

## Dominican Republic

### Part 1: Situation update in the country

#### Social, political and economic context

The Dominican Republic is a democratic upper middle-income country with economic growth higher than in the region over the last 15 years, averaging 5-7 per cent since 2001. This trend was maintained throughout the year. Between January and September, the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 6.9 per cent, with inflation of only 1.5 per cent for the same period and unemployment falling to 5.5 per cent.

However, social inequality in the country has followed the regional trend of very slow reduction or stagnation. The GINI index in the country reduced slightly from 0.445 in 2016 to 0.443 in 2017.

During recent years, monetary poverty has been continually reduced, starting after the economic crisis of 2004 (49.5 per cent), dropping to 25.5 per cent in 2017. With these figures, poverty has fallen to somewhat more than pre-crisis levels (31 per cent in 2000). Child monetary poverty has also been reduced, but less than general poverty, from 60.5 per cent in 2004 to 40.9 per cent in 2016, according to the latest available data. Children are disproportionately more affected by poverty; with multidimensional child poverty affecting 31 per cent of children.

The middle class reached 30 per cent of the population in 2017, returning to the levels of 2002. Multidimensional poverty, in turn, dropped to 23.1 per cent of the total population of the country. In addition, 43.6 per cent of the population are considered “vulnerable”. As a consequence, any change in economic conditions or a natural disaster in the country could reduce their income and bring them back to poverty, reversing the improvements registered in the last decade.

The most vulnerable regions of the country continue to be the periurban areas of Santo Domingo and Santiago, and the provinces bordering on Haiti.

These gaps in inequality, fragility in social progress and exclusion are explained, in part, by low social expenditure, which represented 9 per cent of GDP gross domestic product in 2013, much lower than the regional average of 19 per cent. Investment in children and adolescents increased in recent years from 1.9 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 3.6 per cent in 2013 and to 5.1 per cent in 2016. However, this investment remained strongly concentrated on education, which represents 70 per cent of public expenditure on children and adolescents. Despite the great efforts of the Government in recent years to increase the investment in early childhood services, at 5.4 per cent the investment in this age group is lower, than for those aged 6-12 years (46.7 per cent) or in adolescents aged 13-17 years (24.8 per cent).

The main violations of child rights continued to be violence (especially gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and child marriage), the persistence of maternal and neonatal mortality, the low quality of education and school dropout.

A total of 63 per cent of children aged 1-14 years have been victims of violent disciplinary methods in their homes, 12.6 per cent of children and adolescents aged 5-17 years' work, and 4.6 per cent of women under the age of 19 have been victims of sexual violence. During the first 10 months of 2018, there were 5,370 criminal complaints about crimes of sexual violence in the country. Although the information is partial, at least 32 per cent of the victims were female adolescents. There is no statistical data on sexual exploitation of children, but in 2017 the National Council for HIV and AIDS (CONAVIHSIDA) reported testing 656 girls and 16 boys under 16 who claimed to be "sex workers".

Thirty-six per cent of women aged 20-24 years were married or in early union before the age of 18, including 60 per cent in the poorest quintile. Some 12.3 per cent were married or in early union before the age of 15, including 23 per cent in the poorest quintile. Marriage and unions of children under 18 in the Dominican Republic are among the highest in the region, and well above the regional average of 23 per cent. In the case of girls married or in union before 15, it is the highest in the region, and more than double the regional average of 5 per cent.

More than one-in-five (21 per cent) of Dominican women aged 15-19 years had been pregnant at least once and 2.1 per cent had a child before age 15. Despite the efforts made by the country, the incidence of teenage pregnancy has not reduced in recent years. As indicated in a study by the World Bank and UNICEF in 2017, child marriage is related to three out of every four children born to mothers under the age of 18.

Despite the high coverage of prenatal care at 98 per cent and 97 per cent of births attended in health services, the maternal mortality rate is 90.6 per 100,000 live births. This is higher than the Latin American average of 68 for every 100,000 live births. One in five maternal deaths is an adolescent. The neonatal mortality rate is 20.8 per 1,000 live births, more than twice the regional rate of 9 per 1,000. This rate has remained unchanged in the last two decades and represents 80 per cent of infant mortality.

In the last five years, investment in education has doubled and access to primary education has become almost universal, reaching 92.9 per cent coverage. However, significant coverage gaps persist in early education at 49.5 per cent and in secondary education that reaches 69.9 per cent. Improving the quality of education remains an important challenge. Only 12 per cent of students in the third grade of primary school have a satisfactory level of Spanish and only 27 per cent in Mathematics.

Children with disabilities face higher rates of exclusion from school. 62 per cent of these children aged 3-5 years, 21 per cent of children aged 6-11 years old and 35 per cent of those aged 12-17 years do not attend school.

Even though the coverage of the programme of conditional cash transfers Progresando con Solidaridad reached 823,598 families according to data from December 2018, and despite the advances already described, the commitment "to not leave anyone behind" continues to be a major challenge. This programme has limitations in reaching the most excluded people. Adults without identity documents, including foreigners without regular residence in the country, cannot receive conditional cash transfers. The social protection programme still does not give special attention to families with children with disabilities.

