Country Office Annual Report 2019
Cuba

Update on the context and situation of children

Cuba is a country highly exposed to natural hazards, particularly to hurricanes, and in the last three years to the toughest droughts in a century. Although no major incidents were reported during 2019, in January 29th an EF4 tornado hit Havana with wind speeds of 300 km/h. Four municipalities were affected, leaving four people dead, 195 injured and considerable material damage and affecting directly to 8,462 boys and 8,131 girls, who received support from UNICEF.

Cuban are exposed to other man-made risks, that impact on the economy and add pressure on the provision of social sector services. Almost 60 years of economic and commercial blockade, intensified during the last two years, place the country in an unstable situation regarding inputs supply, ranging from food products to medicines. This longstanding situation has taken a sharp turn, particularly since April 2019.

In September, a critical shortage of fuel supply affected the country. Vital health and education services remained operational, despite pressures that could have compromised service delivery and quality for children and women. Several industries reduced their production rates and others restructured schedules to adjust their energy consumption, but the net effect was a significant reduction in local production. Transportation was also impacted, deriving on irregularities in public services that run on fuel, to maintain continuous operations during eventual energy blackouts. Operation of UN agencies and UNICEF were affected causing the country team to adjust field trips to those strictly necessary and to activate and review Business Continuity Plan (BCP).

This situation increases the pressure on a population that, although they have access to health, education and protection services, lives in a context of constant stress, to maintain a normal rhythm of life, which is affecting childhood and adolescence.

On situation of children and adolescents, some figures indicate that traffic accidents remain as the main cause of death for children between 10 and 19 years old, with a rate between 8.3 – 8.6 per 100,000 inhabitants (4.3 for male; 2.4 for female); the use of violent parenting patterns based on physical punishment, in 2014 MICS reported; reduction of time in education services for example, the 2017-2018 school year opened with an enrollment of 1,675,143 children and adolescents (ONEI, 2018) - 48.6% female and 51.4% male - in all levels and types of schools.

A new Constitution came into force in April 2019. This new constitutional framework to enhance the fulfillment of the rights of the population, particularly of children. This incorporates among other elements the prohibition of discrimination based on gender identity, ethnic origin and disability. It also includes guarantees for rights enforcement, special protection to families and to the most vulnerable sectors, such as the elderly and people with disabilities.

The Constitution also gives a greater role to municipalities based on recognition of their autonomy and resource assignment powers including administrative and management structures. In addition to existing centralized sources, this should enable them to make decisions regarding local expenditure which could benefit children and adolescents at the community level.

Internet expansion, particularly during the last two months of the year, is remarkable. Although prices are still high, the increase and diversification of services, have made it more accessible for citizens, including for children and adolescents. At the end of the first semester of 2019, there were more than 5.56 M of mobile lines, 2.5M of them with Internet access. It is difficult to determine how many belong to children or adolescents, but it is certain that IT development poses significant challenges for the protection of child and adolescent rights in digital environments.

In the context of the UN Reform, UNICEF has been very actively involved in UN result groups and in the preparation of joint work plans for every cooperation area. The UNCT actively develops joint programming initiatives for the progress of the 2030 Agenda in the country. Along with UNDP, PAHO/WHO and FAO, UNICEF was part of joint interventions focusing on SDGs 1,2,3 and 13. New initiatives included in ECD and related to Economy of Care (focused on women), are in process to be concluded by the first quarter of 2020.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Child’s Right Convention (CRC), UNICEF developed a joint program with national authorities including a wide range of activities in schools and health centers, and an extensive dissemination of the document. To this purpose its principles and objectives were promoted from August until the end of the year through different platforms and has led to potential new alliances with national media for the new 2020-2024 CP.

The 2019 SOWC on Nutrition was presented by the CO in Havana and Cienfuegos in partnership with the Center of Nutrition and Food Hygiene (CNHA) and Cienfuegos’ Health authorities. The event widely attended by national authorities included a presentation of the global report and a discussion about nutrition in the country as well as on alternatives to address issues such as overweight and obesity, promotion of breastfeeding, among other.
The 6th round of MICS took place this year and results will provide reliable empirical evidence for the analysis and report on the situation of children and the country's commitment to the 2030 Agenda to leave no children behind, through the SDGs.

