

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Part 1: Situation update in the country

Venezuela's population in 2018 was estimated at 31.8 million; 20.7 per cent (6.6 million) of whom are children and 10.5 per cent (3.4 million) adolescents. In both groups, 51 per cent are male and 49 per cent female.

In June 2015, which was the last published official data, 33.1 per cent of Venezuelan households were living in poverty, representing a 3.7 per cent increase over 2013. Academic and research centres in the country estimate that by 2017 the number of households in poverty had risen by 53.9 per cent, representing 2.6 times more than the 2015 official data, reaching an estimated total of 87 per cent.

Venezuela is one of the countries with the largest certified oil reserves in the world (around 300,000 million barrels). However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) indicates that the Venezuelan economy has been experiencing a process of deterioration over the last five years. The National Government attributes the decline to the effects of the economic wars and the international financial blockade. It put in place a 60-day economic emergency decree in January 2016, which has been extended 14 times and remains in place.

In August 2018 the Government adopted several measures as part of an economic recovery plan, including: the unification of the official exchange rate (entailing a currency depreciation of 95 per cent) and adjustment of the minimum wage (a raise of 5,900 per cent in nominal terms). Later, in November, the Government introduced a new 60 per cent devaluation of the official exchange rate and an additional 150 per cent hike in the minimum wage.

Salary adjustments in 2018 (six in total) have not been enough to minimize households' loss of purchasing power. Restrictions in availability of foreign currencies, price control and declining national production are among the factors limiting availability and access by families to essential goods such as food and medicine. The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) registered a decrease in real gross domestic product (GDP) of 14 per cent in 2017, projecting a decrease of 18 per cent for 2018 and a 5 per cent for 2019. According to ECLAC's calculations, inflation rose steeply – from 302 per cent reported in 2016 to 2,582 per cent in 2017 – and according to IMF, inflation was expected to reach 1,370,000 per cent by the end of 2018. National economic analysts state that the country is registering a daily inflation rate of 4 per cent, while ECLAC notes that the annual inflation rate for the whole region (excluding Venezuela) was only 5.3 per cent in 2017.

The complex social and economic situation has provoked changes in migration patterns: while there was a 110 per cent increase in the number of migrants between 2015 and 2017, with an estimated 1.5 million migrants, by August 2018 numbers reached 3 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, according to the International Organization on Migration (IOM) and the

United Nations Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). Migration presents significant impacts and generates new problems in the lives of children and adolescents. On one hand, it may be possible to increase household income through remittances sent from abroad. However, in November, the General Attorney denounced cash transfer agencies abroad, which were sending remittances illegally to Venezuela worth between US\$150 and US\$200 million each month). On the other hand, separation (temporary or not) of children and adolescents from one or both parents can have negative consequences on the family's psycho-emotional stability and increases the risks of mistreatment and abandonment and the probability of a lack of protection for children and adolescents.

According to the UN IGME Child Mortality report (2018), the mortality rate for children under five in 2017 was 30.9 per 1,000 live births, highlighting a setback in the advances achieved in Venezuela over the last decade. Indeed, the best results, 16.6 per 1,000 live births, were obtained in 2010-2011. In 2017 the neonatal mortality rate was 20 per 1,000 live births, 7 points higher than in 1990; maternal mortality also increased (65.8 per cent) between 2015 and 2016 – with a total of 756 deaths registered in 2016, according to the epidemiological bulletin of the Ministry of Health (MoH). The pattern demonstrated by these indicators reveals the upturn in risk factors and a deterioration in attention to mothers and children.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Venezuela, the number of people suffering from malnutrition increased by 1.3 million between 2014 and 2016. Another FAO calculation indicates that, after Haiti, Venezuela is the country requiring the greatest level of attention in terms of nutrition due to the almost three-fold increase in prevalence of hunger from 2010 to 2012 (3.6 per cent) and from 2015-2017 (11.7 per cent), reaching 3.7 million people living in hunger. Even though there are no official numbers, on child malnutrition, partial records (such as those from CARITAS Venezuela) reveal that at least since 2016 there has been an increasing trend of acute malnutrition in children under five as well as in women who are pregnant or lactating.