Foreign children without residence, especially Haitians and, to a lesser extent, Venezuelans,

can access education and basic health services that are not denied because of their immigration status. However, children without a birth registration document (Dominicans or foreigners) cannot receive study certificates after finishing school.

The country has improved its birth registration figures in recent years, but 11.1 per cent of children under five years of age have not been registered (National Health Service 2016). This figure is twice the average for the region.

Due to its geographical location, the Dominican Republic is exposed to many environmental threats, such as hurricanes, tropical storms, floods, droughts and earthquakes that could affect the country with different levels of exposure and vulnerability. This generates a risk profile that is both intensive (events of low frequency, but high impact) and extensive (more frequent events, but of lesser impact).

### **Events and regional trends**

In 2018, the national agenda was strongly influenced by the debate on migration, mainly from Haiti and, as an emerging issue, from Venezuela.

The political instability in Haiti had repercussions especially on the common border, where there were isolated incidents arising from demonstrations that generated temporary suspensions of the flow of trade and people, and some situations of violence. There was no significant increase in migration from Haiti. According to official data, in 2012 there were 458,233 people born in Haiti living in the Dominican Republic. In 2017 there were 497,825, an increase of only 39,592 people, or 9 per cent, in five years. Despite this, demonstrations of xenophobia by the civilian population and some social and political sectors on the Dominican side increased.

Migration from Venezuela was also on the public agenda. In this case too, the perception of a high level of migration contrasts with reality. Between January and November, 91,101 Venezuelans entered the country and 91,334 left. Importantly, due to the geographical condition of the country, it is very difficult for people from Venezuela to enter by any means other than by air and through official check points.

The country continued with the National Regularization Plan for Foreigners. A total of 260,000 people (mostly Haitians) have regularized their immigration status due to this Plan, including 11,191 children and adolescents. However, of that total, 252,000 people received the category of "non-resident" that allows them to stay temporarily in the country for specific work, and 7,834 people received the category of resident. In 2018, the General Directorate of Migration deported 57,190 people, mostly Haitians. The Dominican Republic was one of the few countries that rejected the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). It also refrained from signing the Global Compact on Refugees.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and international commitments**

The Dominican Government is strongly committed to the 2030 Agenda. It created a High-Level Inter-Institutional Commission for Sustainable Development that integrates ministries and other government agencies, the private sector, civil society and academia, supported by the United Nations (UN). UNICEF actively participates in the People Sub-Commission, which is responsible for following up on the SDGs of the social sector, and on the Data Sub-

Commission, in charge of monitoring the goals.

In July, the Dominican Republic presented its Voluntary Report about the SDGs. The Report contains the main advances and challenges regarding children to comply with the SDGs, which coincide with those already described in the UNICEF Country Programme Document (CPD) and this Annual Report.

A delegation from the UNICEF Executive Board visited the country to gain a first-hand understanding of UNICEF's work at the country level. The positive field visit report, among other issues, "welcomed, as an important strategy for achieving results for children, UNICEF efforts to influence policies, legislation and public spending towards the most disadvantaged."

## Part 2: Major Results including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the Country Programme Documents

### Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

UNICEF promoted the strengthening of the national health system to better respond to the challenge of the high level of avoidable maternal and neonatal deaths of the most excluded women and children, through evidence-based advocacy and long and intensive technical assistance.

This result contributes to SDG 3, UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 1, CPD Outcome 3 "Children survive and thrive", the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Effect 2 "Social Services and Gender Equality", and to Objective 2.2 of the National Development Strategy 2030 "Comprehensive health and social security", and to the Presidential goals.

One of the biggest challenges for the survival and thriving of children born in the Dominican Republic is related to the high rates of maternal and neonatal mortality. To contribute to the reduction of maternal and neonatal deaths, UNICEF, following a MORES study, identified the lack of quality care as one of the most important causes of maternal and neonatal death. In 2015 UNICEF designed an innovative initiative of continuous improvement of quality care, called "Mothers and Babies in Good Care". This initiative was led and implemented by UNICEF in some hospitals, with the support of the Ministry of Health (MoH). The initiative was based on direct observations of the compliance with quality standards in the hospitals, and after analysing the causes of maternal and neonatal mortality, defining a quality improvement plan and monitoring it. Mothers and Babies in Good Care responds to the UNICEF Gender Action Plan promoting quality and dignified maternal care, and to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The MoH formalized the initiative with a Ministerial Resolution in 2015, but due to the division of roles between its regulatory role) and the National Health Service/NHS (services provider role), there was not an adequate appropriation of the Initiative by the NHS.

In 2018 the initiative was evaluated in two hospitals. The conclusions of the evaluation were:

- 1 The initiative has increased the level of compliance with quality standards of maternal and neonatal care;
- 2 Maternal and neonatal deaths were reduced (the maternal mortality has not been

- reduced in the hospital with lower compliance with quality standards) and;
- 3 The initiative could be scaled-up to public policy, given some recommendations to do so, and the need to increase the appropriation of the Initiative by the NHS.

Based on the conclusions of the evaluation, and with a new NHS director, UNICEF modified its strategy of implementing the initiative directly in hospitals and developed an intensive plan of evidence-based advocacy. This focused on strengthening the NHS ownership of the initiative and gradually transferring it to this institution. The NHS finally decided to incorporate the initiative's methodology as the main strategy to improve the quality of maternal and neonatal care in the 20 most important public hospitals.

