy was supported by solid evidence with a proposal titled ‘Investment in Children: Reach Everyone’ and analysis titled ‘Comprehensive development in early childhood: A look at Guatemala’ presented in the frame of World Children’s Day.

The Country Office had established a close relationship with the National Institute of Statistics (INE) to advance the development of a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Guatemala. Workshops

and training were held. The memorandum of understanding for MICS was signed in December 2023. The SBC work focused on: consolidating the construction of the community participation methodology in health together with the Ministry of Health with an emphasis on COVID-19 vaccination and routine vaccination; strengthening the K'at Noj Communication Network for the Prevention of Violence against Children, and generating insights into social norms that enable violence against children through a specific study; the supporting implementing the national SBC strategy to prevent malnutrition through two monitoring systems: community Knowledge Attitudes and Perceptions monitoring, and monitoring of SBC actions. Communication materials were also implemented in eight Mayan languages to support the protection of migrant children. The work with the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala has allowed us to work on an SBC approach with cultural relevance.

## UN Collaboration and Other Partnerships

In 2023, UNICEF acted as the Lead Agency of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) result group on social development and will retain this status in 2024. UNICEF also co-chairs – along with IOM and UNHCR – the inter-agency working group on migration. UNICEF is also part of the results groups on housing, education, health and food and nutritional safety. UNICEF also leads the Clusters of Education, Nutrition, WASH, and the Area of Responsibility of Child Protection in the Humanitarian Country Team.

UNICEF is part of three Swedish-funded joint programmes on WASH and nutrition in rural areas of the country together with FAO, PAHO and UNDP. New joint funding proposals were drafted in the last quarter of 2023 with IOM and WFP on migration; and with UNDP on innovation.

Collaboration with OCHA and other United Nations agencies resulted in the efficient participation in the cluster work as well in the updating of Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans, with special emphasis on areas such as education, nutrition, WASH, and child protection.

The Inter-American Development Bank IABD was engaged in 2023 to explore opportunities for collaboration on early childhood, education, and social protection.

UNICEF remains the Lead Agency for Common Premises, currently accommodating UNICEF, UNODC, UNWOMEN, UNCHR and WFP.

Public partnerships with different United States government agencies on migration and child protection were consolidated in 2022. Potential donors such as Japan and Korea have been engaged on migration and climate change.

Private sector engagement resulted in securing funds from EPA (US\$50,000) and Orbia (US\$35,000, in collaboration with UNICEF Mexico). Thanks to LACRO support, UNICEF Guatemala benefitted from the partnership with Kimberly Clark to support the implementation of the ECD national programme “Acompañame a crecer”.

On individual giving, UNICEF Guatemala strengthened its attraction strategies focused on digital channels and telemarketing (which resulted in 385 new pledges) as well as face-to-face campaigns (1,686 new pledges). An additional channel was started with the first cash campaign through the Country Office’s landing page. End-of-year income reached US\$220,000, representing a growth rate of 812% compared to US\$27,071 in 2022. The number of active donors increased from 912 in January 2023 to 2,050 donors in December 2023.

## Lessons Learned and Innovations

Together with the Government of Guatemala, through the Presidential Commission on Open and Electronic Government, Guatemala has joined the Alliance for Digital Public Goods, promoting the creation, discovery, and use of open source digital solutions to address global challenges. This accession represents a significant milestone in the country's digital landscape, aiming to incorporate innovative and collaborative solutions that will enable significant advances in reducing the digital divide.

UNICEF's analysis "Investing in Children" provided a call to action on the importance of investing in children and adolescents in 2023 electoral process. The results were presented to different stakeholders and decision-makers, included the main candidates in the 2023 electoral race, with the aim of promoting debate and advocacy for greater investment in children and adolescents. Technical assistance to MIDES in the development of SIBS and SHR included important technological innovations. By using digital FECS, the processes required for socio-economic data capture are reduced from 70 to 16 steps, thus reducing the time for inclusion of new beneficiaries, and the elimination of the use of paper as a means of filling out the traditional FECS. In partnership with CashCap-NORCAP, UNICEF's technical assistance generated valuable learning through collaborative analysis of the country's humanitarian social protection policy framework, building trust, dialogue, and a common language among humanitarian actors. At the global level, this is the first time this type of analysis has been undertaken and it is hoped that the lessons learned from this deployment will provide valuable lessons for the regional and global humanitarian community.

In pursuit of culturally sensitive health-care services for girls and adolescents, with the support of the Ministry of Health, the 'Inclusive Health' translation device was implemented across health-care centres in Alta Verapaz, providing access to health care to indigenous girls in their own language (Q'eqchí and Poqomchí). Additionally, training was implemented to strengthen the digital capacities of health providers (doctors and nurses).

Further, to strengthen the country's response to emergencies, drone technology is being developed to provide connectivity to risk assessors in remote communities. It will facilitate real-time monitoring and rapid assessment to speed up the response and movement of humanitarian aid.

UNICEF Guatemala continues to work to strengthen the innovation ecosystem for the benefit of children and adolescents. It has been participating actively with the Secretariat of Science and Technology in the second edition of the Junior National Innovation Award and supporting the implementation of digital public goods such as PRIMERO with the Social Welfare Secretariat, and Rapid Pro for health and protection.

The evaluation of the child protection programme was completed in 2023, and the evaluation of the education outcome program PLANE/ECHO was initiated. The final report for the education's evaluation is expected to be concluded in March 2024. With these evaluations, the CO complied with the evaluation policy, aiming to generate at least one programme evaluation per year to enhance interventions for the benefit of children.