Availability and access by families to food has been restricted due to high costs and the decline in national production and imports. The main governmental effort to provide food has been through bags/boxes provided by local supply and production committees (CLAP as per the Spanish acronym) that managed to increase its coverage, with the goal for March 2018 to reach 12 million families. However, the number of protests and claims by communities for not meeting the periodicity (the supply was supposed to be fortnightly) of deliveries to households have also increased.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reported the reappearance of and uptick in controlled diseases, mainly affecting rural and indigenous populations, as malaria (at least 406 cases in 2017), measles (6,000 cases, including 73 deaths in 2018), diphtheria (mortality rate raised from 18.2 per cent in 2016 to 21 per cent in 2018), tuberculosis and HIV,.

At the start of the 2018–9 school year the national Government announced that 7.7 million students were enrolled in basic education subsystem nationwide, including 6.4 million in public schools. However, social organizations such as the Venezuelan Federation of Teachers and the Fe y Alegría Movement have raised concerns about an increase in the levels of non-attendance at school, estimated at around 30 per cent of the total students enrolled. The groups identified barriers linked to the country's current context that affect school attendance: deterioration of the public transport system, shortages in the supply of services such as drinkable water and electricity and lack of food in households, as well as the weakening reach

and declining quality of the school feeding programme.

According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), between 2010 and 2015, the fertility rate for adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean was 66.5 births per 1,000 women between 15-19 years of age, while in Venezuela the rate was 80.9 births per 1,000 women.

Social organizations such as Pro Adopción, focused on children separated from their families, have warned about an increase in the number of children and adolescents being given to care institutions, as well as variations in the reasons families decide to give their children up for adoption. The first reason is economic; since the household cannot take care of one more member. The Network for the Human Rights of Children and Adolescents also noted an important increase in the number of children and adolescents – with or without their parents – on the streets begging or searching for food and/or money. Partial records obtained thanks to the implementation of a monitoring mechanism supported by UNICEF and led by four protection councils of the metropolitan area of Caracas (including the municipalities of Baruta, Chacao, El Hatillo and Sucre), as well as by protection councils in three states (Lara, Trujillo and Carabobo). The records indicate that these children left their households because their families cannot take care of them. The analysis originating from the aforementioned monitoring mechanism also indicates an increase in the number of families in street situations.

According to official records reported by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), birth registration coverage rose significantly (from 43.2 to 84.8 per cent) during the years 2000-2016. However, since 2017, the birth registry units do not have essential supplies for issuing birth certificates, thus hampering the official recognition of newborns and the fulfilment of their right to an identity.

Slightly more than 10,000 homicides were registered in Venezuela during 2018 according to the annual report of the Venezuelan Observatory of Violence. While the national NGO, CECODAP, a civil society group supporting child rights, stated in its 2017 annual report that the homicide rate for adolescents had reached almost 100 per 100,000 in their age group.

According to administrative records of the Supreme Court of Justice, between January and June 2018, slightly over 3,000 adolescents in conflict with the law appeared at criminal courts, of whom eight out of 10 were sentenced with alternative measures to the deprivation of liberty.

The situation described in this section, had a significant impact on UNICEF Venezuela's operation. UNICEF has signed an action plan with the Government to expand the existing country programme in various sectors to respond to the challenges facing children and adolescents.

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

The year under review was a challenging time for Venezuela, for children and for UNICEF Venezuela. The deep political and economic crisis required UNICEF to adapt, adjust strategies and objectives, combine technical assistance with service delivery and expand the scope of its interventions and increase its capacity.

UNICEF Venezuela's Country Programme Document, agreed with the Government of the

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, extends from 2015 to 2019 and it is aligned with UNDAF. In 2018, UNICEF signed an action plan with the Venezuelan Government to expand the existing Country Programme in various sectors in response to the challenges facing children and adolescents.

The major results, based on the UNICEF Strategic Plan, are described below.

Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives

In 2018 the cooperation agreement between UNICEF and the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela increased its reach in response to significant changes in Venezuela's social and economic context, increasing the financial ceiling substantially. UNICEF adopted strategies to amplify its cooperation, widening collaboration opportunities with the Government and other partners, strengthening local capacities and adjusting its programmatic interventions.