With technical assistance, UNICEF supported the design of the functional structure that the NHS would need in order to implement the methodology. This functional structure is based on two teams. The first team periodically monitors, through direct observation at the hospital, the application of the activities for compliance by health personnel with the quality standards based on national norms and protocols. Each observation ends with a report. The second team comprises specialists to technically assist hospitals to design a quality improvement plan based on the data from the observation report, and to help them to implement the plan and supervise its implementation. The NHS is using its own resources for hiring new personnel for the two teams and for the implementation.

UNICEF contributed not only to the design of this organigram, but also to the training of the new hired personnel which is underway (in process), and supported the NHS in sensitizing, motivating and disseminating the Initiative to the key personnel of the 20 hospitals and the Regional Health Services.

In the framework of risk-informed programming, technical guidelines for nutrition in emergencies were elaborated with UNICEF technical assistance.

## **Goal area 2: Every child learns**

With the evidence generated by the Children Out of School study launched in February, UNICEF supported the development and strengthening of the education system. This was through taking the initial steps to scale-up nationwide the implementation of the new pedagogical model to teach reading, writing and mathematics in the first years of basic school.

This result contributes to SDG 4, UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 2, Outcome 4 of CPD "Learning for all", UNDAF Effect 2 "Social Services and Gender Equality" and to Objective 2.1 of the National Strategy of Development 2030 "Quality education for all".

The Children Out of School study succeeded in increasing the visibility of the problem of exclusion from school faced by children in the country, and the internal barriers within the system that affect their learning and prevent them from staying on at school.

This study showed that one of the most important pedagogical causes for adolescents dropping out of school is the weakness of reading, writing and mathematics learning in the first grades. For that reason, UNICEF helped strengthen the National Educational System in its first grades by providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Institute for Teacher Training and Education (INFOCAM in Spanish).

UNICEF helped to establish an elite team of trainers comprising 140 MoE technicians and university instructors. This was through providing technical assistance, adapting to the local context and intensive training a new model to teach reading, writing, and mathematics in the first and second grades of primary schools, and also in planning how to expand this training to teachers.

The 140 elite trainers then trained 1,200 trainers, who, in turn, trained teachers in order to effectively implement the new model. A total of 17,794 teachers from all districts and regional technicians were trained, received the implementation guides, and the instructions on how to implement the new model.

The design of the system for monitoring the quality of the implementation of the new model was also completed, using tried-and-tested instruments. UNICEF will monitor one district (Villa Mella) to analyse if it is necessary to make some adaptations to the application of the new model.

In the next few years, UNICEF will need to continue supporting the MoE to assure the quality implementation by teachers of the new methodology.

UNICEF also contributed to strengthening the capacity of the MoE in the use and analysis of data to identify children who are excluded from school or who are at risk of dropping out. As a result of the Out of School study, the MoE developed a virtual interactive report that identifies children at risk of exclusion or who have left school, in all 122 educational districts. A total of 702 MoE officials were trained in the preparation and use of this report to improve its management.

### **Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

#### **Birth registration**

UNICEF promoted cross-sectoral collaboration and national commitment to improve timely birth registration in prioritized hospitals. As a result, 50,755 newborns were registered in a timely manner in the 21 prioritized hospitals in 2018. Additionally, 1,665 late birth registrations were granted to children under 16 years of age.

This result contributes to SDG target 16.9, UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 3, Outcome 2 of the CPD “Child Protection”, UNDAF Effect 3 “Institutional Strengthening and Human Rights”, Objective 1.3 of the National Strategy of Development 2030 “Participatory democracy and responsible citizenship” and to the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

A timely birth registration pilot programme was started in four hospitals in 2014 with the support of UNICEF. In 2015, another eight hospitals joined the pilot programme. In 2017, an external evaluation was carried out that concluded that the initiative was successful and that it could be scaled-up to a public policy.

With the evidence generated by the evaluation, UNICEF advocated and promoted a partnership to win the support for the cause of children between the Presidency of the Republic, the Central Electoral Board (CEB), the MoH and the NHS. In July 2017, these institutions and UNICEF signed the Inter-Institutional Agreement to Universalize the Birth Registry that is the framework of the Dominican Republic’s public policy to fulfil the SDGs.

As a first step in the implementation of the agreement, UNICEF supported the CEB in a timely birth registration baseline (with data 2016-2017) in 61 hospitals with Civil Registry Delegations. The baseline concluded that 61 per cent of newborns in 2017 were registered before leaving the hospitals. Two main gaps remain: only 21 per cent of children born of adolescent mothers, were registered before leaving the hospital and only 41 per cent of children born of foreign mothers were registered in the Foreigners Register (that does not give Dominican nationality).

The agreement, which focuses on 21 hospitals in its first phase, includes 36 commitments that involve, among others, the leverage of technical and financial resources, administrative reforms and changes in procedures. Actions taken to meet the commitments included:

- 1 The Presidency placed community promoters in the hospitals, with the aim of helping the families to register their new-born children. These community promoters were trained by the CEB and UNICEF;
- 2 The CEB created a new unit that regularly monitors the civil registration in the prioritized hospitals to identify needs and has strengthened the Civil Registry Delegations in larger hospitals with more staff to keep them open on weekends and holidays;
- 3 The NHS approved a resolution that prohibits the departure of newborns without proof of registration from the Civil Registry Office in public hospitals. It also improved the infrastructure of the Civil Registry Delegations in the Elías Piña and La Altagracia Hospitals (the latter being the main maternity hospital in the country).