The Country Office adjusted its communication and advocacy strategy to align with the Global Communication & Advocacy Strategy 2019-2021 focusing on strengthening UNICEF’s brand and creating compelling content that drives change for children. It also worked in providing strong, evidence-based content and leading events and exchanges to influence decision makers, counterparts, other key audiences and the wider public not only to make a difference in children’s lives but also to empower them to advocate for child rights.

Operations continue to be a challenge in the context of restrictions imposed to Cuba. Supplies are still a substantial part of the cooperation and delays in delivery have been increasing as restrictions on carriers turn stricter. In-country logistics have also been limited due to fuel shortages.

Resource Mobilization is a high strategic priority to engage emerging and non-traditional donors. The country office takes this challenge in the context of a new CPD that will begin in an uncertain economic context during 2020.

**Major contributions and drivers of results**

2019 was a year of opportunities to articulate cooperation actions for the next cooperation cycle, identified in demand for knowledge and data.

Breastfeeding and protection actions to ensure survival and quality newborn health and quality health in the first 1,000 days, were promoted through “Father from the Beginning” (Padres desde el principio) initiative. Around 110,000 mothers and their families received assistance and breastfeeding training on by antenatal, delivery and post-natal care services. UNICEF Cuba strengthened alliances with civil society and advocated for a legal framework that includes elements of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

UNICEF Cuba supported the scaling-up of Human Breast Milk Bank services with Regional Thematic Funds. Two new Human Milk Banks were inaugurated in the provinces of Villa Clara and Matanzas for a total of 12 services in 5 provinces in including Havana. These facilities provide adequate and optimal nutrition to newborns in vulnerable conditions.

A total of 77,900 children under 1 year old (67 % of this population) were immunized against measles, mumps and rubella, with the support of Iberia and UNICEF Spanish Committee.

In alliance with the Mother and Child Care Program of the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP), contributed to an agreement on care criteria complications of maternal morbidity in obstetric emergencies, this led to the training of 52 health professionals from 23 institutions in all provinces.

With the support from LACRO and using WASH Global Thematic Funds, UNICEF implemented the "Experience of a community intervention to promote the use of safe water in Santiago de Cuba and Havana”. This systematization of good practices contributed to train 390 school children as health promoters and 670 community members: pregnant women, teachers, community leaders to apply community and intersectoral intervention.

With support from UNAIDS and the Global Thematic Funds for HIV and based on the National Strategy for Primary Prevention of STD-HIV/AIDS, UNICEF Cuba was able to convey information, promote education and undertake communication actions in all Havana municipalities, reaching 111,813 adolescents and young adults (55 percent female and 45 percent male aged 15 to 19 years). In addition to this, UNICEF Cuba supported the training of 402 professionals from health services and other sectors in the provinces of Guantanamo and Santiago de Cuba, to expand knowledge on comprehensive health care for adolescents.

Almost 80 percent of the child population in Havana (163,560 children and adolescents) acquired knowledge and skills about road safety and increased their commitment to safe and responsible mobility. The support provided by FIA and Sherritt allowed UNICEF to articulate alliances between sectors, national organizations and key actors to promote curricular, extra-curricular and community educational actions, aimed to promoting a responsible road safety culture.