UNICEF Venezuela's strategy for reaching Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan is based on strengthening the healthcare system, working through two platforms:

(1) A community platform: UNICEF Venezuela focused on strengthening family knowledge about the health and nutrition services offered in their territories, the adoption of healthy habits, and the identification of signs of inadequate nutrition or health problems in children; and then taking appropriate measures. This approach will reinforce the role of the community in social accountability to guarantee that services reach those who need them. The promotion of this work within the community platform was piloted successfully during 2018, a model of co-management of health services was created in the Capital District, as a participative mechanism in which the community, as user of health services, interacts through its leaders with the health workers to improve the quality of services and monitor the management model of health facilities. This model will expand during 2019.

(2) Services platform: This component of healthcare sector schemes has suffered important losses of qualified human resources. The remaining staff face serious difficulties in providing quality services due to the lack of functional equipment, deterioration of infrastructure and insufficient supplies.

Both strategic axes have been addressed with interventions in line with sister agencies UNFPA, UNAIDS and PAHO, to reduce duplication risks and increase cooperation efficiency.

Between 2016 and 2018, cooperation with the MoH was strengthened to support government plans to control outbreaks of malaria, diphtheria and measles and to guarantee the treatment of children with metabolic diseases. Currently UNICEF is prepared to: widen its support for immunization; extend the coverage of supplies geographically; substantially increase its technical assistance efforts for the reduction of peri-neonatal mortality and maternal death and to improve efforts to prevent malnutrition and provide care for children with acute, severe or moderate malnutrition.

The main results achieved during 2018, with contributions from UNICEF Venezuela, occurred in:

Maternal and child health: During the last four months of 2018, 33 per cent of the 7,680 women who gave birth in the five maternities registering the highest average monthly deliveries

in the states of Miranda and Capital District, had access to a safe delivery, and an equal number of newborns received preventive treatment for obstetrical hemorrhage. UNICEF trained human resources and provided the required supplies.

UNICEF provided the Ministry of Health with measles vaccines, treatment against malaria, HIV ARV and the test for early detection of syphilis in women who were pregnant. The results were: a) 990,000 children under five were vaccinated against measles, in alliance with MoH; b) 150,000 children received anti-malarial medicines; c) all of the 2,324 children registered in the national HIV programme received anti-retroviral treatment; d) 10,000 women who were pregnant had access to rapid tests for syphilis during their prenatal visits; e) all children with metabolic disorders registered by the Ministry of Health received prompt treatment. The provision of supplies was part of the strategy to strengthen the capacities of the health system to provide timely health care to children and women.

Together with UNFPA and the CSO Redisalud and the Society of Obstetrics, UNICEF promoted the prevention and efficient management of adolescent pregnancy by strengthening healthcare services, benefitting approximately 20,000 adolescents who were pregnant in four states, who received counselling and orientation services to reduce the maternal and child mortality risks. This was a result of:

- (a). UNICEF and UNFPA supporting the Society of Obstetrics for the training of 496 doctors which has contributed to improve the quality of obstetric care, control of neonatal infections and asepsis in seven maternities in four states, an activity developed jointly with UNFPA;
- (b). As a result of the support to Redisalud, 52 community health promoters, 19 resident doctors of postgraduate studies in obstetrics and paediatrics of the Maternal and Child Hospital “Hugo Chávez Frías” and 52 youth activators were trained, as part of the community-based strategy to promote adolescent health, prevent adolescent pregnancy and provide friendly case to pregnant adolescents in the Community Comprehensive Health Areas (ASICs) of ss actors taking part in the care and management model of comprehensive obstetric care in community comprehensive health areas (ASICs) of the Parish El Valle and Coche.
- (c). The training of 89 healthcare workers in hospitals and communities undertaken in the community health centre of el Valle and Coche, to strengthen the networks and community systems of epidemiological surveillance and rapid response for safe maternity, pregnancy and reproductive and sexual health.
- (d). 71 youth promoters trained in two secondary schools in El Valle and Coche to promote responsible reproductive health.