The commitments were periodically monitored by an Implementation Commission, supported by UNICEF.

UNICEF technically supported individual and joint actions of the four institutions allied under the agreement, including production of information material in Spanish and Creole that was placed in all the hospitals and training of 607 health staff, civil registry officers and promoters on how to improve timely birth registration.

As a result, 50,755 newborns were registered in a timely manner in the hospitals in 2018. Timely birth registration in the 21 prioritized hospitals grew significantly from 61 per cent in 2017 to 70 per cent in 2018. Two health centres had registration rates of 86 per cent. The timely birth registration of children of adolescent mothers grew from 20 per cent in 2017 to 28 per cent in 2018, and that of children of foreign mothers from 37 per cent to 55 per cent in the same period. Additionally, a total of 1,665 late birth registrations were granted to children under 16 years of age in the prioritized communities.

### **Protection of children on the move**

The rights of children on the move between Haiti and the Dominican Republic are better protected. More unaccompanied children and families were protected at the border and prevented from being deported as a result of UN inter-agency coordinated interventions.

This result contributes to SDGs target 10.7, to UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 3, to Outcome 2 of the CPD on “Child Protection”, UNDAF Effect 3 “Institutional Strengthening and Human Rights”, and to Objective 2.3 of the National Strategy of Development 2030 “Equality of rights and opportunities”. Based on the Human Rights Principles of the best interests of the child and family unity, the Dominican Government maintained its commitment not to deport children or adolescents, pregnant women, or families with children.

To support that commitment, in 2018 UNICEF maintained a permanent presence through observers at three of the four official border crossing points. The observers provided technical assistance to the authorities to identify people in the process of deportation who claim to be under 18 years old, parents with children in the Dominican Republic, or women who were pregnant, to avoid erroneous deportations and to facilitate family reunification in the country. UNICEF also facilitated contacts with local protection institutions in Haiti and Haitian consulates at the border and supported the strengthening of the coordination between child protection institutions and migration authorities of both countries.

UNICEF worked at the borders in strong collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) through the regular exchange of information and the identification of bottlenecks together. The IOM also helped the work of UNICEF's observers by providing office space and logistic support at the three official border points for deportation. This work was developed in coordination with the General Directorate of Migration and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR).

As result of this work, in 2018 a total of 651 children detained to be deported were returned to their families in the Dominican Republic. Based on the principle of family unity, 321 families with children and 222 parents with children living in the country were returned to their homes in the Dominican Republic. In addition, 413 Haitian children without families in the Dominican Republic or unaccompanied children who were trying to enter the Dominican Republic, were handed over by the Dominican authorities to the Haitian authorities, or to NGO partners for family reunification in Haiti.

The situation of instability in Haiti had an impact on UNICEF's programme at the common border points. This was mainly through delaying the establishment of local mechanisms for the protection of children in border communities and cancelling, a few times, the bi-national meeting between child protection authorities and other stakeholders, organized jointly with Plan International.

The UNICEF office in Haiti and the Dominican Republic worked jointly on a proposal which is under review to the European Union to better protect children on the move.

In relation to child migrants from Venezuela, an inter-agency plan to protect and assist Venezuelan migrants was developed. The process was led by UNHCR and the IOM. Some individual cases identified were assisted by the IOM in coordination with UNICEF and local authorities.

### **Prevention of violence**

Children are better protected against violence through the implementation of the National Roadmap for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Children, an inter-institutional alliance approved in 2015.

This result contributes to SDGs target 16.2, UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 3, Outcome 2 of the CPD on "Child Protection", UNDAF Effect 2 "Social Services and Gender Equality" and Objective 2.3 "Equality of rights and opportunities" of the National Strategy of Development 2030.

In 2018, UNICEF supported CONANI in monitoring the fulfilment of the National Roadmap goals. Additionally, UNICEF supported two main initiatives. In the first, the MoH trained health

staff on how to use the Inter-institutional Route for the Attention of Children Victims of Violence. This tool helps to identify and attend the victims and makes it mandatory to refer suspected cases of violence against children to the authorities for investigation and prosecution. In the second initiative, the MoE developed with UNICEF support the National Strategy Against Child Violence in Schools. A pilot intervention in schools in Boca Chica was implemented, targeting violence perpetrated by teachers, bullying and gender-based violence. Teachers learned how to teach without violence and children learned how to mediate in peer's conflict situations.

#### **Goal area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

In the framework of leveraging the private sector to improve child rights through harnessing their core business - and taking into account several international and national good practices and the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities and Communities Handbook - a Children's Rights Impact Assessment was undertaken on an affordable housing development in the country. The assessment made 35 recommendations to improve child rights in the planning, design and development of the condominium: in health, education, baby care, protection, appropriate playgrounds and green spaces. All the recommendations were accepted by the constructor and the investor who committed themselves to the implementation of some of them in 2019. The investor will use the recommendations to improve child rights in other affordable housing developments both in the Dominican Republic and in other countries.

