

# Child rights in Mexico

Mexico ratified the Convention on 21 September 1990, and successive national governments have worked to support children's rights. Despite a major financial crisis during the mid-1990s, the country has made steady progress in child survival, health care and education. According to the latest international estimates, the under-five mortality rate has been reduced by one third since 1990, net primary school enrolment and routine immunization are above 97 per cent, and 95 per cent of Mexicans have access to improved sources of water.

Mexico has also been a strong advocate for child rights beyond its borders. It was one of the six countries that convened the World Summit for Children in 1990, and it has subsequently helped organize events to monitor States' progress towards meeting their commitments to children. Mexico promoted the formulation and approval of regional guidelines for the protection of unaccompanied migrant children in the Regional Conference on Migration covering North and Central America and the Dominican Republic. The Government has also provided leadership in chairing the UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

## Linking child protection to health care and other social benefits

Within the country, multi-sectoral programmes involving a broad range of stakeholders are having a positive impact throughout Mexican society. For example, the internationally acclaimed Oportunidades programme, which began in 1997 under the name Progresá, addresses overlapping issues of poverty, ill health, child labour, and school non-attendance and dropout. Oportunidades delivers cash transfers to women on condition that their children attend periodic health checks and go to school. By 2008, it had reached 5 million families in all 31

Mexican states and the Federal District, with around one fifth of the recipient families living in the impoverished southern states of Chiapas and Veracruz.

Mexico has also been engaged in innovative health programmes. During the past 30 years, the country has used the "diagonal approach to health care" to implement and expand successful initiatives to combat diarrhoeal diseases, vaccine-preventable diseases and micronutrient deficiencies. A comprehensive programme of primary health care for mothers, newborns and children – Arranque Parejo en la Vida (Equal Start in Life) – was introduced in 2001 and has reached a high level of national coverage. With the addition of Seguro Popular de Salud, a public health insurance initiative, maternal and child health became entitlements. In 2007, another insurance initiative targeted specifically at newborns – Seguro Médico para una Nueva Generación – was introduced. And in 2009, universal and free health care during pregnancy, childbirth and the post-partum period was launched as part of a national strategy to further reduce maternal mortality.

A diverse country with a federal structure, Mexico continues to be challenged by the complexity of establishing integrated child protection policies and systems. Among these challenges are addressing violence against women and children, sexual exploitation and child labour. The Government of Mexico has taken important steps to regularly collect and disseminate disaggregated data on child labour, adding a module on the issue to the national household employment survey. The 2007 survey revealed that 3.6 million children aged 5 to 17 years old – 12.5 per cent of the age cohort – were engaged in child labour, including 1.1 million children under 14, the legal minimum age of employment. Nearly 42 per cent of working children do not attend school.

## Complex challenges across the country's states

Mexico's southern region presents some of the greatest child rights challenges. Home to the majority of the country's indigenous communities – more than 60 ethnic and linguistic groups – it accounts for most of the 20 per cent of Mexicans who live in absolute poverty. Violence perpetrated by organized criminal elements has added to the dangers already posed by ongoing civil conflict here, especially disputes over land rights. As each indigenous community has its own pressing issues, applying human rights legislation uniformly remains a complex task, which the Committee on the Rights of the Child has recognized in its responses to the periodic reports submitted by Mexico since 1990.

Mexico is advancing in its efforts to bring state legislation on child rights into line with national and international law. Its third periodic report to the Committee pointed to the progress individual states are making in ensuring child health, improving domestic and family law, and strengthening child protection.

Hard hit by the global economic crisis, and with violence an urgent concern, Mexico faces a triple task: addressing the disparities that deny children in impoverished and marginalized communities their rights, strengthening child protection systems at the local and national level, and sustaining the overall gains in provision and protection that have been accomplished through its national and targeted initiatives. Further innovation and commitment to child rights will be required to address these challenges in Latin America's second largest country.

*See References, pages 90–92.*