At the Maternity Concepción Palacios, UNICEF contributed to the survival of premature infants and the completion of training of 87 doctors, specialists and nurses in the kangaroo mother (Madre Canguro) programme and its three components. These measures resulted in a 50 per cent increase in the number of premature infants born in the maternity ward from 2017 to 2018. The programme is expected to be expanded to at least three more maternity wards during 2019.

Nutrition: With technical assistance and supplies provided by UNICEF, some 189,547 children were screened to determine their nutritional status and received the appropriate support. Venezuela’s response capacity to child malnutrition was strengthened through a cooperation agreement between UNICEF and the National Institute of Nutrition, adding to efforts by civil society allies such as Fe y Alegría and CARITAS. This result was achieved through granting technical assistance and distributing equipment to enable early identification of children with nutritional vulnerability and facilitating treatment in communities for moderate

acute malnutrition (MAM) and severe acute malnutrition (SAM) without complications, and prompt hospital referral for SAM with associated morbidity, in the country's 24 federal entities.

In addition, approximately 20,000 women who were pregnant gained access to improved services through breastfeeding consultations at eight community health centres and received prenatal attention and nutritional supplements with multiple micronutrients. This was complemented with promotion of the child-friendly hospital initiative at 20 maternities.

Jointly with Red Cross Venezuela, UNICEF supported training for 60 health promoters focused on nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life. In addition, jointly with the MoH, continuous training was provided for health staff on IHAN in 20 prioritized hospitals.

Limitations on access to appropriate, reliable, disaggregated and quality information on the situation of children and adolescents, and the impact the current crisis is having in their lives, were two of the main challenges faced during 2018.

Goal area 2: Every child learns

As foreseen in its country programme 2015–2019, UNICEF Venezuela's contribution in the education sector is focused on ensuring that children and adolescents, especially the most excluded, attend and remain in school by improving education quality and pedagogical content. The country context required an extension of the activities planned for 2018–2019, in agreement with the Government.

In this regard, UNICEF Venezuela sought to adapt cooperation and the demands in accordance with the current country context, which generated new bottlenecks that limited school attendance and learning. UNICEF's maintained regular dialogue with the Ministry of Education during all of 2018, despite frequent rotation of personnel and changing internal dynamics and priorities. This allowed UNICEF to conclude an agreement and work plan with the Ministry of Education to be signed and implemented in 2019. Furthermore, UNICEF supported civil society organizations to increase school retention, providing practical tools to the teaching community (not only teachers) to achieve timely attention to children and adolescents in basic learning areas. Children and adolescents who live in highly vulnerable urban contexts and those living in indigenous communities received priority attention. The latter benefitted from use of the bilingual intercultural education approach.

Through its focus on strengthening teaching skills in fundamental areas of learning, improving learning environments by allocating resources and training members of educational communities and developing information systems to support assessment of educational quality, UNICEF Venezuela contributed to the following results in 2018:

(1) 9,800 children and adolescents gained access to improved learning environments. UNICEF through its partners supported: a) training of 131 members (teachers, managers, coordinators, volunteer mothers, workers, students and community leaders) of 21 educational institutions in vulnerable urban areas, border regions and indigenous communities to implement recreational activities incorporating learning and protection issues; b) delivery of 121 recreational kits; and c) opening of two child-friendly spaces. These results were coordinated with Fe y Alegría, the Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Ayacucho and the Simón Rodríguez Public Library, covering the prioritized states (Capital District, Miranda, Bolívar and Amazonas) and, through joint work with UNFPA, a municipality of Anzoátegui State.

(2) 1,800 children learned from teachers with improved skills for teaching fundamental areas such as literacy and numeracy, through actions such as: a) training 153 teachers (including volunteer mothers) of primary education at Fe y Alegría and b) strengthening teachers' and volunteers' capacities in literacy, resilience and developmental psychology to facilitate their work with children and adolescents who do not attend school in areas of high social risk, in alliance with UNHCR.