In the framework of risk-informed programming, with UNICEF assistance, the WASH sector, led by the MoH, continued to strengthen seven Provincial Health Directorates in the coordination for WASH emergencies, based on the guides and tools provided. The national water quality surveillance system was improved with the inclusion of the HTH test to identify cyanide.

#### **Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

2018 was the first year of the implementation of the new social inclusion programme component of the CPD. The first steps were taken to help strengthen the role of the Government Social Protection Programme in the prevention, care and recovery after emergencies.

This result contributes to SDGs 1 and 10, to UNICEF Strategic Plan Goal Area 5, Outcome 1 of CPD on "Child Protection", UNDAF Effect 1 "Poverty, Food Security and Environmental Sustainability" and to Objectives 2.3 "Equality of rights and opportunities" and 4.2 "Effective risk management to minimize human, economic and environmental losses" of the National Strategy of Development 2030.

UNICEF carried out a risk assessment which concluded that a range of threats, such as hurricanes, floods, droughts and earthquakes, could affect the country with different levels of exposure and vulnerability.

The most vulnerable children and families are those most affected by emergencies and usually these families are beneficiaries of the social protection programme. However, after an emergency the vulnerable families could lose all the advances that they had achieved with the support of the programmes or even become poorer. For this reason, UNICEF decided to focus on interventions to prevent and reduce the effects of emergencies on the most vulnerable children, working together with the cash transfers Social Protection Programme (PROSOLI).

The country has a strong capacity for immediate response to disasters caused by climate shocks. It has a National Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response System coordinated and led by the Emergency Operations Centre that is very active especially in the hurricane season of June to November.

The social protection programme in the Dominican Republic has an Index of Vulnerability to Climate Shocks (IVACC in Spanish) that calculates the vulnerability of a household when facing a climatic disaster. The IVACC can focus the response on the people affected by emergencies with great precision and speed. This data is recollected by the System of Beneficiaries of Social Protection (SIUBEN in Spanish) that includes 85 per cent of the total population of the country. In 2018, the IVACC was updated and improved, with World Bank support and limited assistance from UNICEF.

UNICEF decided to include the perspective of risk-informed programming in its work with the PROSOLI, working together with other UN agencies on two interventions. In the first, UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) signed an agreement with the Vice Presidency and PROSOLI to use the regular channels of cash transfers of the social protection programme to transfer UNICEF funds in case of Level 2 or Level 3 emergencies. In 2019, UNICEF and the WFP will provide adequate tools and procedures to do that. In the second initiative, under the leadership of UNDP, UNICEF worked jointly with PROSOLI on the design of the National Action Protocol for Social Protection Against Climate Shocks, to strengthen the capabilities of the social protection system, for emergency preparedness and response, as well as for recovery after them.

The objectives of this protocol are to:

- 1 Protect the population who are most vulnerable to socio-environmental shocks, especially children and adolescents, the elderly and the disabled, and;
- 2 Reduce the likelihood that the temporary impact of climate shocks will be transferred to conditions of chronic poverty.

The protocol defines how, after the immediate response to emergencies, the social protection programme should connect the programmes of cash transfers, economic inclusion and social development with the most-affected people. It also includes the role of PROSOLI in strengthening the families' abilities in the protection of children during and after emergencies, as well as in the recovery phase.

### **Gender dimension**

In 2018, UNICEF in the Dominican Republic worked on the two dimensions of the Gender Action Plan: integrated gender results, embedding gender across all programme areas, and; targeted priorities for the empowerment and well-being of adolescent girls.

### **Integrated gender results, embedding gender across all programme areas**

**Every child survives and thrives:** The health programme component mainly focused on improving the quality and dignity of maternal care, through the Initiative “Mothers and Babies in Good Care” (see this component above). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that one of the quality standards included in the Initiative is the humanization of the care of mothers and the elimination of obstetric violence and to improve human warmth in the relations of health personnel with mothers.

UNICEF launched the “Super Dads” campaign with 27 companies who spread messages about the important role of fathers in early childhood development and about breaking the traditional gender role in raising young children. The campaign reached 6,961,159 people, with 532 joint publications between UNICEF and the participating companies. The videos had 1,042,469 reproductions. UNICEF undertook a survey on child-friendly policies in these companies and conducted a workshop to share best practices and challenges. Because of the campaign, one important bank extended paternity leave to 10 days instead of the two days established by the Dominican law, and a supermarket chain installed 14 breastfeeding rooms for employees and clients.

**Every child is protected from violence and exploitation:** UNICEF strengthened its efforts to protect children, especially girls, from sexual exploitation including online. The Attorney-General and other authorities, with UNICEF’s support, established inter-institutional work groups in five prioritized tourist municipalities, to mobilize local communities to prevent the sexual exploitation of children, to prosecute the crime and to protect the victims. As a result, eight people were convicted, and 38 investigations are underway.

Four international airports, which manage five million passengers a year, displayed material informing travellers about the legal consequences of sexual exploitation and abuse of children in the country. Dominican consulates in Europe provided the same information to tourists.