In alliance with the Center of Nutrition and Food Hygiene (CNHA) focused its efforts on: (1) an Action Plan in response to the recommendations derived from the Evaluation of the implementation of the Nutrition Guidance for children under two years old; (2) a study of the non-nutritional risk factors in anemia prevalence from a sample of 1,400 pre-school children across the country, which represent the baseline for performance protocols in child health care; (3) a study on the
In partnership with the Ministry of Justice (MINJUS), the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) and MINED contributed to the
strengthened, as well as the promotion of rights and the prevention of violence and other risk behaviors, through advocacy
institutions that implement programs towards childhood and family protection. Mechanisms and participation methods were
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UNICEF has worked to give visibility to the violence affecting children and adolescents from vulnerable groups and
from all over the country.
UNICEF through its Culture of Rights, Protection and Participation program component and in partnership with several
organizations and institutions, has reached 157,626 children and adolescents, and 2,221 professionals and social actors
engages families and communities to face disasters associated to multiple risks. This program is expected to be fully
situations. The results validated the pertinence of implementing an educational program that, beginning at school level,
information from 25 schools at 9 municipalities in 3 Eastern provinces that are exposed to multiple risks. This action
UNICEF support was aimed to improve the quality of learning for children and adolescents who live in less developed
areas.
Inclusive educational practices reached 11,789 children and adolescents with disabilities, enrolled in 3,278 regular schools
(32,6 percent of the country’s total), according to a situation monitoring led by the Central Institute for Pedagogical
Sciences (ICCP) of MINED with the support of UNICEF Cuba. A total of 79 schools from 29 municipalities in 12 provinces
reported greater awareness and preparation among teachers and families. Challenges to meet children’s individual needs
were identified, as well as those to obtain support from families and communities, especially in rural areas. UNICEF Cuba
has supported 2,000 families of children and adolescents with Autistic Spectrum Disorder received support tools for social
inclusion. UNICEF’s contribution to inclusive education has been financed by Iberostar through UNICEF Spanish Committee,
and by the government of the United Arab Emirates.

About 4,155 adolescents with a history of school failure and graduated from special schools will benefit from a new
Vocational School Model (Modelo Escuelas de Oficios). UNICEF Cuba has accompanied the Directorate for Technical
Vocational Education of MINED in the design of new curricula in vocational schools at primary and secondary levels, and in
the adjustments for adolescents graduated from special education. The Country Office supported training of 40 principals,
teachers and national experts for the implementation of the experimental program in the 2020 – 2021 school year in the
provinces of Havana and Las Tunas.
A group of 205 teachers and principals from 5,067 rural schools in the country and 357 centers that provide services at
different educational levels (mixed) was trained to implement changes in the curricula. This action led by MINED, with
UNICEF support was aimed to improve the quality of learning for children and adolescents who live in less developed
areas.
UNICEF and the Directorate of Science and Technology of MINED, along with 475 students and 28 teachers, collected
information from 25 schools at 9 municipalities in 3 Eastern provinces that are exposed to multiple risks. This action
responds to national priorities regarding the preparedness of the population and to increase risk perception in disaster
situations. The results validated the pertinence of implementing an educational program that, beginning at school level,
engages families and communities to face disasters associated to multiple risks. This program is expected to be fully
executed during the 2020-2024 cooperation cycle.
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and harmonization of national, regional and global priorities.

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Discussion, promotion and dissemination of issues regarding children, women and family included in the new Constitution of the Republic as well as in the opening of spaces for professional training and exchange. UNICEF also advocated for child protection in digital scenarios, through the Ministry of Communications (MINCOM) and the Cuban Association of Information and Technology (UIC), considering the risks and opportunities posed by the social digitalization policy and the accelerated increase of Internet access.

In alliance with Office of the Historian of Havana, UNICEF contributed to consolidate the initiative "a+ espacios adolescentes" (spaces for adolescent) and the child and adolescent social program that promotes rights, participation and social inclusion of vulnerable urban groups. About 7,000 adolescents in Havana, (4,355 female) participated in vocational orientation and training, artistic education, responsible citizenship, science and environment programs offered by the Center for Adolescents. Other 700 adolescents from 12 educational institutions in Old Havana participated in socio-educational activities. 380 workshop facilitators, professionals and social actors were systematically trained for the work with adolescents. The interinstitutional network for comprehensive adolescent development articulated the participation of 60 collaborators and 28 institutions for the implementation of the program. The radio show "Contigo somos más" (With you, we are more), created by and for adolescents, is broadcasted weekly. 12,432 children and adolescents (7,735 female) participated in initiatives such as the classroom-museum, city’s heritage guides and different cultural promotion activities. 1,500 children received information about the inclusion of people with disabilities, and inclusion actions were designed to meet the demands of 135 children and adolescents with intellectual disabilities and photo protection needs.

