

UNICEF EDUCATION

Education Case Study

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Ensuring inclusive education during the pandemic and beyond

1 February 2022

COVID-19 closed all schools across the Dominican Republic for the full 2020/2021 academic year. Concerned that distance learning would compound the pre-existing education inequities for children with disabilities, the Government partnered with UNICEF to forge ways to be as inclusive as possible.

Longstanding collaboration on inclusive education had set a favourable stage to tackle this challenge. Beyond the pandemic response, UNICEF with the financial support of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, offered expertise and advice to the Ministry of Education on inclusive education policy contributing to a number of other key resources, including the process to start the transformation of Olga Estrella from a center for those with visual disabilities to a [national disability resource center](#) that will progressively serve children with all kinds of disabilities. Furthermore, UNICEF carried out a national study on teacher training needs regarding inclusive education and developed inclusive pedagogical plans and resources.

The first key milestone to an inclusive COVID-19 response was the decision to adopt a single, integrated and accessible set of home-based learning materials. UNICEF provided technical advice for this policy decision but also for design of accessible booklets for children with autism and intellectual disabilities. It also helped to develop two accessible education kits for students from pre-primary through to secondary that included easy-to-use guides for both teachers and parents. This is an example of a [guide for teachers](#). From May to November 2021, UNICEF also supported two training sessions on these accessible education kits to promote their effective use. [This video](#) shows how meaningful these accessible learning materials are to learners.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

- Over 5,100 children with disabilities (2,662 girls) were able to continue their education during the period of school closures as a result of the accessible learning materials.
- The Ministry of Education distributed over 5,700 accessible education kits during school closures which benefitted learners, learners' parents and teachers in 123 schools as well as staff working at different levels of the Ministry.
- UNICEF-supported training on the accessible kits benefitted 75 teachers and 265 Ministry of Education personnel.
- UNICEF's technical assistance contributed to the broadening of materials and support for children with different kinds of disabilities beyond audio-visual impairment, including the transformation of Olga Estrella Center into a national disability resource center supporting children with different disabilities.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Closing data gaps is critical to improving inclusivity in emergencies, but also to advancing inclusion more generally.** [As in many other countries](#), data on children with disabilities is incomplete. Missing information that would have pinpointed the number, educational level and exact location of children with disabilities, particularly in rural areas, was a constraint in efforts to mount an inclusive COVID-19 and education response and to advance inclusive education more generally. The [national survey ENHOGAR MICS 2019](#), which implemented the [short set of questions from the Washington Group on Disability](#), and the national census scheduled for 2022 are expected to help fill the gaps.

- **The pandemic was a critical opportunity to advance inclusive education.** Even in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic, UNICEF and the Government were able to chart inclusive home-based learning. This was an important pro-equity approach given that [UNICEF research confirms that pandemic-related school closures hit children already marginalised pre-pandemic disproportionately hard, including those with disabilities](#).
- **Support to teachers is key to accelerating inclusion in all settings.** Preparing teachers to use inclusive pedagogy is a key success factor. Thus, the study to identify teacher skills gaps was a critical step to catalyzing transformational change in the education system.
- **Modest investments in technical advice can drive large-scale change where there is political will.** UNICEF's timely and relevant technical expertise and modest financial support helped the Government chart an inclusive home-based learning strategy across the country. The Ministry of Education remained in the driver's seat, drawing on its own budget to rollout the inclusive continuity of learning strategy.

NEXT STEPS

UNICEF has signed an agreement with the University of Murcia, to continue strengthening inclusive education, including the transformation of the Olga Estrella National Disability Resource Center to support children with a greater variety of disabilities. This three-year partnership, running from 2022 to 2024, consists in the design of a national model for the provision of accessible educational services for learners in pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels. Additionally, a collaboration agreement is being developed with the [ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with the Blind Persons in Latin America](#) to continue strengthening the inclusive education model for children with visual disabilities.

Cost effectiveness: From July 2020 to November 2021, UNICEF invested US \$28,000, with the financial contribution of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to provide pedagogical advice for the design of the accessible education kits and the training on their use. UNICEF leveraged US\$70,000 from the Ministry of Education to enable the graphic design, printing and distribution of the accessible education kits during school closures.

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