(3) 1,381 children from 11 early childhood education centres in nine states benefitted from the implementation of methodologies for educational transformation, which include thinking development in preschool, development of comprehension projects, strategies for the development of multiple intelligences, transformations in the evaluation through the use of pedagogical material. These activities created a space for brainstorming on how to mitigate the crisis in the sector. For example, the institutions have exchanged ideas on elaborating teaching resources with low-cost materials, or redistributing groups to mitigate teacher absence teachers by strengthening and implementation the educational innovation programme developed by Fe y Alegría at the national level and the training of 104 teachers of early education.

(4) 1,100 children and adolescents from indigenous communities and communities in Bolívar State received an education appropriate to their culture. This was possible through: a) training of Fe y Alegría teachers on teaching both mother tongue and Spanish (as a second language) in the framework of bilingual intercultural education (EIB); b) dissemination of 1,300 calendars of the Jivi people in public schools in indigenous environments of Amazonas State, executed in alliance with the Simón Rodríguez Public Libraries Network; c) the development and implementation of educational projects to improve the EIB modality in four indigenous schools of the Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Ayacucho.

(5) Undertaking a formative assessment of the implementation of bilingual intercultural education with the aim of generating evidence on achievements, barriers and bottlenecks in the development of this education modality in the country's educational policies and institutions and its operationalization in indigenous communities. Based on this evaluation, a response plan is anticipated to guide advocacy with government and non-governmental entities to strengthen bilingual intercultural education and enhance understanding of its relevance in the current context. This evaluation was carried out in coordination with the indigenous Town Hall of La Guajira and the Apostolic Vicariate of Puerto Ayacucho, and with specialized technical support from the Centre for Social Research.

(6) Fe y Alegría Venezuela created an evaluation unit to improve educational quality. UNICEF provided specialized technical assistance to the Fe y Alegría team. The design phase of the unit was complete by end-2018 and a pilot test has been carried out.

It is important to highlight that UNICEF's contribution to the improvement of learning environments (including teaching capacity), the bilingual intercultural education and information systems, have served to stimulate other processes, such as the links between educational institutions and communities, brainstorming on the new needs of the education sector and the challenges facing children and adolescents in the current crisis. These results contributed to generating evidence for advocacy work with the MoE.

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

In 2018, UNICEF contributed to the goal of every child and adolescent being protected from violence, exploitation and abuse. The socio-political and economic crisis has increased poverty, school drop-out and the most diverse forms of violence against children. No official figures are available, but it may be inferred from partners' reports that increases have taken place in child abuse, sexual and economic exploitation, children in street situations, children left behind due to unplanned migration and the insufficient availability of goods and services.

In line with national priorities, the UNDAF, the Country Programme 2015-2019 and its theory of change, the UNICEF strategic plan 2018–2021 and the SDGs, the priority in 2018 was a focus on reaching the most vulnerable. Activities sought to overcome the barriers associated with lack of access to quality programmes and services, the absence of information systems, violent social norms, and the impact of the economic crisis. Results were achieved in collaboration with UNICEF partners: the Government, non-governmental organizations, and other agencies of the United Nations system, such as UNFPA, UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Taking into account the best interests of the child as well as strengthening the protective environment, UNICEF's main interventions focused on developing capacity within the child protection system; establishing multi-sectoral alliances; producing material for the promotion of children rights, practices and adequate procedures; generating statistical information; promoting behaviour change in prioritized communities, including delivering supplies for child-friendly spaces and birth registration certificates to the country's hospitals.

Thanks to joint efforts by the child protection system at the local level and the national civil registry system, the following results were achieved:

- (1) 1,048 children and adolescents in Zulia and Táchira states were assisted by community advocates, who were trained with UNICEF's support.
- (2) 54,000 newborn children received their birth certificates in a timely manner. UNICEF provided the government with supplies for the production of birth certificates that guarantees national coverage for five years for all children.
- (3) Promoting community-based approaches, UNICEF promoted the development of spaces where inclusion, rights and the child protection system are promoted, which provide psychosocial support to child and adolescent victims of violence (including gender-based violence) benefitting approximately 20,000 children and adolescents and that the decision to migrate is based on the best interests of the child. In this regard: a) 60 teachers and community leaders were trained in the legal and emotional aspects linked to migration in the most vulnerable areas of Caracas; b) at least 80 child-friendly spaces were opened, with participation by 245 teachers and child protection system members trained in eight states of the country.
- (4) A risk analysis, in accordance with the human rights approach and the gender equality action plan 2018-2021, recommended the dissemination to government and NGOs of information on: minimum standards of child protection; guidelines on gender-based violence; general observations by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on children in street situations and children in the context of international migration; and the protocol to prevent and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