Around 70,000 children and adolescents participated in artistic appreciation and creation programs in community cultural centers (Casas de Cultura), museums and libraries, among other institutions. UNICEF Cuba’s contributed to these programs through an alliance with the Ministry of Culture (MINCULT), by providing them with a rights and equity approach. The "Juan Marinello” Cuban Cultural Research Institute gathered evidence on cultural practices in focal groups of 960 adolescents from 3 provinces (La Havana, Artemisa and Mayabeque). 84 cultural agents were trained to work with these age groups.

The initiative "Communities for the rights of children and adolescents in Granma”, supported the creation of protecting environments, in alliance with the cultural sector. A total of 56 cultural agents were trained to monitor rights, participation, gender, prevention of violence, and inclusion issues. This initiative covers 62,000 children and adolescents including 1,932 with disabilities, 300 whose parents are serving sentences and 43,019 residing in 12 communities with social vulnerabilities in 7 municipalities.

The "Soccer for All” initiative included 2,016 children at national level. Through an alliance between UNICEF Cuba and the National Institute for Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (INDER), this sports for all movement disseminated communication products and trained 500 Physical Education teachers to promote respect for rights, inclusion and nonviolence.

UNICEF Cuba, in partnership with MINED, contributed to capacity building for the protection of 498 children and adolescents without parental care by improving living conditions in 52 institutions (homes) and by training 730 decision makers and educational agents.

In alliance with MININT, UNICEF developed capacities to protect 170 adolescents with aggravated behaviors or who have committed acts typified as crimes by the law, that were enrolled in 12 vocational schools. This action enabled their training in vocational activities and their participation in cultural and sports activities thus contributing to generate protecting environments and facilitate their social reinsertion. UNICEF supported capacity building for the attention of 310 children and adolescent victims of crime who received care at 3 Protection Centers (CPNNA) and from other specialized services. About 200 professionals were trained in subjects such as rights, prevention of violence, and updating on legal matters.

About 2,227 children and adolescents joined 57 workshops and 973 participated in the national contest “Por un Mundo al Derecho” (For a Rights World), in the framework of the homonymous initiative. UNICEF in alliance with MINJUS, academic institutions and social research centers contributed to strengthen initiatives for the promotion of a culture of rights and supported the training of 70 justice operators and other key social actors on violence prevention and comprehensive protection.

In alliance with the Centre for Youth Studies and the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research, the Country Office supported interventions and use of instruments with a social impact as well as the promotion of rights and of research-action-participation for the social integration of adolescents in Havana, Villa Clara, Las Tunas and Santiago de Cuba. 141 professionals, community and youth leaders were trained in topics related to violence and learned about tools for its prevention. As a result, contraventions at a Secondary School in the San Miguel del Padrón municipality decreased in 40 percent.

In accordance with UNICEF Gender Action Plan, the Country Office improved its capacity for the analysis and application of
a gender approach in programming. UNICEF’s advocacy with national partners, its technical support and resources, as well as the creation of coordinating mechanisms, facilitated the positioning of topics about gender violence and positive gender socialization in capacity building strategies. The relations with counterparts, civil society organizations and academia, promoted studies about social and cultural standards linked to gender stereotypes. Through technical and institutional alliances, the Country Office contributed to implement awareness-raising strategies against gender violence in maternal care services during delivery and in obstetric emergencies. Interventions to improve comprehensive health care were gender focused, as well as those to train adolescents, women and men as promoters to prevent STD/HIV/AIDS.

In 2019, the initiative "Father from the Beginning", an integrated ECD result, continued its implementation, proving its potential to engage men in broader goals, such as the increase in breastfeeding rates, the decrease of violence against children, improvements in the attention to early childhood and other programmatic demands related to gender. UNICEF Cuba launched a digital app with the same name that gathers essential information about the rights, responsibilities and benefits of fathers, facilitates participation through available services and promotes recommended practices for the full exercise of parenthood. The software, which is considered the first digital initiative aimed at Cuban fathers, has been downloaded more than a thousand times from Play Store and CubApk.