In 2018, 50 tourism police agents and the employees of 30 private companies were trained on how to prevent and denounce child sexual exploitation. Collaboration with local civil society was key in involving communities in prevention actions against child sexual exploitation. A total of 1,441 children and adolescents, 433 parents, 84 teachers and 21 local authorities received information on how to prevent and denounce this crime.

AERODOM (the main company that manages airports) displayed banners at the main airports to inform tourists that sexual exploitation is a crime pursued in the country.

Additionally, seven new hotels and the Hotel Association of Santo Domingo signed The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, making a total of 69 tourist companies that have signed it in the country.

The Government joined the WePROTECT Global Alliance to End Online Child Sexual Exploitation. A high-level multi-stakeholder alliance to implement a National Response to End Online Child Sexual Exploitation was created.

In this framework, the judicial system aimed at prosecuting online child sexual exploitation was strengthened. A total of 892 judges, public defenders, prosecutors and lawyers were trained with the financial and technical support of UNICEF through:

- 1 The Congress on Cybercrime and Digital Evidence;
- 2 A course on investigation and sanction of the crime;
- 3 The Second National Congress against Online Child Pornography, and;
- 4 A workshop on protection of victims.

Furthermore, with the support of the US Department of Justice, 17 specialized investigators received training on the Internet Crimes Against Children System (ICACOPS).

In addition, UNICEF supported the First Latin American Interfaith Meeting organized by Arigatou International with the participation of religious representatives of 12 Latin American countries. The Meeting analysed the role of faith communities in the protection of children in the digital world and prepared for the First Interfaith Alliance forum for Child Dignity in a Digital World.

UNICEF and Plan International launched the study “Invisible Under the Sun”, on child sexual exploitation in the region of Enriquillo.

### **Targeted priorities for the empowerment and well-being of adolescent girls**

**Prevention of child marriage:** The 2017 communication campaign, The Worst Soap Opera, raised awareness in Dominican society about child marriage (see Part 1) and won three Cannes Lions awards, including a Silver Lion in the category of Sustainable Development Goals and Gold in Glass: for Change in the Gender sub-category. As a result of this intensive public advocacy, the Vice President, PROSOLI and the MoE agreed to work on child marriage prevention.

A knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) study on child marriage and early unions was initiated, together with the PROSOLI to collect information on its beneficiary families in six prioritized territories of the country. The research will be completed in 2019.

The voices of girls and women, as well as of their male peers, were heard in the focus groups and in the survey of the study, and they will be taken into account in the design of the first new Child Marriage and Early Unions Prevention Pilot Public Programme of the country, which will start in 2019.

UNICEF, jointly with the MoE, produced a video that included the Worst Soap Opera and several interventions of young influencers. This video will be shown in several schools in 2019 to raise awareness of the students about child marriage and early unions in the country and to win support among adolescents and to help them be agents of change among their peers to prevent child marriage.

### **Other cross-cutting areas**

#### **Early childhood development**

Through cross sectoral programming, UNICEF supported the Government’s Quisqueya Starts with You plan, to promote a holistic intervention with an intersectoral perspective of ECD.

UNICEF promoted the institutional strengthening of the National Institute for Comprehensive Early Childhood Care (INAIPI in Spanish) through technical and financial support to improve behavioural change in positive parenting, hygiene, nurturing care, early detection of disabilities, and the inclusion of children with disabilities. This wasthrough training of 700 INAIPI technicians, using communication for development educational material. INAIPI adopted this training component within the institution’s continued education programme, and all their staff will be trained in 2019.

Children’s chances of better health were improved through the institutional strengthening of the NHS, by promoting the appropriation of the Mother and Babies in Good Care initiative. This Initiative provides tools to improve the quality of health care from pregnancy check-ups to

postpartum follow-ups and to new-borns (see “Every Child Survives and Thrives” component). A total of 83 breastfeeding rooms opened in public and private institutions, encouraging female workers to continue exclusive breastfeeding, in a joint effort between the Ministries of Health and Women, UNICEF and WHO/PAHO.

UNICEF harnessed the power of businesses to raise awareness about the role of fathers in early childhood through a communication campaign called Super Dads and partnerships with the private sector. The campaign seeks to break traditional gender roles in the raising of children and calls for fathers to have a more active role in it. Super Dads mobilized 27 large companies that joined the initiative and contributed with spaces, diffusion in their social networks and internal awareness-raising actions. The campaign reached 6,961,159 people, with 532 joint publications between UNICEF and the participating companies. The videos had 1,042,469 reproductions.

Commitment from the companies went beyond media diffusion. Twenty-one companies responded to a survey on human resources practices with respect to early childhood of the children of employees. With UNICEF support, six companies trained 358 of their employees on parental responsibility. Furthermore, as highlighted earlier, one of the associated companies will begin offering 10-day paid paternity leave, instead of the two days regulated by Dominican law, and a supermarket chain installed 14 breastfeeding rooms for employees and clients.

UNICEF promoted cross-sectoral programming in the framework of the Inter-Institutional Agreement to Universalize the Birth Registry supported by UNICEF (see the section “Every child is protected from violence and exploitation”).