UNICEF contributed to this effort: a) four technical tables for the protection of children and adolescents, and their plans of action, were created in Caracas, Tachira, Zulia, and Bolivar to prevent and punish trafficking by 71 government officials and NGOs; b) two forums in which at least 1,200 members of the child protection system and the SPRA participated; c) a training for 252 child protection counsellors; d) meetings for the prevention of trafficking in children and women in the states of Zulia, Bolivar, Nueva Esparta and Caracas. These actions contributed to the provision of improved services, in line with international standards, by people who reach approximately 200,000 children and adolescents annually in administrative and judicial proceedings.

(5) The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was translated into three indigenous languages (Pemón, Wayuu and Warao), following the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and an analysis of the judicial rulings on the rights of children and adolescents from 2012 to 2016 was published and disseminated to the public.

(6) Prevention and attention to violence against children and adolescents was strengthened through information, education, communication and community participation initiatives. UNICEF's response consisted of: a) a communication for development initiative on the prevention and attention to violence against children and adolescents conducted in 27 educational communities, reaching 2,139 people (992 children, 686 teachers and 461 caregivers), exceeding the initial goal of 2,000 participants. This work was reinforced through the production of three training manuals, brochures and posters on positive parenting, good treatment and a campaign on the issue on social networks that reached an audience of 190,000 people; b) training of 491 adolescents on their rights, utilizing print and online children's version of the national human rights plan; c) 900 children and adolescents discussed their right to good treatment with judges in Lara and Aragua states.

(7) To improve information systems and knowledge and the efficiency and effectiveness of partner organizations in achieving programme results, in 2018 UNICEF Venezuela supported the following initiatives with partners: a) two bulletins with statistical information on the judicial protection of children and adolescents, including adolescents in contact with the law; b) a systemization of qualitative information collected on the situation of children on the street that reveals the need for specialized care programmes to protect families; c) a study on migration with preliminary results, indication that 68 per cent of adults who migrate do not carry out legal procedures to protect children before they migrate; 57 per cent of families do not involve children in their decision-making on migration; and 61 per cent of children are left behind with the other parent, grandparents or third parties; d) a school observatory was created and instruments and protocols have been validated based on indicators and synthetic indices that allow monitoring violence in the school environment; e) a study identifying the bottlenecks that limit the attention of child sexual abuse in the Councils for the Protection of Children and Adolescents; f) a national mapping of public and private institutions that care for children and adolescents with disabilities; g) two guides to prevent and reduce violence among peers in communities and promote the right to grow as a family.

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

This strategic area has been part of UNICEF's Cooperation Programme in Venezuela, particularly as it relates to the need for a safe and clean environment for children to make full use of their rights, including ensuring adequate health conditions, nutrition, improved WASH conditions in schools and emerging protection needs.

Due to the current situation in the country, in which migration and pressure for access to basic goods is getting stronger, it becomes imperative to develop more robust actions to ensure a clean and safe environment for the most vulnerable children and adolescents. In this sense, within its expanded cooperation programme, UNICEF Venezuela will support interventions focused on the states of Bolívar, Zulia and Táchira.

Nevertheless, in 2018, UNICEF Venezuela developed some WASH-oriented interventions to promote safe and clean environments, achieving the following results:

(1) 300 children from Fe y Alegría were sensitized about the importance of handwashing and have access to better water and sanitation conditions in their schools, through the implementation of two days of awareness-raising during handwashing day and the delivery of four hygiene kits, five covered recipients and faucets for bathrooms and dining rooms at four schools.