With the contribution of the Russian Federation Government, the Country Office has moved from a humanitarian emergency response to a development program which allowed the installation of a water desalination plant in Punta de Maisi. The facility is providing access to safe water to 8,486 inhabitants (including 385 children and adolescents).

In the aftermath of a tornado that hit Havana in January 2019, UNICEF Cuba responded to the emergency, leading the WASH response. It ensured access to drinking water for 12,480 people (5,322 women and 1,077 girls) in the municipalities of Regla, 10 de Octubre and Guanabacoa. The distribution of emergency kits including water storage containers, basic hygiene articles and communication materials helped to promote healthy practices and to prevent water and vector-borne diseases.

As a leading organization in the Education sector and in coordination with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF Cuba contributed to the return of children to safe learning spaces with the acquisition of 33,000 m2 of waterproof roofs for 40 schools, including 9-day care centers. 8,462 boys, 8,131 girls and 998 teachers were benefited with psycho-emotional support guidelines in disaster situations and received school and recreation materials.

With the support of Xunta de Galicia UNICEF continued its contribution to infrastructure rehabilitation in 3 daily care centers that were affected by Hurricane Irma in Eastern Havana, and two high school institutions in the province of Camaguey, with support of Iberostar.

With Regional Thematic Funds, the Country Office pre-positioned early childhood learning materials, school, recreation and WASH kits, to provide immediate response to new emergencies.

Along with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF designed a childhood protection and back to school workshop in the event of an earthquake scenario, given the high probability of occurrence. This was preceded by the SIMEX exercise in Cuba which simulated medium and high intensity earthquakes and was coordinated by the National Civil Defense, OCHA and INSARAG, with the participation of the United Nations system and governmental organizations.

Cuba presented its best practices and key successes in the elimination of HIV/AIDS mother-to-child transmission and of congenital syphilis in the framework of the Second High-Level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (BAPA+40).

A new app to disseminate Children Atlas is in progress, introducing ICTs as a tool for targeting priorities and monitoring. By request of UNICEF Nicaragua, the Country Office coordinated government authorization and trained, together with the national implementing agency, a group of Nicaraguan professionals from the National Statistics System (Central Bank of Nicaragua and National Institute of Development Information) in MICS survey processes, based on Cuban model.

C4D actions significantly increased, with 30 products designed and disseminated for the promotion of breastfeeding, responsible fatherhood, road safety and accident prevention, resilience and natural disaster risk management, Food Day, the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights, the International Day for people with disabilities and the SOWC Report 2019. More collegial work was done with partners and the media to ensure greater promotion of the country programme components. UNICEF’s joint efforts were widely publicized in more than 15 national and more than 5 international media outlets. Cuba was among the countries with the greatest international press coverage of the launch of The State of the World’s Children 2019 among 190 UNICEF’s offices.

Progress was made in the negotiation process with the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (ICRT). The realization of a cooperation agreement for the 2020-2024 cycle with this institution would make it possible to develop a plan that focuses
on the co-creation of specific contents and products with the aim of influencing changes in behaviour among parents, guardians and decision-makers. It would also facilitate the production of specific programs devoted to children and adolescents and the training of journalists as main actors of change in the dissemination of key messages on programmatic areas.

In terms of logistics and procurement, Country Office submitted an analysis to national authorities and counterparts on supply categories procured and nationalized in a timeline with costing and risk information. This set the basis for a training and exchange session that may lead to risk mitigation in nationalization processes.

**Lessons Learned and Innovations**

During the 2019 cooperation Cycle, UNICEF Cuba worked to strengthen and escalate issues related to online protection included in the UNICEF 2018-2021 Strategic Plan in alignment with national, regional and global priorities. This has brought further focus on the prevention and attention to violence affecting children and adolescents.

In Cuba, violence has not been sufficiently present in public debate. Violence against children tends to be perceived as an issue of low incidence and impact in national context. There is a strong trust in State responsibility, capacities and the reach of its institutions to ensure protection for all children.