### **Adolescence**

UNICEF strengthened its cross-sectoral programming with adolescents in this first year of the CPD, through three approaches:

- 1 Strengthening work on prevention and prosecution of child sexual exploitation and online sexual exploitation (see the section “Every child is protected from violence and exploitation”);
- 2 Conducting a KAP study on child marriage and early unions, including focus groups of adolescents separated by sex and by age, and a survey in which adolescents with the same data segregation were also included. These opinions, attitudes and behaviours of adolescents will be the basis of the design of an intersectoral programme for the prevention of child marriage and early unions (see the section “Gender Dimension”);
- 3 Accelerating work around adolescent pregnancy, whose rates havenot changed in the last 20 years, despite the country having a national plan for its prevention since 2011. This year UNICEF, in partnership with other UN agencies, supported the evaluation of this national plan and its conclusions were utilized by the Social Cabinet for the elaboration of a new national cross-sectoral plan for the reduction of adolescent pregnancy. This is being developed with the wide participation of adolescents as well as government and non-government institutions, universities, churches, and the international cooperation agencies.

## **Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints**

2018 was the first year of the Country Programme 2018-2022 and, so far, the theory of change

of each programme component are in their initial stages. However, several lessons have been learned in this period.

The first lesson learned is related to the Children Survive and Thrive programme component. The conclusions of the evaluation of the Mothers and Babies in Good Care initiative were that:

- 1 It increased the level of compliance with quality standards of maternal and neonatal care;
- 2 Maternal and neonatal deaths were reduced (the maternal deaths have not been reduced in the hospital with a lower level of compliance with quality standards), and;
- 3 The initiative could be scaled-up to public policy, given some recommendations to do so, such as the need to increase the appropriation of the Initiative by the National Health Service.

UNICEF did not have the financial and staff resources to follow up on all the evaluation recommendations and to continue with the 2018 planning and, as a result, it was necessary to select one option.

UNICEF analysed the advantages, disadvantages and risks, and specifically the local environment at the current time. Taking into consideration the greater receptiveness of the current management of the NHS and of the MoH, UNICEF modified its strategy to implement the initiative directly in hospitals and developed an intensive plan of evidence-based advocacy and technical assistance focused on strengthening the NHS ownership of the initiative.

In November, the NHS decided to incorporate the initiative's methodology as the main strategy to improve the quality of maternal and neonatal care in the 20 most important public hospitals and is leveraging its own resources for hiring new personnel for its implementation. To this end, UNICEF will focus its efforts and resources on strong technical support for the NHS to break the resistance to change among health staff and in the institutional culture. If this process is successful, UNICEF will have made an important contribution to reducing maternal and neonatal mortality in the country.

The lessons learned were not only about the value of the evaluation, but also the importance of carefully analysing the changing environment to choose the optimum moment to put all the efforts into a strategic intervention. In addition, the importance of UNICEF maintaining an adaptive and flexible approach was highlighted, being able to change from the original plan of working in some hospitals to an institutional programme. Based on the conclusions of the evaluation, in 2019 UNICEF will focus its efforts on transferring the methodology to NHS.

The second area of work where key lesson were learned relates to the KAP study into child marriage and early unions. The preliminary results showed that the gender roles on which this practice is based were deeper and more ingrained than were expected. Some 93 per cent of the people interviewed agreed that the main role of every woman is to be a good wife and mother. This opinion was similar among all age and sex groups. This attitude, and the early economic emancipation expected for young people of both sexes, leads many girl adolescents almost inexorably to child marriage and early unions, despite their knowledge of the negative consequences, as shown in the research.

According to this research, child marriage and early unions is not a problem of lack of knowledge that can be resolved only with information or sensitization. The strategies to prevent child marriage should also include the promotion of changes in attitudes, practices and

behaviours to overcome these roles assigned to young women.

Another lesson learned has been that, despite having had several previous studies on the subject, only an in-depth KAP study allowed UNICEF to assess the magnitude of the problems that the programme is going to face, and to make the necessary reflections to adapt the intervention.

Although it is still too early to know if the theory of change is still valid, the depth and the rooting of these perceptions will lead UNICEF to carry out in 2019 a new analysis of the theory of change, the strategies and especially the results that can be expected in the short term in this complex context. Likewise, there remains the challenge of being able to identify process indicators that can measure these advances.

### **Limitations and challenges**

During the year, the Country Programme faced some limitations and challenges.

The situation of instability in Haiti, as already highlighted affected the development of UNICEF's programme, leading to the suspension several times of bi-national meetings to strengthen the child protection systems of both countries. These meetings were organized jointly with UNICEF Haiti, local institutions and NGOs on both sides of the border.

The Attorney-General's Office had several staff changes, including the specialized prosecutors for Human Trafficking and High-tech Crimes, which caused implementation delays and changes in the development of key activities. To address this constraint, UNICEF reinforced its direct technical assistance and monitoring of the activities.

UNICEF implemented the preparation activities for the National Household Survey-MICS 2019, with the National Statistics Office (NSO). This process had three important challenges:

- 1 The insufficient funds available (one-third of the total budget),
- 2 The National Health Survey will not be repeated in the country, and;
- 3 The NSO is still collecting the data survey on paper.

In response, and together with UNFPA, UNICEF undertook intensive advocacy with the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development. As a consequence, the total budget needed was allocated and a plan to collect the National Health Survey data for several years was accepted, including some questions in MICS 2019. With support from UNICEF headquarters and Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office, the NSO accepted the collection of data with tablets.