(2) 2,500 children at two Fe y Alegría schools participated in risk prevention and management activities in order to identify emergency cases and promote the distribution of the brochure 'Riesgolandia' (Risk Land).

(3) 7,500 people, among them 2,350 children, received emergency attention due to August flooding in 13 municipalities of Táchira and Miranda states (eight in Táchira and five in Miranda), including a basic preventive response, as well as the distribution of water purification tablets, family hygiene kits, 14-lit covered recipients with faucets, foldable water tanks and tents for the civil protection response.

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

UNICEF Venezuela contributed to strengthening sub-national capacity for compilation, use and analysis of data (especially in relation to issues where there is an information vacuum), with the aim of improving access to information that facilitates decision-making. The main results for 2018 were:

(1) The current situation with regard to migration required data and information to allow UNICEF to gauge the size of the problem, understand the situation of children and adolescents left behind and identify the migrant population (who are they, why do they migrate). UNICEF collected up-to-date information about the determining factors for migration of Venezuelans, as well as the situation of children and adolescents left behind, and it is using this information to prepare a behaviour-change initiative for Venezuelan families still living in the country. This was carried out through the development of a national study about migration of Venezuelans.

(2) The Venezuelan state issued a report about national public investment in children and adolescents, which was finalized with UNICEF support for the creation and implementation of a mechanism facilitating the measurement of national public investment directed towards children and adolescents. In addition to the report, the Government has supported the monitoring of public investment directed towards children and adolescents, and has adopted methodological tools for this end, and aims to ensure the continuity of these measurements.

Venezuela is going through a deep political and economic crisis that affects the well-being of children and other vulnerable populations, as well as the ability of UNICEF to fulfil its mandate and commitments. On the latter, for instance, the high level of rotation over the last few years of top officials in key areas (e.g., the Ministries of Health and Education) during the last few years delayed and disrupted planned activities and implementation of agreed strategies. From an economic perspective, prevailing distortions and instability constrain UNICEF's ability to function smoothly within the work plan, requiring constant adjustments to operational arrangements. All of this is taking place in a context that progressively affects children and increases their vulnerability, increasing the need for and the value of UNICEF's support.

Faced with the mounting needs of children, UNICEF sharply increased its cooperation for the last two years (2018-2019) of the country programme, as agreed with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. This meant not only a substantial increase in the financial ceiling for those two years (from US\$5.6 million to US\$32 million), but also an increase of in-country organizational capacity in terms of human resources and physical presence at the sub-national level (three field offices were established). Additionally, the office strengthened its logistics capability to support partners by providing much-needed supplies to communities and children.

While this scaling-up was a very challenging undertaking to be implemented in a short timeframe – especially because of the complex context and the internal organizational requirements – the process is progressing and consolidating successfully, facilitated by mechanisms UNICEF has in place for responding to emergencies. It is advisable to maintain and further develop flexibility, capacity to adapt and the use of internal support mechanisms available for unusual circumstances.

The economic turmoil the country currently faces presents, as noted earlier, great challenges for the effective and efficient operation of the office. For example, hyperinflation discourages service providers and experts from engaging in contractual relations in the local currency, while multiple exchange rates make UNICEF expenditures extraordinarily high when using local currency. The economic distortion also affects the private sector, where the number of reliable service providers and suppliers is in decline. All of this results in continuous operational reprocessing, increasing reliance on procurement of goods and services abroad, and delays in the implementation of activities. It is thus necessary to devise mechanisms and 'lighter' operational procedures to address economic restrictions in this context.

The deep political polarization in the country affects collective efforts to ensure children's rights and support to the most vulnerable. While one of the roles of civil society is to provide assistance to those in need, usually complementing efforts by the government, their perceived political positioning sometimes results in limited communication between the two, opening space for duplication of efforts, different technical approaches, or imposition of mutual boundaries. This is not in the best interests of right-holders.

In the context of Venezuela, UNICEF has been able, based on the principles of neutrality and impartiality, to maintain fluid channels of communication and collaboration with Government institutions and civil society organizations. In the context of the current crisis, UNICEF should continue to play this role and further support both sides to build bridges and actively collaborate to benefit children through coordinated efforts.

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