However, there is a growing presence of this issue in the agenda of institutions, social and professional organizations as well as in the media.

The results of the last MICS round implemented in the country in 2014, show that 36% of girls and boys from 1 to 14 years has been the subject of some violent practice in their home environment, 21% has been the subject of psychological aggression and 26% of physical punishment (out of whom 2,5% of severe physical punishment). In addition to this, some studies show the persistence of cultural and social norms that reproduce gender stereotypes affecting the socialization of children and adolescents (Gender Equity Survey from the Women Studies Center, among others).

In the last years accelerated internet access has emerged as an issue of growing concern. According to 2020 Digital report on world digital tendencies in social media -2019 data-, 7.1 M Cubans are already connected to internet (63% of the country’s population). At the end of 2019, Cuba’s telecommunications company (ETECSA) announced that there were 3.7 M lines with mobile data access, only one year after the launch of this service.

In that context, the following challenges were identified in a constant dialogue with national authorities, during the CPD 2014-2019. Among those related to the prevention and attention of violence affecting children and adolescents:

- Insufficient knowledge and visibility of this issue which generated at first, certain resistance from Cuban institutions to approach it
- Perception about certain types of violence that favor their justification or naturalization
- Insufficient risk perception and knowledge of fathers, mothers and other relatives as well as of professionals and specialists from different services and social sectors, on the different types of violence affecting children and adolescents and on their consequences.
- Insufficient public systematized information on violence affecting children and adolescents in the national context.
- Risks for the protection of children derived from the late but increasingly accelerated process of informatization of Cuban society, particularly in the use of social media.

During 2014-2019, UNICEF Cuba contributed to the promotion of a culture of rights, protection and participation. Advocacy with authorities and specialists of different sectors as well as technical and financial support and coordination have given greater visibility to topics related to the prevention and attention to violence through the strengthening of institutional and community capacities and the implementation of communication actions.

With the support of UNICEF, in 2019, a number of 1,799 professionals from different sectors (judicial, protection, education, sports, health) received training on issues related to violence with a special focus on gender violence and violence in digital scenarios. They also received information on existing national and international legislations and some communications products created to raise further awareness on these issues such as the initiative “Padre desde el principio” (“Father from the beginning”) and a leaflet and a video on sports.

The following 2019 results are the base for further development of this area:

- Availability of a route map to approach violence with C4D strategies for the 2020-2024 Country Program as part of
an initiative promoted by LACRO.

- Availability of an advanced proposal of a communication strategy for all parts of the 2020-2024 country program including the prevention and attention to violence.

Some key lessons learnt are:

- **The need of a C4D strategy** to give a comprehensive approach to violence and promoting the change in the mindset of families and authorities on the violence as a barrier for the integral development of children and adolescents.

- **Increasing the awareness on violence** consequences, there is a need to also increase the supply of services and of the capacities for the prevention and attention to all types of violence.

- **There is a need of increase the generation of evidence and knowledge management** to enhance effective policies and intervention on violence. The intersectoral alliances and exchanges promoted by UNICEF have contributed to the fact that some academic institutions and professional organizations (CIPS, CEJ, ICIC Juan Marinello, Universidad de La Habana, UNJC) further share research results, experiences derived from local interventions and training programs. The latest have had a positive impact in a growing knowledge of the context, a greater focalization of actions, the training of professionals from different sectors and the modelling and escalation of interventions.

- **The participation of children and adolescents has increased** and has evolved from mere attendance to cultural events, to use this cultural space to express their points of views. They have also had a further engagement on proposals to strength protecting spaces and contribute to a better decision-making in different adolescents’ spaces for example: Centro a+ espacios adolescentes, in Old Havana, vulnerable communities of Granma province and in local interventions based on research-action-participation in Havana capital, among others.

The start of the new (2020-2024) cooperation cycle along with the whole negotiation process related to it, is an opportunity to provide a more solid ground and a further escalation actions and advocacy efforts towards the implementation of a system of integral protection for the protection of children and adolescents.