The recruitment of national staff for new components of the country programme, the resignation of several national staff arising from change of country residence or retirement, and the rotation of some of the international staff, resulted in major transformations in the personnel structure. In total, 54 per cent of the current staff were recruited or assigned to new functions in 2018. To reduce the impact of this constraint, important efforts were made in the induction of the new staff, not only from the technical point of view and about the administrative norms and requirements of the organization, but also specifically on the Standards of Conduct. Special attention was given to all the staff in relation to the Speak-up Culture, to the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of authority, and to the mechanisms for reporting. Despite this constraint, 100 per cent of the allocated funds were implemented.

## **Cross-cutting strategies**

UNICEF implemented a number of cross-cutting strategies during the year, as follow.

### **Institutional strengthening of national systems**

This was undertaken mainly in the programmes that were developed during the previous country programme. In 2018, the MoE started the first steps to scale-up the new model for teaching reading, writing and mathematics in the first years of primary school. The Civil Registry service was strengthened, through an inter-institutional high-level agreement, that was implemented in the 21 most important hospitals of the country with remarkable success.

Important steps were taken in the strengthening of the NHS through the first phase of the process of transferring the methodology of the Mothers and Babies in Good Care initiative. All these initiatives were promoted by UNICEF. Jointly with other UN agencies and civil society organizations, UNICEF advocated for the legal prohibition of child marriage.

### **Policy engagement**

With the evidence of UNICEF and the World Bank, a communication campaign and intensive advocacy, UNICEF obtained the political commitment of the Vice President, on whom the social protection programmes depend, and of the MoE to prevent child marriage. In 2018, an educative video for working on prevention of child marriage and early union in schools was produced by UNICEF. The child marriage KAP study was undertaken with the social protection programme.

### **Multisectoral programming**

This was mainly in early childhood development, in birth registration through the inter-institutional high-level agreement, in the prevention of violence against children through the inter-institutional National Roadmap, and in preventing sexual exploitation through the inter-sectoral agreement which focus on five tourist municipalities. All this cross-sectoral work was facilitated by UNICEF.

### **Social and behavioural change**

This strategy was mainly applied in child marriage and early unions. In 2018, UNICEF implemented a KAP study in six communities, the conclusions of which will be the basis for a pilot initiative to eradicate child marriage, based on a communication for development (C4D) strategy. The Zika response not only included communication for development as a programme strategy, but also promoted the incorporation of UNICEF's C4D model into the MoH's national training and guidelines for health promotion and disease prevention. In ECD, UNICEF promoted behavioural change in positive parenting, hygiene and nurturing care.

### **Communication and advocacy**

The focused communication and advocacy strategy to win the support for the cause of children and young people strengthened UNICEF's leadership voice by increasing the number of mentions in top-tier media by 36 per cent (1,525 mentions). Digital presence was strong, reaching 15.5 million people and the engagement with audiences increased by 51.9 per cent. The number of followers increased by 15 per cent compared to 2017. A total number of 363,261 users visited the website, exceeding the established goal.

Strategic partnerships for advocacy and public engagement were built with 16 influencers (who

have a combined audience of 5.8 million followers) who delivered key messages on priority issues like child marriage, sexual exploitation of children, ending violence in schools, ECD and for World Children's Day. UNICEF engaged a 17-year-old influencer to help support young people to become agents of change. The influencer hosted a youth talk with 400 adolescents on ending violence in schools.

### **Partnerships with the private sector**

UNICEF has a Business Advisory Council formed by entrepreneurs that supported advocacy for child rights and generated new opportunities for corporate engagement.

In ECD, the Super Dads campaign promoted the importance of the role of fathers in early childhood. In health, more breastfeeding rooms were built for employees and, in 2018, also for clients.

In the prevention of sexual exploitation, seven new hotels and the Hotel Association of Santo Domingo joined The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism, bringing the total to 69. AERODOM displayed banners at the main airports to inform tourists that sexual exploitation is a crime pursued in the country.

In a child-responsive urban setting a Children's Rights Impact Assessment was undertaken in an affordable housing development. The study's recommendations will be included by the investor in the development of future housing complexes in Latin America.

The fundraising from of the local private sector finances UNICEF-supported health and child protection activities.

### **Harnessing the power of evidence as a driver of change for children**

This key strategy was used in:

- 1 The evaluation of the health initiative in two hospitals on Mothers and Babies in Good Care. Based on the conclusions, UNICEF developed a plan of evidence-based advocacy focused on strengthening the NHS ownership of the initiative;
- 2 The UNICEF Children Out of School study which supported the implementation of a new pedagogical model to teach reading, writing and mathematics in the first and second grades;
- 3 The timely Birth Registration Baseline which is being used to monitor the results of the measures taken by the partners of the Inter-Institutional Agreement to Universalize the Birth Registry;
- 4 The KAP study on Child Marriage will be the basis for a new pilot programme to prevent child marriage;
- 5 The Child Rights Impact Assessment on an affordable housing development will be used by the investor to improve child rights in similar developments both in the Dominican Republic and in other countries, and;
- 6 The conclusions of the evaluation on Zika response will support the dialogue with the government promoting the development of a more inclusive and comprehensive policy for children with disabilities.

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